

“THE SOUTH WILL RISE AGAIN, RUSSIA IS OUR FRIEND”: THE RUSSIAN  
PROPAGANDA CAMPAIGN (2015-2017) AND THE ALT-RIGHT MOVEMENT IN  
THE US

by

Margaret E. DeLany  
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Committee:

\_\_\_\_\_ Chair of Committee

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_ Graduate Program Director

\_\_\_\_\_ Dean, School for Conflict  
Analysis and Resolution

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“The South Will Rise Again, Russia Is Our Friend”: The Russian Propaganda Campaign  
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A Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of  
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by

Margaret E. DeLany  
Bachelor of Science  
United States Naval Academy, 2000

Director: Dr. Karina Korostelina, Professor of Conflict Analysis and Resolution and  
Psychology  
School for Conflict Analysis and Resolution

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George Mason University  
Fairfax, VA

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## **DEDICATION**

“The greatest trick the devil ever pulled was convincing the world he didn’t exist.” (From the movie “*The Usual Suspects*,” 1995)

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **“THE SOUTH WILL RISE AGAIN, RUSSIA IS OUR FRIEND”: THE RUSSIAN PROPAGANDA CAMPAIGN (2015-2017) AND THE ALT-RIGHT MOVEMENT IN THE US**

Margaret E. DeLany, M.S.

George Mason University, 2019

Thesis Director: Dr. Karina Korostelina

This research explored the relationship between Russian propaganda and the alt-right movement in the United States through the lens of identity, factors in identity conflict, and the role of identity in propaganda. By examining five exemplars of alt-right websites and comparing them to the 3507 Facebook advertisements identified as Russian-sponsored propaganda, propagated in the US between 2015 and 2017, this thesis investigated the similarities and differences between the discourse of the two groups of data. An examination of the alt-right revealed they used both racial (white/nonwhite) and ideological (conservative/liberal) markers to identify in- and outgroup members through four main tenets of their collective axiology: pro-white, anti-nonwhite, anti-alternate ideology, and pro-traditional values. Investigating the body of Russian propaganda Facebook ads revealed that 529 ads pushed these same tenets of collective axiology. This

research examined the use of stereotypes and favorable comparison to describe social boundaries between racial and ideological groups; the role of moral duality and dehumanization in strengthening those boundaries; and the use of relative deprivation and outgroup threat to amplify the messaging. This comparison demonstrated that Russian propaganda used the same or similar verbiage, stereotypes and moral duality to push analogous pro-white, anti-nonwhite and anti-alternate ideological messaging. Both groups used negative stereotypes and moral duality to show that outgroup members, including nonwhite people and those holding liberal ideology, were not “real” Americans. The major difference between the groups was in the object of their anti-nonwhite sentiment: the alt-right was staunchly anti-Semitic, and the Russian propaganda focused on inciting ire against Muslim and Hispanic immigrants.

## **CHAPTER ONE - INTRODUCTION**

The news rocked America. In the months leading up to and following the 2016 US Presidential election, government officials verified what reputable news sources had already reported: Russia conducted a massive propaganda campaign in the US, designed to benefit Donald Trump and to create distrust amongst Americans in their democratic systems (Intelligence Community Assessment, 2017). The propaganda targeted American cultural "fault lines," social identity factors imbued with high emotion like race, religion, ideology, and incendiary issues like immigration and the Black Lives Matter movement. (Entous, Timberg, & Dwoskin, 2017).

Russia launched their campaign through traditional news sources such as Russian state-sponsored RT news and through social media platforms, including Twitter, Instagram and Facebook (Intelligence Community Assessment, 2017). Their influence on social media was immense: almost 1.4 million Twitter users engaged with 3814 Russian-linked accounts (Kirby, 2018); and experts believe that billions of Americans likely viewed Russian propaganda on Facebook (Bertrand, 2017). On Facebook, Russian propagandists concealed their Russian connections and set up Facebook accounts portraying themselves as Americans, including as Texas secessionists ("Heart of Texas") (Lister & Sebastian, 2017), anti-immigrant hardliners ("Stop All Invaders") or Black activists ("Blacktivist" and "Black Matters") (Levin, 2017).

At the same time Russia focused their massive propaganda campaign on US social, racial and ideological fault lines, another phenomenon dominated the headlines: the rise of the alt-right. The alt-right appeared to be the newest incarnation of white supremacy, targeted towards the under-forty crowd and propagated on the internet. Their fervor for Donald Trump and opposition to immigration echoed some of the messages in the Russian propaganda. During a torchlit “United the Right” rally, the members chanted, “The South will rise again! Russia is our friend” (Svrluga, 2017). This prompted the question, was the Russian propaganda campaign connected to the rise of the alt-right?

### **Impact**

Russian propaganda spanned the breadth and width of American issues. As aforementioned, it did not confine itself to political issues, but also focused heavily on social issues. Data analysts believed that the Russian-sponsored Facebook pages reached an audience of billions (Bertrand, 2017). Russian-sponsored Facebook pages displayed a mix of interests and issues: accounts in support of the Black Lives Matter movement; in support of LGBT rights; in support of Muslim Americans; opposed to Islam in America; opposed to immigration; in support of the military; in support of gun rights; opposed to Donald Trump; in support of Donald Trump (HPSCI-Minority, 2017). The goal of these accounts was to "to provoke unrest and discontent" (Sheth, 2017) among the American population.

It is important to highlight that the Russian propaganda campaign reached beyond the boundaries of the internet and intruded into real life. The Russian propaganda campaign was not solely made up of bits and bytes, and its impact is not solely measured

in the “squishy” metrics of psychological effect. They planned and advertised rallies, sold t-shirts, sponsored contests and gathered information about American Facebook users. They reached out and touched real Americans, on American soil. And they did so by making use of our social identities and the racial, political, religious and socioeconomic divisions that those identities entail.

One of the propaganda campaigns, the one designed to inflame anti-immigrant sentiment and provoke pro-white feelings, coincided with a well-publicized rise of the “alt-right” movement in the US: a white supremacy movement born on the internet, targeted at the newest generation of white supremacists and white nationalists. The concurrent rise of the alt-right with a massive Russian pro-white propaganda campaign gained significance when juxtaposed with the reverence that the alt-right has for Russia. In October 2017, alt-right personality Richard Spencer led a torchlit rally in Charlottesville (the previous one, in August, had ended with the murder of a protester). At this rally, his group chanted, among other things, “The South will rise again! Russia is our friend!” (Svrluga, 2017). Of all the chants (“Jews will not replace us!” “We will be back!”), it was the most specific and stood out for its lone mention of a foreign country. What significance did Russia have for the alt-right community? And why?

The Russian propaganda campaign in the US was troubling for many reasons, from the potential damage to our election system to the increased division that it sowed in our country along partisan, socio-economic and racial lines. Another troubling aspect was that the interference continued long after the election had concluded (Stretch, 2017), which highlighted Russia's intention to sow division rather than simply influence the

election. By all accounts, the interference is ongoing. (Securing Democracy Dispatch, 2017). Unless we take the time to understand how this propaganda affected our country, we are powerless to recognize it, defend against it, and heal from it. While many democracy focused think tanks have been concerned with the effects of this propaganda on our democratic institutions, there has been less focus on the impact of the Russian propaganda on the social rifts it exacerbated. Russia pointedly focused on race, religion and xenophobia in its US-directed propaganda, attempting to swirl discontent on all sides. How successful was Russia in this attempt? Were any of the current hate groups affected by Russian propaganda? This aspect of the Russian propaganda campaign cannot be ignored.

### **Research Question**

Russian propaganda in the US has spanned the centuries, but for this research, I focused on the Russian propaganda targeted at US audiences from January 2015 to August 2017. During this time period, Russia pushed propaganda on many media and social media platforms; however, I focused on the propaganda propagated as ads on Facebook. And although Russian propaganda targeted all sides of America's racial divide, I confined my research to the intersection between Russian propaganda and the alt-right movement. *How did Russian propaganda, propagated through advertisements on Facebook from January 2015 to August 2017, stress the discourse of the alt-right movement in the United States?* How did Russian propaganda employ negative stereotypes and favorable comparison, prevalent within the alt-right movement, to describe social boundaries between white and nonwhite groups? What role did moral



duality and dehumanization play in this process? How did they use threat and relative deprivation to amplify their message? How were propaganda tactics and methodologies used in the discourse? I will explore these questions based on the theoretical ideas of social identity, models of identity conflict, interracial relations in America and the role of identity in propaganda.

### **Overview**

The next four chapters consist of a literature review that explores the topics integral to this research question. In the next chapter, I define "propaganda," explore the changing face of Russian propaganda, examine the tactics propagandists use and how propaganda affects the population. The third chapter examines the theories of social identity theory, including categorization, stereotypes, social boundary, discrimination, favoritism and bias, collective social identity, collective axiology, moral duality and dehumanization. The fourth chapter discusses factors and dynamics of identity-based conflict, with a strong emphasis on threat. The fifth chapter, and final chapter of the literature review, examines the concepts of ethnicity and race, summarizes white racial identity and discusses white supremacy and the alt-right.

The three chapters following the literature review dissect the actual research. Chapter six provides the methodology of the research, including the choice of alt-right exemplars, source and sorting of the Facebook ad data, coding themes used to evaluate the alt-right and Facebook ads, coding themes used to evaluate the propaganda devices, and analysis techniques. Chapter seven explores the alt-right through the coded themes; chapter eight does the same for the Russian-sponsored Facebook ads. Finally, chapter

nine compares the two groups of data and investigates the significance of that comparison.

## **CHAPTER TWO – PROPAGANDA**

Propaganda is often viewed as a purely negative endeavor, made up of crude images and slogans, employed by totalitarian governments to brainwash their own people. It is also seen as an offensive weapon, used by adversaries to influence an enemy population. Some view propaganda through a wider lens: Edward Herman and Noam Chomsky (2010) consider the current American media system to be propaganda for the US government; many critics (including Ellul, 1965) consider our modern public education system to be a form of propaganda; advertising can be considered overt propaganda. Propaganda could be negative or positive; benevolent or malevolent; internal or external; narrowly focused or imbuing every aspect of our modern life. In other words, propaganda is in the eye of the beholder.

The US government studied propaganda extensively – how to recognize and fight it, and how to create and employ it. A US-government World War II pamphlet (Casey, 1944) discussing propaganda could not come to a formal definition, conceding that propaganda includes "ideas and beliefs that are intentionally propagated... [and] attempts to reach a goal by making use of words and word substitutes (pictures, drawings, graphs, exhibits, parades, songs, and similar devices)" (Casey, 1944). The pamphlet noted that propaganda could be made up of lies, half-truths, biases, or unvarnished truth. It could be from a source that is openly attributed or one that is concealed. Propaganda could be

about controversial issues or something that is socially acceptable and non-controversial. It could be used by the adversary to influence, undermine, divide or appease their target. Propaganda could also be used benevolently, to influence a population towards a beneficial goal. This seventy-year-old definition of propaganda has not been substantially improved upon today and the debate over the definition of propaganda is ongoing. For the purposes of this paper, however, I define propaganda as *the use of words and word substitutes to propagate an idea or belief (controversial or otherwise) by an outside element who conceal their origin and purpose; propaganda can be made up of truths, half-truths, biases and falsehoods.*

### **Russian propaganda campaign on Facebook from 2015-2017**

Russia is not alone in their use of propaganda. Propaganda is an old tactic, used by adversaries and allies alike to influence a population. Propaganda has taken many forms over the centuries: from Thomas Paine's publication of *Common Sense* (1776) to influence the American colonists; to the use of radio programs during WWII to influence at home and abroad (including Tokyo Rose and Axis Sally) (Radio Propaganda, n.d.); all the way through the modern use of television channels such as RT to promote cultural and political hegemony.

Although propaganda isn't new, Russia has changed the propaganda "game." According to Watts (2018), Russia's recent interference in the US represents "the swiftest and most pervasive influence effort in world history." During the Cold War, Russia employed propaganda to attempt to demoralize and influence the US. Their efforts continued despite the thawing of the Cold War; in recent years their propaganda

strategies have improved and increased. According to a Rand Corporation report on Russian propaganda, since 2008, Russian propaganda strategies have shifted to take advantage of new technologies and media platforms and have been highly effective at reaching and influencing audiences (Paul & Matthews, 2016).

The new nature of propaganda, relying on the internet, rapid news cycle and social media, means that modern propaganda has an unprecedented ability to propagate and reach a large audience. Propaganda seeded by Russia in the 1980's took an average of two years to propagate throughout the US; now, it can take 75 minutes (Paul & Matthews, 2016). In the last few decades, Russia continued to launch propaganda on a myriad of issues, but "...the Kremlin's trolls gained the most ground and the greatest resonance through amplification of social issues of race, immigration, and anti-government conspiracies" (Watts, 2018).

Facebook identified 120 accounts linked to the Internet Research Agency (IRA), a Russian company associated with state sponsored disinformation; the IRA constructed the accounts and spent \$100,000 on ads promoting their page content (Stretch, 2017). Although Facebook claimed that the content reached 126 million people (Stretch, 2017), other data analysts claim that the content likely reached billions of people (Bertrand, 2017). The propaganda activity continued from at least January 2015 until well after the conclusion of the election: when Facebook shut down these accounts in August 2017, they were still active (Stretch, 2017). Later revelations from Facebook revealed that hundreds more IRA created Facebook accounts and pages – 470 in total - had been discovered the following year (Mayer, 2018).

Many of the accounts were made public through Congressional testimony; the Appendix contains a full listing of the IRA sponsored Facebook pages featuring ads released by the HPSCI (HPSCI-Minority, 2017 and HPSCI(D), 2018). These accounts revealed the scope of the IRA's reach, which, though broad, maintained focus on hot-button identity issues which could be used to exacerbate existing social schisms in the US.

The Russian-sponsored propaganda campaign on Facebook included creating, cultivating and advertising Facebook community pages from a multitude of perspectives. Some were racially charged – the campaign which was aimed at pro-Black Lives Matter activists and allies made up the bulk of the Russian-sponsored advertisements that were released by the HPSCI. Some were mundane – there were several “meme” sites with no obvious messaging. The Russian Facebook page posts and advertisements used established and innovative propaganda tactics to attract and keep followers; in every aspect of their campaign, they relied on social identity concepts and social identity theory (discussed below) to maintain and motivate their Facebook followers.

It is important to highlight that the Russian propaganda campaign reached beyond the boundaries of the internet and intruded into real life. The Russian sponsored Facebook ads touted rallies and protests; sponsored petitions; requested their follower's contact information and pictures; and sold themed T-shirts and hats. The Facebook pages dealt in real, monetary benefits: their “Defend the Second” Facebook page advertised a free shooting package (handgun and range rental) for their first eight respondents, to be used at a local Gainesville, Florida shooting range. The Russian-sponsored Facebook

page “Black Fist” sponsored a free self-defense course at several different US gyms, available to all their Facebook followers. These were real-life events, paid for by Russia, and unwittingly held by Americans on US soil at US-owned establishments, to cultivate followers and gain US person contact information (HPSCI(D), 2018). There were other, more nefarious, attempts to gain access to Americans: one of the Facebook pages (Stop AI) heavily advertised a non-existent free music browser, which relied on downloading an attached file onto the user’s computer (HPSCI(D), 2018). This file acted as a Trojan Horse to access that device’s contact information (Lapowsky, 2018). The Russian campaign involved real life factors and had real life significance; their ramifications are still being studied and disputed by the data and political science communities.

### **How propaganda tactics and devices work**

Social philosopher Jacques Ellul studied propaganda and chillingly believed that propaganda was ubiquitous and powerful in our society; and often remained unrecognized by the masses because it fulfilled the functions often filled by social identity groups: esteem, belonging, and direction. Ellul (1965) described five characteristics of propaganda: that it is constructed for the masses, it makes use of all types of media, it is continuous, stifles dialogue and is not intended to produce critical thinking. Ellul further delineated propaganda into two types: integration propaganda, which is intended to adjust the masses to a situation or process; and agitation propaganda, which is intended to incite action or rebellion. Ellul did not only view propaganda as a tool to change opinion; he believed it was most effective when it sharpened and heightened a person’s pre-existing beliefs and moved him to action (agitation

propaganda) or when it layered onto pre-propaganda foundations (integration propaganda) to produce a conforming population. Ellul believed that modern education systems acted as pre-propaganda, encouraging rule-following and inoculating the population to their expected actions.

Several decades before Ellul, experts Leonard Doob and Edward Robinson also dissected propaganda in order to find defining characteristics. In their article on “Psychology and Propaganda,” Doob and Robinson (1935) made a distinction between education and propaganda: education was the transmission of information, whereas propaganda was the reliance on persuasion to transmit a message. The authors identified three key elements to effective propaganda: getting the target to perceive the message, having the intended suggestion in the message and using devices of suggestion. The first element entailed gaining the target’s attention - using “the billboard, the magazine, the radio and the hall,” and making their selected medium as attractive and attention-getting as possible (Doob & Robinson, 1935, p .90). The devices to attract attention do not have to be related to the end message; here, the authors used the example of an advertising jingle employed to make a potential customer remember a certain type of pill. The message ought to be simple and easily grasped; additionally, the message should be repeated often and widely in order to have the best chance of it reaching the biggest audience. Being first to reach the audience with a message can be a boon for propagandists - this takes advantage of the primacy effect (Lawson, 1969), or the propensity for the audience to be persuaded of the first argument they hear. This contrasts with the recency effect, which is a person’s tendency to remember the most recent



message they receive (Bordens, Horowitz & Irwin, 2001). Some studies show that the two effects work hand in glove on different types of people: those who find the message more personally relevant are more affected by the primacy effect; those who do not find the message personally relevant are more affected by the recency effect (Haugtvedt & Wegener, 1994). A propagandist could engage both the primacy and the recency effect through the early and continuous flow and repetition of propaganda. The Russian propaganda model, as described by Paul & Matthews (2016), relies heavily on these characteristics; they described it as “the firehose of falsehood” because of its multiple channels and overwhelming volume: “rapid, continuous, and repetitive” (Paul & Matthews, 2016, p. 1).

The second factor in effective propaganda is the use of suggestion to convey the message, which the authors deemed more effective than direct transmission of the message when the propagandist or the cause would “create antagonism” (Doob & Robinson, 1935, p. 90). One effective tactic in propaganda is to attract the audience’s attention using indirect messaging or unrelated messaging, then use direct messaging to request the audience’s action or sympathy. An example of this is the popularity and effect of propaganda radio shows during WWII; American soldiers listened to enemy propaganda radio in order to enjoy the music, but also exposed themselves to the direct messaging from propagandists like “Tokyo Rose.” Another effective tactic is to “swim with the tide,” or take advantage of the audience’s pre-existing attitudes to send messaging that either complements or can be attached to the existing belief system. (Doob & Robinson, 1935). This is similar to Ellul’s assertion that propaganda is not

always meant to change an opinion, but can often be employed to increase an existing one and move the audience towards action.

The third factor which Doob & Robinson (1935) asserted was necessary to create effective propaganda is the use of devices designed to attract the audience's attention and convey the message persuasively and simply. The Institute for Propaganda Analysis, quoted in "Counter propaganda: Cases from US public diplomacy and beyond" (Cull, 2015), identified seven primary devices that propagandists used to hook their audience. The devices were Name-calling, Transfer, Glittering generality, Bandwagon, Testimonial, Card stacking, and Plain folks (Cull, 2015). These devices, described below, and the aforementioned tactics are underpinned with social and psychological phenomena that help explain why propaganda can affect the population.

"Name-calling" works to paint a complete picture of the object of propaganda in just one or two words. For example, invoking the names "libtard" or "snowflake" in today's political discourse presents a complex (and strongly negative) picture of a politically liberal person who is weak, deluded by their political views and unable to understand the "real world." Names-calling also serves to perpetuate a stereotype of the object of the name-calling, often dehumanizing or lessening them in the eyes of the propaganda's recipient. The name-calling tactic's use of stereotypes (stereotypes are discussed in Chapter 3) takes advantage of our reliance on heuristics - guides, shortcuts or bundles of pre-packaged opinions - to make sense of the world quickly and with little effort. Heuristics and stereotypes are examples of human nature's tendency to be a "cognitive miser" (Bordens, Horowitz & Irwin, 2001).

“Transfer” is the tactic of conjoining two ideas to raise the value of the targeted idea, “unjustifiably associating an argument with an admired category of thought such as religion or patriotism” (Cull, 2015, p. 6). The baldest example is found in advertising, wherein the use of a particular product (in these examples, Coca-Cola) is linked to intangibles such as patriotism (“Red, White & You”), world peace (“I’d like to buy the world a Coke”) and happiness (“Open happiness”) (Coca-Cola Journey website, 2012). Doob and Robinson described this effect as utilizing the prestige of cultural values to advance the stimulus of propaganda: “A flag, a quotation from the Bible, an authority, a sentimental reference to the glorious past - these are some of the typical values that help propaganda” (Doob & Robinson, 1935, p. 91). Propaganda’s routine avoidance of critical thinking benefits the transfer tactic: the cognitive miser quickly assesses the established idea (religion, etc.) as “good” and lazily evaluates the associated propaganda message the same way.

“Glittering generality” is presenting one’s message in a vague but enticing way. One example of glittering generality is President Ronald Reagan’s use of the phrase, “shining city on a hill” (Cull, 2015, p. 6) to describe his vision of America, or President George W. Bush’s use of the phrase “axis of evil” to describe the perfidy of three nations. Propaganda which relies on glittering generality relies on provocative imagery but is short on facts and plans; many political and advertising slogans are examples of glittering generality. Like name-calling, glittering generality relies on heuristics that allow a general picture (rather than specifics) to lead the target’s emotional and cognitive opinion on a topic.

The Bandwagon tactic (“everyone is doing it!”) takes advantage of our tendency towards conformity, which is our natural inclination to espouse the same opinion as the majority of those around us (Fisher & Kelman, 2011). The bandwagon technique is very powerful: it indicates to the audience that the idea being pushed is more popular than it is. The bandwagon tactic can prompt a “go-along” attitude among those who don’t have strong opinions about the topic; empower and strengthen the convictions of those who already agree with the propaganda message; and suppress dissenting opinions. Solomon Asch’s work on the power of the majority to inspire conformity (1956) demonstrated that the effect is enormously powerful. His experiments, in which a group of college students were shown a drawing of several lines and asked to pick the two with the same length, showed that three quarters of the subjects literally rejected the evidence of their own eyes and conformed to the majority of respondents who had been instructed to answer incorrectly. Propaganda takes advantage of this aspect of human nature, presenting ideas as popular or as the “norm” for the majority.

The Testimonial technique takes advantage of our instinctive trust of authority figures, experts or of people with whom we identify. Our reception of a message often relies on the perceived credibility of the message communicator; in this case, “credibility” is a mix of expertise and trustworthiness. The link between established expertise and potential for opinion change was demonstrated by Hovland and Weiss (1951), who showed that trustworthy sources (so deemed through established expertise and public prestige) significantly affected opinion change amongst the experiment participants. Advertisers who select spokespeople for their products certainly choose

them for their prestige, but also for their perceived expertise (if Michael Jordan says these sneakers are good, then they must be!) or for their trustworthiness (if a beloved “Happy Days” star says that a political candidate is good, then he must be!). Propagandists also use the “testimonial” effect to take advantage of our tendency to trust those who look or act like us, either by race or culture: “[T]he credibility of a message often hinged not on its content but on the nature of the messenger, whose effectiveness was enhanced by similarity with the audience” (Cull, 2015, p. 9).

Another aspect of the testimonial technique is the potential to take advantage of preference falsification, which is when people feel free to express existing (though not socially acceptable) opinions if an influential person publicly expresses those opinions. Recent experiments from researchers at the National Bureau of Economic Research demonstrated that “preference falsification” may be linked to the expression of racism and the election of President Donald Trump (Bursztyn, Egorov & Fiorin, 2017). These experiments demonstrated that having a President openly express xenophobic and racist views made it more socially acceptable for people to express those same ideas. This could be effective in propaganda: if a trusted figure or authority figure expressed a certain view, then those who already held that view would feel freer to express it.

The Card-stacking technique in propaganda occurs when the propagandist presents an unbalanced amount of information about the topic, “stacking” the cards on one side of the message. Card-stacking takes advantage of the inoculation effect (McGuire and Papageorgis 1961), in which providing a small amount of information against a pre-held belief “inoculates” the subject against arguments that counter their

existing belief. This works by exposing them to the opposite belief and allowing them to develop counter arguments, in the same way one's body uses a vaccination to build up defenses against the same virus in the vaccine. Propagandists can use this technique to strengthen their audience's pre-existing beliefs – providing a small amount of information counter to their message and a lot of information to support their message. This same technique also works off the principle that certain audiences respond well to one-sided argument and some respond better to two-sided arguments. Hovland, Janis and Kelley's 1953 study (cited in Bordens, Horowitz & Irwin, 2001) demonstrated that less educated audiences are better persuaded by one-sided arguments, while more educated audiences are persuaded by two-sided arguments. The card-stacking tactic allows propagandists to direct their message to multiple audiences without a strong danger of accidentally persuading their audience of the opposite message.

As described by Cull (2015), the Plain Folks tactic in propaganda worked by “identifying the speaker or position being promoted with folk wisdom and familiar home values” (p. 6). It makes the propaganda feel more familiar, normal, and even wholesome. Propaganda, by its nature, is aimed at the masses; by appealing to “plain folks,” the propagandist implicitly identifies the propaganda with the values or norms most fundamental to the audience.

Propaganda can rely on a mix of emotional and cognitive persuasion and the preceding devices make use of both types. By far, one of the most effective methods of persuasion is the use of fear or invocation of threat to provoke an emotional response. According to psychiatrist Dr. Andrew Nierenberg (2018), propaganda works by inciting

fear and provoking stress in its audience; the natural neural reaction to fear is to cease executive function; i.e., stop thinking. Propagandists who rely on this method can deliver their messages unchallenged by critical thought from the recipients. The invocation of fear or threat can move propaganda from mere messaging towards action, which can alleviate the fear. This tactic aligns with Ellul's (1965) description of propaganda as stifling critical thought and inciting action.

### **Propaganda, threat and identity**

Effective propaganda is simple and aimed at the masses; it often uses fear as its method of persuasion; it is designed to suppress dialogue and circumvent critical thinking. In order to accomplish these things, propagandists often rely on the heuristics associated with social identity: the stereotypes, cultural norms and values, prejudices and established patterns of threat. The devices of propaganda often work best when applied through a social identity lens: using culture, religion, ethnicity or nationality to shape the message and messaging. Name-calling with a generic term ("jerk") is not as persuasive as a term important along cultural lines ("Western imperialist pig"). Transfer works best when applied to objects of prestige appropriate to the social identity - a message with a Bible verse would have a very different impact in Saudi Arabia than it would in Alabama. The impact of the Testimonial method depends mightily on the social identity of the authority figure and that of the audience; targets of propaganda are more likely to receive messages from people they view as similar. One's social identity will heavily influence their viewpoint of credibility, trustworthiness and expertise: imagine using the words of KKK leader David Duke to try to persuade Black Lives Matter activists to end their

protest. The Bandwagon tactic is implicitly couched along the lines of social identity; the “everybody” invoked by propagandists only matters to the audience if it is THEIR “everybody.” Plain Folks likewise depends on understanding the nuance of the audience’s social identity and aiming towards the appropriate set of cultural, ethnic or religious “home values.”

In the same way that propagandists can utilize aspects of social identity to craft propaganda devices, they can use the cultural fears and established patterns of threat in their audience’s social identity. Propagandists whose aim is to incite division in a society can easily use existing prejudice between social identity groups. The recent Russian propaganda campaign used America’s racial fault lines to incite further division, but they were preceded by a long line of adversaries who did the same. Nazi propaganda during WWII aimed at white American soldiers raised the specter of a scene from back home, in which black men raped white women while their [white] husbands were dying on foreign soil. At the same time, both Germany and Japan directed propaganda at black American soldiers, detailing the unequal pay, unjust treatment, lynchings and violence they faced in America, and questioning why they fought for a country that treated them so poorly. In all these cases, the propagandists found fertile ground for persuasion in the field of racial disharmony. They sowed their seeds of discord using aspects of social identity, quickly tapping into deep fears, resentments, grudges, prejudices and attitudes. Because the current Russian propaganda campaign was particularly focused on exacerbating racial divisions and taking advantage of the cultural, ethnic and religious fault lines in America



(Sheth, 2017), I have chosen to examine this propaganda through the lens of social identity theories.

### **CHAPTER THREE - SOCIAL IDENTITY THEORY**

Social identity theory is based on the idea that people desire to belong to social groups, that they view themselves and others as belonging to categories of people, that these groups provide positive self-image, and that this social identity affects how we view ourselves and others (Tajfel, 1982 and Korostelina, 2007). Our social identity is rooted in cognitive and emotional factors: “the felt attachment between the self and the ingroup as a whole” (Brewer, 2001, p. 21). The social identities to which we are attached can be assigned at birth - our race, culture, nationality, ethnicity and religion - or they could be chosen over our lifetime - our political ideology, clubs, or profession. Our identity is not determined solely by the groups which form it – it is also determined by the actuality, salience and valence of those factors (Korostelina, 2007). Identity actuality refers to the distinctiveness and highlighted-ness of an identity aspect; a white person in a majority white country will not view her race with actuality of a white person in a non-white country. Identity salience refers to the centrality of one's identity: how important or central that actual identity is to a person. For example, the same white person in a non-white country may begin to value their racial identity and raise its significance in their view of themselves. Valence refers to whether the identity is viewed positively or negatively; if white people are viewed negatively, a person's white identity may have a

negative valence for them. Conversely, if their race is prized or valued, their whiteness may have a positive valence for them.

Social identity is contingent on categorization, and results in the formation of groups, group loyalty and cohesion, and feelings about those outside of the group. “The feeling and understanding of “we-ness” is a result of social identification processes” (Korostelina, 2007, p. 19). Our human drive to categorize, to form ingroups and outgroups, “us” and “them,” is so strong that we need minimal distinction such as preference for an obscure artist or the ability to estimate the number of dots (Tajfel, 1970) in order to invoke the feelings of group membership.

There are many theories about the motivations behind our willingness, desire and need to form groups, which can require individuals to subsume their own desires to those of the group. Marilynn Brewer (2011) explains several of these motivations: self-esteem, security, “uncertainty reduction” in which belonging to a group provides structure and social rules, and belonging, “an aspect of human nature derived from our vulnerability as lone individuals who require connection with others in order to survive” (Brewer, 2011, p. 130). Volkan (1997) describes ethnic identity as a “tent” which provides security and protection and a sense of “we-ness.” Social identity can also be a source of self-esteem, through favorable comparison with out-groups. Tajfel (1982) noted that perceptions of a social group “are primarily *relational* in nature” (p. 24). In other words, one’s perception of the value of their social group is derived from comparing that group to another. We derive positive group esteem through positive comparison to outgroups; if that group

holds a salient social identity for us, then our self-esteem is also increased through that positive group comparison (Tajfel, 1982).

### **Categorization (Stereotypes, attitudes and perceptions)**

People engage in categorization and stereotypes in order to quickly make sense of the world around them - it is an attribute of the human tendency to be a “cognitive miser” (Borders & Horowitz, 2001). Categorization allows us to “direct similar behaviors towards an entire class of objects or people. We do not have to choose a new response each time...” (Borders & Horowitz, 2001, p. 109). Stereotypes and prejudice are the outcome of categorization. Stereotypes are the cognitive aspect of prejudice, which is also comprised of feelings/emotions about a group of people. Stereotypes are an individual’s tendency to ascribe characteristics to and feelings about an entire category of people. Stereotypes can be associated with all identity factors – national (“Americans are loud”), regional (“Southerners are slow”), religion, race and more. There are ingroup and outgroup stereotypes; there are positive and negative stereotypes. Stereotypes don’t only exist to help the “cognitive miser” make sense of his world; they also exist in order to provide positive distinction from other groups.

Tajfel (1982) discussed the two parts to “social accentuation:” the cognitive function and the value function. Cognitively, we focus on similarities and differences (social accentuation) for “ordering, systematizing and simplifying the complex network of social groups confronting the individual” (p. 21), i.e., making sense of the world around us. But there is also a valuing function associated with those differences: “This served to protect, maintain or enhance the value systems applying to distinctions between

social groups” (Tajfel, 1982, p.21). Individuals use categorization and stereotyping to order their world, but they also use it to make themselves or their group appear better.

One of the bases for social identity is the positive esteem that the group confers on the individual (Tajfel, 1982). Embracing positive stereotypes of one’s ingroup and negative stereotypes of an outgroup strengthens this esteem through favorable comparison. The need to differentiate based on favorable comparison is especially strong for groups in close quarters. “If groups have similar status and access to power and close cultures, their members need to use favorable comparisons with outgroups to increase their self-esteem. This comparison leads to the formation of negative stereotypes and attitudes toward outgroup members, perceptions of them as a “second sort” of people, prejudices, and blatant discrimination” (Korostelina, 2007, p. 93). If the comparison is favorable, the real or perceived benefit of being part of that group can strengthen an individual’s membership.

The value function attached to categories and stereotypes leads to the attitudes and perceptions that one group holds about another. Attitudes are our internal, unseen mental map of the world, comprised of and expressed through our thoughts, feelings, desires and actions (Bordas & Horowitz, 2001). Our attitudes are how we see the world: they can be strong or weak, positive or negative. Attitudes are developed through our experiences or the adopted experiences of others. Attitudes towards other races can be shaped by the attitudes of others (family attitudes towards race), or by personal experience with other races (roommate in college of a different race) or by the experience of others (family member was treated by a doctor of another race). In each of these cases,

the experience could have been positive or negative and shapes the way we view and interact with members of our own or other races. Although attitudes and perceptions can be individual, they are often part and parcel of intergroup relationships. “Intergroup attitudes (such as prejudice) and intergroup behavior (such as discriminatory practice) refer to the attitudes and the behavior manifested by members of groups collectively or individually. The characteristic of an intergroup attitude or an intergroup behavior is that it is related to the individual’s membership in a group” (Sherif, et al, 1988, p. 199-200). In many cases, we hold the attitudes and perceptions of other groups that our group normalizes; we act and feel as others in our group do. Our status as members of a group often relies on embracing these attitudes and stereotypes.

Categorization is not confined to perceptions of others, it includes categorization of ourselves. To which group do we belong? What is our social identity? Collective social identity is the identity of the group: the norms, beliefs, rules and shared history that define the group. Implicit in this collective identity is the *awareness* of individuals that they share an identity in common with other group members, i.e., the identity is a salient one for group members (Coutant, Worchel, & Hanza, 2011, p. 40). An individual who is part of the group gains this collective social identity, taking on the beliefs and norms of the group, following the rules and believing the shared history. A person could be part of a group, but with low salience; alternately, they could be invested emotionally and cognitively in the group. Korostelina (2006) terms these two states of group belonging as “categorical” groups and “membership” groups and suggests that “categorical groups can be described in terms of a role theory of identity and membership groups in terms of a

group theory of identity” (Korostelina, 2006, p. 156). Individuals who are aware of their identity and for whom their identity is salient, “can draw his or her goals and values from the group, share his or her destiny with the group, and actively fight for the rights of the ingroup and/or discriminate against members of other groups” (Korostelina, 2006, p. 156).

Self-categorization theory (Turner, et al, 1994) stipulates that our view of ourselves is shaped by both personal and social identity and we value both aspects of our identities. Marilynn Brewer (1991) explored our desire to be both individuals and members of a group in equal measure. Her model of *optimal distinctiveness* dictates that we seek equilibrium between personalization and social identification. Self-identity is both flexible and relational (Turner, et al, 1994) – which categories we view ourselves in vary over time and environment, as in Korostelina’s (2006 and 2007) discussion of salience, actuality and valence. Though they are variable, and their salience affected by our environment, the categories to which we belong are not random: they must fit who we are and be understandable (accessible). Identifying oneself as a member of a group, or self-stereotyping, is termed “depersonalization.” Voci (2006) sums up the interplay of self-categorization factors in group dynamics: “[T]he interaction between accessibility and comparative fit of an ingroup-outgroup categorization affects depersonalization—that is, self-categorization as a group member. Depersonalization, in turn, determines group phenomena” (p. 75). Self-categorization theory has been demonstrated to interact with favorable comparison to demonstrate increased stereotyping among groups whose social identity was made more salient (Turner, et al, 1999). In other words, we are more likely

to have positive stereotypes of ourselves and negative stereotypes of outgroup members when our social identity is made more salient.

Propagandists use categorization to push their message, invoking and nurturing warm feelings of “we-ness” to prompt collective action; or instigating opposition to “them” in order to advance an opposite action. Stereotypes are especially effective – as a heuristic, stereotypes can paint a complete picture of a positive “us” and a negative “them” in a few words or an image. Propagandists rely on concise, thought-stifling messages; stereotypes, especially those presented through the “name calling” device, epitomize this.

### **Collective Axiology and Axiology of Difference**

Collective identity is comprised of a myriad of elements: rules, laws and morals; food, costume and etiquette; songs, stories and dance; beliefs, ideology and practices. Group collective identity can be cultural, reflected or mobilized in the individual (Korostelina, 2007, p. 86). Cultural identity is the identity an individual lives within; the boundaries and customs are so common as to be ingrained. The identity lacks salience (highlighted-ness) because it is an individual’s everyday life (Korostelina, 2007). Reflected identity is more salient; when an individual has a “reflective or advanced understanding of a group’s past, present, and future.... deep knowledge about the history of their ingroup and its relationship to outgroups... its current status and position... its future goals and perspectives” (Korostelina, 2007, p. 86). Mobilized identity exists when a group is in competition with another group and has a heightened sense of “we-them”



opposition; a mobilized identity exists between groups and describes adversarial intergroup interactions (Korostelina, 2007, p. 86).

A main component in collective social identity is collective axiology - the value system, morals and rules that guide how members of the group interact with each other and members of other groups. "A collective axiology defines boundaries and relations among groups and establishes criteria for ingroup/outgroup membership" (Rothbart & Korostelina, 2006a, p. 4). A group's collective axiology binds members together using aspects of collective identity: "Transcending the finitude of individual life, a collective axiology extends retrospectively from the salient episodes of the past to a prospective vision... into the otherwise uncertain future" (Rothbart & Korostelina, 2006a, p. 4).

Collective axiology is not static. The influence of social identity groups flows both ways – the individual is influenced by the group, and the group is influenced by the individual. Korostelina (2007) notes that "[t]he victories and defeats of a group become part of a person...[and] ...the person's attitudes, beliefs, and behavior become part of a group and influence the differentiation from other groups..." (p. 25). Likewise, the expressions of social identity can change based on the existence and influence of outside identity groups; the ingroup attitudes and perceptions of themselves can be directly influenced by their perceptions of the Other.

The comparison of one group's axiology to another's is axiology of difference. "Underpinning the process of axiological difference centers on the formation of a normative order that is defined through dualities of sacred/profane, good/evil or virtuous/vicious. To accept "who we are," it becomes necessary to define "who we are

not,” that is, “who are the Others” (Rothbart & Korostelina, 2006b, p. 41). Axiological difference impacts a group’s willingness to engage in collective action against another group; the degree of collective generality and balance (described below) with which they view themselves and others dictates their axiological difference (Rothbart & Korostelina, 2006b).

Collective generality is the way in which the ingroup views the outgroup and the level of homogeneity they attribute to that group. Relative heterogeneity, or the “tendency to perceive greater variability for the ingroup relative to the variability perceived for the outgroup” was demonstrated to rely more on the perception of outgroup as homogenous than on ingroup heterogeneity (Mullen & Wu, 1989). Axiological difference, the difference that the ingroup sees between their moral and normative order and that of the outgroup, is heavily dependent on the salience of their identity; salient identities have been linked to the willingness to invest in stereotypes (Turner, et al, 1999). Stereotypes are a form of outgroup homogeneity and lead to higher collective generality. In addition, Brewer (1994) hypothesized that our need for optimal distinctiveness – to be both distinct and a member of a group – led us to hold more salient those identities that allowed ingroup heterogeneity and outgroup homogeneity. So, the more important (salient) an identity is to us, the more likely it is that we will see our group as good and the other group as not good (axiological difference) AND the more likely it is that we will see the other group as uniformly not good (homogenous).

The other driving factor in axiological difference is balance: axiological balance “refers to a kind of parallelism of virtues and vices attributed to groups” (Rothbart &

Korostelina, 2006b, p. 49). The ingroup can see itself and the outgroup in a balanced way, as a mixture of good's and bad's, or in an unbalanced way, as all-good or all-evil. The need for an unbalanced view of the Other can be linked to favorable comparison, or enhancing one's esteem through comparison to another group, as each group believes their axiology is morally superior. Since collective axiology provides a narrative of the group's moral standing, past and present, and because collective identity is a source of group esteem, ingroup moral narratives usually depict the ingroup as good/virtuous. Volkan (1997) theorized that ingroup members use outgroups as a repository for bad or shameful characteristics of their own. Unwilling to view their own group as possessing negative characteristics, they will project them onto the outgroup, forming stereotypes and vicious narratives about the outgroup. Axiological difference can lead to moral duality, as each group embraces a narrative that dictates that the outgroup is bad/wrong/evil. "In these narratives, the ingroup becomes a source of collective pride and self-esteem, while the outgroup is described as a source of threat and aggressiveness" (Korostelina, 2007, p. 149). Balance strongly impacts axiological difference, which can drive collective action: "The formation of demonized and devalued images of the Other can galvanize members of the ingroup" (Rothbart & Korostelina, 2006a, p. 8). Unbalanced axiological difference and moral duality can strengthen a group stereotype or bias against an outgroup, increase their hostility against the outgroup and their commitment to maintaining the integrity of their identity.

One aim of propagandists is to stifle critical thought – the use of existing collective axiology can be an effective tool towards this aim. Our identity axiology is

often so hard-wired in us that we accept it unquestioningly. This can be demonstrated in a propagandists' use of the device "transfer" to push their message. By linking their message to something that we accept without question, they can likewise avoid questioning. Moral duality further exemplifies this pattern; by the time a group has reached the level of axiological difference needed to evoke moral duality, they no longer critically think about the out-group. A propagandist could invoke moral duality through the use of stereotypes of both the out-group and in-group to stifle thought and pass their message.

### **Chosen traumas and glories in Collective Axiology**

Collective axiology helps the identity group make sense of their past and relate it to their future; as such, history plays a powerful part in an identity group's collective axiology. Sometimes manifested in traditions that find expression in the culture's collective axiology, and sometimes manifested in the enduring prejudices and attitudes towards other identity groups, the history of a collective social identity group is pivotal in how they see themselves and how they relate to others. Montville (2006) highlighted the importance of understanding the history of inter-group relations as a means to understand current inter-group relations; he traced Irish animosity towards the British back to Cromwell's massacre at Dublin in 1647 (p. 383), linking the events from centuries past to modern Irish Republican Army groups.

One of the ways that social identity groups incorporate their history into current expression is through "chosen traumas and glories" (Volkan, 1997), which build and strengthen their collective group identity and axiology. These are memories, often

mythologized, of great victories and defeats from the group's past. The memories strengthen the group's bonds by reminding them of their shared suffering or "inducing feelings of success and triumph" (Volkan, 1997, p. 49 and p. 81). Chosen traumas and glories can be commemorated in songs, stories and prayers, or reenacted in plays, parades and memorials. They become touchstones for the ingroup, serving to buttress them during hardship, motivate them towards a group goal, or provide esteem and a feeling of oneness.

The memory or invocation of chosen glories can build pride in the identity group, which strengthens the sense of esteem that members gain from membership in that group. They are "reactivated as a way to bolster a group's self esteem... [and] heavily mythologized over time..." often invoking past victories or past heroes (Volkan, 1997, p. 81). Chosen glories, when compared with a current diminished state of the group, can also provoke action within that group to try to regain their glorious past. A white supremacist group might invoke images of America's ante-bellum South to remind group members of a time when white people ruled unquestionably over all others and inspire group member's continued commitment to returning to that time period.

A chosen trauma is a "collective memory of a calamity that once befell a group's ancestors.... it is a shared mental representation of the event, which includes realistic information, fantasized expectations, intense feelings, and defenses against unacceptable thoughts" (Volkan, 1997, p. 48). Chosen traumas bond group members over a shared loss, establish borders around shared victimization, serve as a warning against future traumas from outgroups, and prompt the group towards action against the outgroup which

wronged them. The same imagery of America's ante-bellum South, if shown to black Americans, would remind them of the enslavement their group endured, serve as a caution against trusting outgroup members who perpetrated those acts, and prompt a commitment to gaining power so that it does not happen again.

Chosen traumas and glories personalize the history of an identity group and link the experiences of a group to an individual's emotions. In this way, the individual and the group become closer. Eriksen (2001) noted that identity groups leaders often invoke chosen traumas and glories in order to strengthen group identity and move a group towards violence. "Using myths, cultural symbols, and kinship terminology in addressing their supporters, promoters of identity politics try to downplay the difference between personal experiences and group history. In this way, it becomes perfectly sensible for a Serb to talk about the legendary battle of Kosovo in the first person ("We lost in 1389"), and the logic of revenge is extended to include metaphorical kin, in many cases millions of people" (Eriksen, 2001, p. 58).

A key part of chosen traumas and glories is the way in which they can feel immediate to the identity group celebrating them, despite the modern-day group being separated from the actual event by hundreds or thousands of years. Volkan (1997) termed this immediacy "time collapse," "in which the interpretations, fantasies and feelings about the past shared trauma commingle with those pertaining to a current situation.... [P]eople may intellectually separate the past event from the present one, but emotionally, the two events are merged" (Volkan, 1997, p. 35). One striking example of the immediacy and passion inspired by chosen traumas is the Shi'a mourning ritual Ashura.

Ashura commemorates the martyrdom of Hossein, son of Ali, who Shi'a Muslims view as the legitimate heir of the Prophet Muhammad. Ashura is celebrated by the faithful with bloody displays of self-flagellation, elaborate re-enactments of the death of Hossein, gatherings and processions. In Iran, a country built on their shared identity as Shi'a Muslims, Ashura and the events it commemorates have special significance. In his memoir of living in Iran, author Christopher de Bellaigue (2006) asked an elderly Iranian woman to describe the death of Hossein. "She spoke as if she had been eyewitness to it, effortlessly recalling every expression, every word, every doom-laden action. She listed the women and children in Hossein's entourage as if they were members of her own family. She wept her way through half a dozen Kleenexes" (de Bellaigue, 2006, p. 2). The death of Hossein was such a powerful part of this woman's identity that it felt both personal and immediate, and inspired real emotion, despite having occurred in 680AD. Sandole (2006) notes that "each successive, "real world" replay of the traumatic event ... builds upon and reinforces the original sense of assault, loss and, therefore, grievance" (p. 66). In this example, the Iranian social identity is strengthened by the shared display, which serves to bond the people who participate and to make them distinct from their (Sunni) neighbors. Ashura celebrations sharpen the boundaries and borders between the groups: Shi'a participate in this emotional ritual, Sunni do not. This also serves to strengthen the moral duality existing between Shi'a and Sunni Muslims, each of whom view the other as apostates.

Propagandists can find plentiful fodder for their messaging by invoking chosen traumas and glories. In just a few words or images, the propagandist can tap into the

sense of threat or of pride that the event provokes, conjure strong emotions, and raise the specter of the Other: the enemy in the chosen trauma or glory against whom their propaganda is intended to incite animosity. A picture of the World Trade Towers collapsing on 9/11 immediately inspires feelings of loss, fear and sadness amongst Americans; it also invokes the fear of Islamic terrorism, a sense of international isolation and general threat from majority Islamic countries. The emotions invoked by chosen traumas and glories immediately shut down critical thinking and can speak simply and powerfully to a large audience, quickly pushing the propagandist's message and inciting action against the offending Other.

### **Social boundaries, favoritism, bias and discrimination**

In-group favoritism and out-group bias occurs when identity groups favor their own members at the expense of outgroup members. Social identity theory stipulates that a social identity, such as race, religion or nationality, provides cognitive and emotional benefits, including security, a sense of belonging and positive esteem through favorable comparison. Depending on the status of the identity, it could also provide its group members with tangible benefits such as better access to jobs, education, and resources. These benefits can occur at the micro level (individual inter-group interactions) or the macro level (in state and local laws, or rules and norms affecting in- and out- group members) through ingroup favoritism and outgroup bias and discrimination.

Tilly (2005) discussed how categories, such as race and ethnicity, are used to create social boundaries. "When a social boundary comes into being, it includes not only a dividing line but also relations on each side of the line, relations across the line, and



shared stories about those relations” (Tilly 2005, p. 173). Once created, the boundaries serve to *include* as well as to *exclude*; both actions perpetuate and reinforce the established social boundaries. As aforementioned, social and identity boundaries can result in both tangible and intangible benefits. They can protect a cultural or religious identity from outside influence, but they can protect legal, political and economic power.

Tilly (2005) discussed the social boundaries which perpetuate durable inequality through the use of exploitation and opportunity hoarding. Through a system that is built on one group taking advantage of the other (exploitation) and maintaining that system through favoritism and bias (opportunity hoarding), Tilly postulated that inequality was built, passed down through the generations and mirrored (emulated) across multiple lines of power, economy, information and education. The social boundaries resulted in other boundaries, spanning the aforementioned lines; these social boundaries were enacted and enforced through a combination of categorization, favoritism, bias and discrimination.

What prompts favoritism and discrimination? Many researchers postulate that favorable comparison is the culprit. Tajfel (1970) found that even groups formed with minimal distinction demonstrated in-group favoritism and out-group bias. In his experiment, boys were split into groups based on whether they over- or under- estimated the number of dots shown to them. They were then asked to assign money to other boys in the experiment. After being primed to make a distinction between their group or the other group, the boys more often chose to award money to boys in their own group and, when directed to award an amount to the other group, frequently chose to allot the other group the least amount possible. “[I]n spite of the fact that giving as much as possible to

two members of the outgroup ... presented no conflict with the ingroup's interest. [The students did not choose to do so.] It simply would have meant giving more to "the others" without giving any less to "your own." This represented, therefore, a clear case of gratuitous discrimination" (Tajfel, 1970, p. 102). Tajfel (1970) noted that the boys seemed to value maximizing the difference between what was allotted to each group, in other words, maximizing the opportunity for favorable comparison. In later experiments, Tajfel and Williams (1981) found that children as young as seven years old would choose to maximize the difference in awards given to in-group and out-group members, even if mutual benefit would not detract from their in-group gain. This supported Tajfel's earlier finding that, "Whenever we are confronted with a situation to which some form of intergroup categorization appears directly relevant, we are likely to act in a manner that discriminates against the outgroup and favors the ingroup" (Tajfel, 1970, p. 98-99). Turner (1975) found that inter-group discrimination based on minimal social groupings occurred even when the competition was "social" competition (points without value in the real world), as opposed to realistic competition (over something with monetary value). Mullen, Brown and Smith (1992) conducted a meta-analysis of research on in-group bias and found that ample evidence that the phenomenon exists: "people tend to see the ingroup in more positive terms than they do the outgroup" (Mullen, Brown & Smith, 1992, p. 115). This was especially true for smaller ingroups; the study found that ingroup bias increased as the size decreased. In-group bias was also linked to salience of the identity; as salience increased, so, too, did ingroup bias.

Though these experiments displayed stark examples of ingroup favoritism and outgroup bias, later experiments and theorists did not find such dire outcomes. Mummendey and Schreier (1984), found different results in their experiments, which indicated that individuals with stable, positive social identities did not feel the need to protect them through denying benefits to another group (p. 233). And Brewer (2011), noted that “despite widespread belief that in-group positivity and out-group derogation are reciprocally related, empirical research demonstrates little consistent relation between the two” (p. 132). Eriksen (2001) noted that in-group favoritism may lead to the perception of out-group bias: “[G]roups form to create warmth for their members, but they necessarily create some outward coldness in order to be able to do so. Under particular circumstances, the outward coldness is more readily perceptible than the inward warmth” (p. 63). Brewer (2001) theorized that racism may be less about hating another group and more about loving your own. She termed the attribution of positive characteristics by ingroup members to their group, “ingroup positivity.” “[P]ositive affects such as admiration, sympathy and trust are reserved for the ingroup and withheld from the outgroup” (Brewer, 2001, p. 23).

Despite the varied reasons for the basis of favoritism and bias, there is no doubt that those phenomena exist and, along with the social boundaries they reinforce, have real effects. Propagandists can take advantage of social boundaries, favoritism, bias and discrimination to push their message. They can use the threat ingroup members feel at the potential for those boundaries to change – and with them, the advantages of being part of the ingroup – to push a message that reinforces those boundaries. They could aim their

propaganda at those who are discriminated against and disadvantaged by existing social boundaries, to push a message challenging the boundaries. In both cases, the strong feelings that are prompted by the favoritism and bias inherent in the social boundaries can be used to advance a propagandist's aim. Nowhere is this more evident than in propagandists' use of the social boundaries based on race. In the case of in- and out-groups based on race, the categorization of people into race groups and overlay of racial stereotypes can prompt discrimination or assumptions based on race, i.e., racism. This thesis has presented propaganda examples from WWII, the Cold War, and current Russian propaganda in the US which all used race, racism, and the boundaries surrounding race in the US to push their message. No other identity factor has proven as effective in pushing divisive propaganda as race in the United States.

## **CHAPTER FOUR - DYNAMICS AND FACTORS IN IDENTITY BASED CONFLICTS**

How does identity become identity conflict? What factors move groups from ingroup favoritism, to outgroup bias and discrimination, to violence and genocide? Korostelina's 4-C model uses four factors to examine identity conflict; there are multiple theories concerning each of these factors and their contribution to identity conflict.

The path of intergroup relations which leads from harmonic coexistence to conflict, from healthy ingroup favoritism all the way to genocide, is laid by social identity theory. This dictates our willingness to be in groups; our need to see our group positively; the benefits to maintaining group membership. Social identity theory underlies and informs the path from peace to identity conflict, but it does not act alone. Along with social identity theory, there are conflict and competition theories that help explain the willingness of a group to engage in intergroup conflict.

### **Korostelina's 4-C model**

One way to understand the dynamics of identity conflict is Korostelina's (2007) 4-C model; this model allows analysts to incorporate "economic, political, social, and psychological factors" (p. 152). In this model, identity conflict follows four stages: comparison, competition, confrontation and counteraction. Comparison is the formation of the we-they groups and the actualizing of identity, often through favorable comparison. Competition occurs between two "counterpoised" identity groups, usually

sharing the same space, over access to resources such as land, water, power or information. Confrontation grows with the growth of identity salience; even if most of the population had multiple or cross cutting identities, the increasing competition increases the salience of an identity (often spurred by identity leaders). The confrontation stage – in which the increasing identity salience combines with competition over resources – prompts the ingroup to view the outgroup as a threat. “Fighting with the outgroup becomes the main goal and condition of ingroup survival” (Korostelina, 2007, p. 152). The final stage, counteraction, is when each group uses collective axiology to build moral duality, framing the outgroup not only as a threat, but as evil.

### **Identity salience as a factor in conflict**

Confrontation can be attributed to a combination of identity salience and outgroup threat; each factor locked in a cycle wherein the growth of one increases the other. Korostelina (2007) suggests “readiness for conflict can have two main components: a willingness to defend ingroup goals, safety, values, and ideals; and a willingness to fight against outgroup goals” (p. 132). The first factor involves the salience of the identity to the individual members; individuals who strongly identify with a group (“high identifiers”) are more likely to perceive threat to their group and more likely to justify hostility, including violence, against out-groups because “group interests and well-being are intimately linked” (Brewer, 2011, p. 133). In her 2006 study on “Identity salience as a determinant of the perceptions of the Other,” Korostelina found that individuals holding a very salient ethnic identity “see other ethnic groups as opponents, rivals and even enemies and are ready to defend and engage them in violence” (p. 122). Identity salience

was the key factor, not ethnic identity, in viewing the Other negatively and a readiness for conflict (Korostelina, 2006, p. 123).

### **Outgroup threat**

The second factor in a group's readiness for conflict involves their perception of the outgroup goals as a threat to the ingroup (Korostelina, 2007). Threat can be realistic or symbolic – in other words, it can be directed at tangible things like resources, security, or land; or it can be directed at intangible things, as in a challenge to the group's identity, values or beliefs (Brewer, 2011). These aspects of outgroup threat can be examined through Korostelina's 4-C model.

“Comparison” sets the stage, establishing identity groups, favorable comparisons and identity salience. In this stage, groups either become accustomed to their status as powerful/weak, minority/majority, or dissatisfied with that status. In keeping with social identity theory, they also rely on their identity for positive esteem, positive self-stereotypes, protection, security and a sense of belonging. These positive feelings about the self and ingroup go hand in glove with a certain amount of negative perception of the Other.

The “competition” stage includes intergroup interactions involving desire for the same resources, either tangible or intangible. Ingroups might feel threat from an outgroup over realistic competition over resources, or *perceived* realistic competition over resources (“They’re taking our jobs!”). The realistic competition could be absolute, as when two groups want the same resources, or it could be comparative, as when a group

feels that their relative position or resource allocation has lessened when compared to the outgroup (relative deprivation).

The “confrontation” stage that springs from the previous two stages can be furthered by intergroup interactions that perpetuate the idea of outgroup threat. Confrontation can be closely linked with aspects of security dilemma, in which lack of communication, past threats and stereotypes can contribute to the perception of the outgroup as a threat.

The view of the outgroup as a threat can take place in a myriad of situations. Outgroup threat can be perceived whether they constitute the minority or majority: the ingroup majority worries that the outgroup minority will grow or try to take over. Outgroup threat can be felt whether the outgroup has more power or less: a less powerful outgroup could be plotting revenge; a more powerful outgroup could follow patterns of oppression it had previously visited on the weaker ingroup. Ingroups may perceive outgroups as threats over actual attacks or violence which occurred, but that violence may have taken place hundreds of years ago, as displayed in “chosen traumas.” Ingroup may perceive outgroup threat over non-physical “attacks” on their identity (“They’re speaking Spanish! This is America!” or, “They’re taking prayer out of our schools!”).

The final stage, “counteraction,” hinges on moral duality and axiological difference. In this stage, the other group is simply wrong and outgroup threat is based on their “wrong-ness.” Their evil could corrupt the pure ingroup and must be extinguished. Dehumanization can be used to strengthen axiological difference in this stage.



Outgroup threat is intertwined with identity salience and conflict. Identity salience increases the perception of outgroup threat, which increases feelings of identity salience, which increases the likelihood of conflict; conflict increases both salience and perception of threat (Sherif, et al, 1988; Korostelina, 2007, Brewer, 2011). David Berreby (2005) noted that the interplay of identity and conflict could become tautological, “The reason we fight as my tribe against your tribe is because... we fight” (p.209). The fights are produced by the existence of two tribes AND the two tribes are produced by the existence of the fight. The process can be cyclical, feeding on itself, and reoccurring. Identity salience lays the groundwork for identity conflict; threat can be the spark that moves two groups to conflict. Or perhaps it could be more accurately described as a seed, sowed in ground made fertile by a salient identity, growing and re-growing seasonally. Rather than burning and extinguishing, identity conflicts tend to occur and reoccur as groups revisit old wounds and fears.

Propaganda frequently uses fear and threat in persuading their audience. The fear can be conveyed through particular tactics, or propaganda can use simple and overt messaging to convey the threat. The propaganda tactic “name-calling” makes use of stereotypes and prejudice, and it often paints the Other as a threat (“animals,” and “dirty --,” as threat of contamination). The “testimonial” tactic can be employed to give credence to a threatening Other: “If (expert) says it is a threat, then it must be!” Fear works to disable the critical thinking part of our brain (Nierenberg, 2018), so overt messaging that simply displays a threatening Other is extremely effective. WWII was rife with examples of this kind of propaganda: each side produced pictures of the other’s

soldiers, displaying weapons and exaggerated aggression, to prompt their own soldiers to view the enemy as a threat (Cull, 2015). In propaganda, the fear is the point. A threatening Other can be simply conveyed using stereotypes and heuristics, or by invoking a chosen trauma (to display moral duality) or a chosen glory (to display relative deprivation, i.e., what we previously had in comparison to others.) The threat and fear shut down dialogue and critical thinking and can prompt the action desired by the propagandist. By increasing identity salience, strengthening moral duality and heightening axiological difference, the propagandist can move the audience towards collective action.

Following Korostelina's 4-C model, we can look at outgroup threat as perceived in the stages of comparison, competition, confrontation and counteraction. There are many theories about the types of intergroup relations that lead to perceiving outgroup threat; here, we will examine relative deprivation, realistic conflict theory, and aspects of security dilemma and dehumanization. The theory of relative deprivation can be used to examine outgroup threat seen in the comparison and competition stages. Realistic conflict theory, both over real and perceived competition, can help to understand outgroup threat that occurs in the competition and confrontation stages. Finally, security dilemma can be used to look at outgroup threat that occurs at the confrontation and counteraction stages and dehumanization can be analyzed as a factor in reaching the most extreme stage of counteraction – genocide.

## **Relative deprivation**

Relative deprivation was conceived by Samuel Stouffer to explain the puzzling contrasts he found among Soldiers during his sociological work with the US Army in WWII. Why were Soldiers in certain military units satisfied with their slow promotion rates, while other Soldiers dissatisfied with their rapid promotion rate? Why were black Soldiers in the South more satisfied with their treatment in the Army than black Soldiers in the North? Stouffer's answer was relative deprivation: "Satisfaction is relative... to the available comparisons we have.... social judgments are shaped not only by absolute standards, but also by standards set by social comparisons" (as described by Pettigrew, 2015). In other words, the Soldiers compared their situation to that of the other Soldiers in their unit or area, not to the promotion rates or lifestyle of Soldiers in other units.

Relative deprivation can be an individual's comparison to another individual; or an individual's comparison of their ingroup to another group. "The first is a person's satisfaction with his position in what he sees as his group; the second is his satisfaction with the position of what he sees as his group in the total social structure" (Runciman, 1961, p. 318). The feeling of group relative deprivation can lead to "collective action and outgroup prejudice" (Pettigrew, 2015, p. 13). Smith, et al, in their extensive 2012 study, defined relative deprivation by three components: comparison with another individual or group; cognitive assessment that there is a disadvantage; perception that the disadvantage is unfair. In the case of group relative deprivation, "Feeling deprived may inspire participation in collective behavior, but only if the person feels deprived on behalf of a relevant reference group" (Smith et al, 2012, p. 205). Ted Gurr's (2016) exploration of

relative deprivation in political situations utilizes this aspect to explain the tendency of people towards violence. He described relative deprivation as “the tension that develops from a discrepancy between the “ought” and the “is” of collective value satisfaction” (Gurr, 2016, pl 23). Members of groups which have lost status, or which have lost the capacity to continue the gains they previously realized, feel relative deprivation; this frustration can lead to violence against the government (or group in power) (Gurr, 2016). The third factor in Smith’s, et al (2012) study specifies that relative deprivation is not just based on the perception of a disadvantage, it is that the disadvantage is *unfair*. Smith, et al, go on to further discuss key characteristics of the feeling of unjust disadvantage – the person feeling relative deprivation does not believe that the disadvantage is their fault; they believe that the system that produced or maintained the disadvantage is illegitimate; and they do not think the situation will change without intervention (Smith, et al, 2012, p. 208). These characteristics point to the reasons that group relative deprivation may lead to collective action or violence.

Relative deprivation can be aroused by a feeling of disadvantage based on comparison to your neighbor; or by comparison to your previous status; or by comparison to your group’s previous status relative to other groups. Relative deprivation can even be aroused by feelings of potential loss, or potential loss of status relative to another group. Feelings of relative deprivation have been shown to impact intergroup relations. A study by Moscatelli, et al, (2014) demonstrated that both relative deprivation and relative gratification (the group that is advantaged relative to others) can prompt ingroup favoritism and outgroup bias. The disadvantaged group feels that their bias is justified

because they are worse off than the advantaged group; the advantaged group feels that their bias is justified because they are (or are likely to be) discriminated against by the disadvantaged group. Distinct from absolute deprivation, relative deprivation nonetheless invokes real feelings of loss, fear and threat and can lead to violence. In discussing the conditions necessary for genocide to occur, Staub (1999) notes, “Poverty by itself does not appear to be a primary instigator of collective violence. Relative deprivation and the experience of injustice are likely to be more important” (p. 305).

In other words, relative deprivation can turn the Other into a threatening Other. Outgroup status, relative to ingroup status (current, past, or projected) can be viewed as a threat, even if the ingroup status is not affected. Because relative status can be at the heart of a group’s identity, the rising fortunes of the outgroup can feel like an attack on their identity.

### **Realistic conflict**

One theory about the intergroup dynamics that spark conflict is Muzafer Sherif’s (1988) theory of realistic conflict. In his “Robber’s Cave” experiment, Sherif split a summer camp of boys into two opposing groups. After building the two groups into salient identity groups, the experimenters then put the two groups into contact and observed intergroup relations when the boys were in competition with one another. In this case, the competition and finite resources acted as the threat that sparked conflict along “identity” lines. The boys demonstrated outgroup hostility, discrimination and bias. “When the groups competed for goals that could be attained by only one group, to the dismay and disappointment of the other, hostile deeds and unflattering labels developed

in relation to the outgroup. In time, derogatory stereotypes and negative attitudes toward the outgroup crystallized” (Sherif, et al, 1988, p 210). Sherif theorized that intergroup conflict arose when groups competed over finite resources – realistic conflict theory. Each group acts in a way to benefit the ingroup; in a zero-sum game, this will necessarily be at the detriment of the outgroup. In this sense, the outgroup only becomes a threatening Other under competition for resources; conflict is less about identity and more about gaining or maintaining groups’ interests.

Realistic conflict theory can help explain why ingroup favoritism and outgroup bias happens during competition over resources, but it does not explain why these things happen in the absence of competition, or over non-valuable resources. As discussed in the section on “Social boundaries, favoritism, bias and discrimination,” researchers found evidence of ingroup bias even for non-monetary rewards (Turner, 1975) and evidence of “gratuitous discrimination” (Tajfel, 1970), in which group members gave less to the outgroup, at no detriment or benefit to themselves. These findings indicate that social identity theory may be more dominant in intergroup relations than realistic conflict theory. However, Hennessey and West (1999) found an interplay of social identity theory and realistic conflict theory during research into ingroup favoritism in organizational settings. They found that small groups predominantly displayed *evaluative* ingroup favoritism, but that did not extend to *behavioral* ingroup favoritism. It’s uncertain whether this would translate from the organizational system to ethnic, religious and national identity systems. Research into the effects of loyalty (identity) and interest-related (competition) factors in the readiness for conflict demonstrated that both factors

contribute to a willingness to engage in intergroup conflict (study by Korostelina, Hagendoorn and Poppe, 2001, cited in Korostelina, 2007). In this study, interests and identity combined to push groups to fight for ingroup goals; however, only interests prompted groups to fight against outgroup goals.

Growing popular opinion holds that the answer to whether social identity theory or realistic conflict theory is the driver of identity conflict is: “yes.” Liu and Hilton (2005) explored the interplay of social identity theory and realistic conflict theory in creating group historical narratives; they found that both factors influenced the dominance of historical narratives and how those narratives affected current intergroup relations. “Rather than pit variables from realistic group conflict theory like threat against ones from social identity theory like degree of identification, social representations of history invite theorists to consider how threat may be built into a group's historical representations, and how degree of identification may become an issue if a group is perceived as the cause of historical injustice” (Liu and Hilton, 2005, p. 552). Even Sherif's own experiment (1988) supports the premise that intergroup relations can be conflictual without competition. His descriptions of the boys' attitudes towards each other, prior to the insertion of competition, display evaluative ingroup favoritism and outgroup bias. Sherif's experiment posits realistic conflict theory, but because he worked to form group identity as part of his experiment, he necessarily places that theory on the shoulders of social identity. Incompatible goals – “realistic competition” – is only one factor in intergroup conflict.

## **Security Dilemma**

The “security dilemma,” a concept coined by John Herz (1950) following the end of WWII, is a way to explain political realism without using Morgenthau’s principle of innate human aggressiveness. Herz believed that nations warred with other nations by way of building defense against those nations. Each nation state, uncertain of their neighbor’s intentions, builds defense against those neighbors. The neighbor states, seeing the growing military defense, interprets it as an act of aggression, and likewise builds their defense.

“Groups or individuals living in such a constellation [of independent states] must be, and usually are, concerned about their security from being attacked, subjected, dominated, or annihilated by other groups and individuals. Striving to attain security from such attack, they are driven to acquire more and more power in order to escape the impact of the power of others. This, in turn, renders the others more insecure and compels them to prepare for the worst. Since none can ever feel entirely secure in such a world of competing units, power competition ensues, and the vicious circle of security and power accumulation is on” (Herz, 1950, p. 157).

And so, the nations grow in mutual fear of and threat towards other states. Absent communication, this cycle continues until it becomes actual violence; violence sparks its own cycle of attack and retaliation, of making war because the other group has done so or might do so again.

From an identity standpoint, the security dilemma can be viewed from our tendency to distrust the Other and attribute negative intentions to their actions. Part of this lies in the fundamental attribution error, or the human tendency to blame innate negative characteristics for failings or mistakes of others and to ascribe situational reasons for one’s own failings, or the failings of their ingroup members. An example of



this is a popular trope about the origins of poverty: “They’re poor because they’re lazy” versus “My sister is poor because of bad luck” (as described in Bordens & Horowitz, 2001). Another aspect of our tendency to ascribe negative intentions to the actions of the Other is the moral duality and axiological difference we build around our own identities, when compared to that of our neighbors. If we are good and they are evil, then their actions must be evil: if we are both amassing weapons, we (good) are only doing so for defense, but they (evil) are doing the same thing in order to attack us.

The security dilemma, distrust of the Other and tendency to ascribe negative intentions to the Other all contribute to the perception of outgroup threat. In the cycle of perception-action-reaction, the security dilemma can quickly ratchet up the perception of threat; when layered over salient identity systems, security dilemma can cause intergroup conflict and violence.

### **Dehumanization**

Dehumanization is the act of lessening the humanity of another group. In Korostelina’s 4-C model of intergroup conflict, dehumanization can happen in the “counteraction” stage, in which moral duality and axiological difference is heightened, leading to collective action and violence. Tajfel (1982) attributed dehumanization to the formation of stereotypes and attitudes: “the tendency shown by members of an ingroup to consider members of an outgroup in a relatively uniform manner, as “undifferentiated items in a unified social category.” The endpoint of this process is the “dehumanization” of the outgroup, which often occurs in conditions of acute intergroup tensions” (Tajfel, 1982, p. 21). Volkan (1997) noted that prejudice and stereotypes were a way of achieving

differentiation from another group and strengthen group identity (p. 113); however, prejudice was an emotion that could range in intensity, from group-strengthening to malignant and harmful against the outgroup, with dehumanization at the extreme end of the range of prejudice. Dehumanization occurred in stages – first the enemy was demonized, then dehumanized, often as an odious animal or bug, or another creature which could be killed without remorse (Volkan, 1997, p. 113).

Dehumanization could be overt; the Nazis often referred to the victims of the Holocaust as “vermin” and in Rwanda, Hutus were motivated to massacre the “cockroach” Tutsis. Dehumanization could also be less obvious. Leyens, et al (2000) theorized that ascribing “humanity” to others is contingent on the range and subtlety of emotions that they are believed to have. Leyens, et al, (2000) coined the term “infrahumanization” to denote the process of ascribing some primary human emotions (excitement, fear) to the outgroup, but few secondary human emotions (embarrassment, guilt, admiration). In this, the outgroup’s humanity is lessened. The outcome of both de- and infra-humanization of the outgroup is that they become more easily acted against by the ingroup.

Dehumanization has long been thought instrumental in enabling violence. Bandura, Underwood and Fromson (1975) demonstrated that dehumanization helped to overcome our human inhibition towards harming others. “Dehumanized performers were treated more than twice as punitively as those invested with human qualities and considerably more severely than the neutral group” (Bandura, Underwood and Fromson, 1975, p. 266). Kteily, et al (2015) found that blatant dehumanization, rather than more

subtle inhumanization, could be “uniquely predicting [of] a range of aggressive attitudes and behavior such as support for torture and openly discriminatory social policy, and spiked following intergroup violence....” Staub (1999) examined the origins and causes of violence and identified “the continuum of destruction,” in which negative feelings (prejudice), negative actions (discrimination) and violence (collective action) build on themselves so that more extreme actions – even genocide – seem reasonable. “Lesser acts of discrimination and violence change and ultimately transform perpetrators and then the whole group. Perpetrators justify their actions by devaluing the victims more. They come to see them as less human and exclude them from the moral universe” (Staub, 1999, p, 307). In this way, dehumanization works hand in glove with the “continuum of destruction” to eventually lead to extreme violence.

Dehumanization can be closely linked to high axiological difference: moral superiority of the ingroup and absolute depravity of the outgroup. In order to maintain the moral upper hand and associated favorable comparison, the ingroup must feel that any violence perpetrated against the outgroup is legitimized. This can be accomplished, in part, through dehumanizing the outgroup and removing the normal human stigma against violence. In contrast, Rai, Valdesolo and Graham (2017) demonstrated that dehumanization is only effective in promoting “instrumental” violence, rather than moral violence. The process of dehumanization removes the morality (good or bad) from the victims; if the cause that provokes violence is a moral one, then the victims are rarely dehumanized. Instead, the outgroup humanity (and associated immorality) is used to prompt aggression from the ingroup and justify violence. If the ingroup must perpetuate

violence on the outgroup for instrumental reasons, then removal of their humanity is helpful to encourage ingroup members to commit violence. “The failure to recognize victims as fellow human beings does not make people desire to aggress, it simply makes them apathetic to victims’ suffering when committing violence in pursuit of instrumental ends” (Rai, Valdesolo and Graham, 2017). The authors of this study recognize that there are many situations in which the violence occurs for both moral and instrumental reasons, and that there may be selective dehumanization which occurs in those situations. In my own experience in the military, I saw examples of this interplay between axiological justification of violence and dehumanization of the enemy to justify instrumental violence. I observed military members desire to commit violence against terrorists for moral reasons and extend that violence to legitimizing “collateral damage.” The military members rationalized that children in the targeted group were “baby rats” and soon-to-be terrorists, and did not deserve protection from violence. In this way, ingroup members committing violence combined moral and instrumental reasoning for their violence, along with placing both human (immoral) and inhuman attributes (baby rats) on the outgroup victims.

This history of dehumanization and the history of propaganda are closely linked; dehumanization can spread mightily through propaganda. The two examples – Nazis portraying their victims as “vermin” (U.S. Holocaust Memorial Museum, n.d.) and Hutu-controlled radio labeling Tutsis as “cockroaches” (extremist radio was “the voice of the devil,” Dallaire, 2007) – were both textbook examples of extremely effective propaganda. By dehumanizing their outgroup victims, the ingroup made them easier to kill. In both

examples, the killers used this lack of inhibition to commit genocide with a ruthlessness and efficiency that is mind boggling.

## **CHAPTER FIVE - ETHNICITY AND RACE**

There are three main approaches scholars use to discuss the formation of identity: the primordial, instrumental or constructivist approaches. The primordial approach is that identity factors (particularly ethnicity, race, religion and culture/nationality) are birth-given and inescapable. The second approach, the instrumentalist approach, “suggests the importance of economic and political factors that influence identity salience and inflame conflict” (Korostelina, 2007, p. 147). In this approach, one’s identity as a certain ethnicity, race or religion is viewed as a tool that gains or loses importance based on outside factors. Finally, the constructivist approach is that identity is chosen: categories are something we embrace or reject; identities are mutable and used by their holders (Adams, 2010).

Those who ascribe to a primordial approach to identity believe that there are certain physical and personality traits that are inherent in people from different identity groups because it is “in their blood” (Fearon & Laitin, 2000). Those who believe this approach may have strongly held attitudes and stereotypes about the members of their own and other identity groups and may be more prone to inter-group bias, discrimination or even violence. “[A] person who claims, or is perceived, to be an identity that is understood as innate may negate her or his personal responsibility for engaging in particular acts...” (Adams, 2010, p. 744). Samuel Huntington, in his article “The Clash of

Civilizations?” (1993) believed that the fundamental differences between people along ethnic and cultural lines – civilizations – predestined them to conflict. His view that ethnicity was inherent, with inherent conflict, was used to explain both the genesis of genocide in the late twentieth century and the international community’s reluctance to interfere. If the conflict was inherent, then interference would be futile.

Many modern scholars take a constructivist approach to identity, including ethnic identity (ethnicity). Ethnicity can be viewed as a combination of physical, cultural and linguistic traits that may not always be apparent to those outside of the inter-acting ethnicities. Ethnicity can be bounded by a nation, or there could be multiple ethnicities within the bounds of a nation. Gellner (1983) combined the ideas of ethnicity and nationhood, believing that two men shared the same nationality if they shared the same cultures and recognized one another as nation-members. His understanding of ethnicity as a combination of culture and race in being a “recognized” member of a nation was implicit; Gellner noted that nationalist principles were violated if the nation’s boundaries did not include all members, included “nonmembers,” or if the rulers were “nonmembers.”

Horowitz (1985), likened ethnicity to kinship, albeit kinship from a massive family, “Among the most important needs met by ethnicity is the need for familiarity and community, for family-like ties, for emotional and reciprocal help, and for mediation and dispute resolution” (p. 81). For Horowitz, ethnicity was real and salient, but in no way fixed; in discussing the formation of ethnic identity groups, he noted “the interplay of givens and choices in ethnicity.” He argued that ethnicity *was* the result of birth, but that

the salience of ethnicity changed over time and in various situations. “Underlying [the characteristics of ethnicity] is the interactive quality of the variables related to group identity: culture, boundaries, conflict and the policy outcomes of conflict... [these] phenomena are reciprocal rather than unidirectional...” (Horowitz, 1985, p. 73). His view was that ethnicity was both primordial and constructivist; it was real *and* it was flexible.

Eriksen (2001) described ethnicity as a purely relational identity: it existed “*between* and not *within* groups” (p. 46). He ascribed to a constructivist approach to ethnicity, attributing ethnicity to cultural differences made salient through social interaction: “Ethnicity is thus relational and also situational: the ethnic character of a social encounter is contingent on the situation. It is not, in other words, inherent” (Eriksen, 2001, p. 46). However, he went on to stress the importance of the distinctions that we make along cultural, ethnic or nationalist lines: “The ways in which cultural differences become socially relevant vary importantly. But to pretend they do not exist outside ethnic and nationalist ideologies would be intellectually indefensible; people’s personal experiences are the very raw material of such ideologies” (Eriksen, p. 66). Just because the differences are not inherent, he implies, does not mean they are imaginary.

Ethnicity, then, is made up of culture, language, nationality, race and religion. The parts that comprise ethnicity are non-standard and the distinctions between two ethnicities are not the same as the distinctions between two other ethnicities. Ethnicity can change over time, in different situations and locations; it can shift in the same time and location by dint of comparison to a varying parade of other ethnicities.



Race is closely linked to ethnicity and can sometimes be considered interchangeable. When made distinct, race is often described as a categorization of people based on purely physical characteristics; however, the social, economic and political ramifications of race, particularly in America, make race much more than just a biological construct.

Historically, American definitions of race were both based on physical attributes and on cultural attributes. The most visible marker of race was skin color, which has been used to “identify” different races for the purposes of legal, public and private benefits or discrimination. The laws that upheld these distinctions recognized that race in America held real social, legal and economic benefits, and worked to keep those benefits only for those who were white. Physical definitions of race in America included the “one drop rule” (hypodescent) developed in the post-Civil War era that enshrined Jim Crow separations into law, which dictated that any amount of black heritage would categorize a person as non-white (Jordan, 2014). Cultural definitions of race in America varied over time and were not only contingent on biological factors; one example is included in James’ (2001) description of the 1870 US Census: “Ultimately, in what was perhaps the first recognition of the socially-situated nature of racial meaning, the Census chose to classify “half-breeds” [i.e., people who had one white and one Native-American (“Indian”) parent] as White if they lived among Whites, and Indian if they lived among Indians.” In this way, “race” was defined by the physical and the social.

Definitions of what constitutes a “race” have also varied over time. Currently, the US Census Bureau recognizes five “races”: white; black; Asian; Hawaiian or Pacific-

Islander; Native American or Native Alaskan (US Census Bureau (webpage), n.d.). Their definition of “white” is “A person having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa” (US Census Bureau (webpage), n.d.). Despite this “official” definition, many people in the US would classify white people as strictly those of European descent. However, even this more limited definition of the “white” race has changed over time. In antebellum America, the Irish were considered their own race, distinct from and markedly inferior to white Americans and classified distinctly by the US Census Bureau (Roediger, 2007). “Some [ethnologists] suggested that the Irish were part of a separate caste or a “dark” race, possibly African” (Roediger, 2007, p. 133). Italian immigrants were likewise considered non-white in the early 1900’s; author Fred Gardarpe (2002) cites recent legal findings that indicate that they may still be considered (in his words) “off-white.”

The changing definitions, described above, of what constitutes racial boundaries demonstrate that race, like ethnicity, can be considered from a constructivist standpoint. Many modern critics argue against a primordial viewpoint, maintaining that race is a socially constructed category rather than a biological imperative.

“In practical terms, to say that race is “socially constructed” means that it is neither “mere illusion” and thus irrelevant, nor something that should be viewed as “objective” and “fixed.” As a social phenomenon, race is rather unique in its marriage of fictitious and factual attributes. Even though there are physical characteristics that one can point to in distinguishing among various groups, most social scientists would agree that the physical differences are much less significant than the social meanings attached to them” (James, 2001, p. 237).

In considering identity, the category “white” could be considered from a racial or an ethnic perspective. Indeed, there are significant arguments regarding the distinction

between race and ethnicity, their divergences and similarities. Some scholars argue that considering “race” reifies it as a category (Fields, 2001); others argue that avoiding the term serves to discount the real effect that racism has on those victim to it (Bonilla-Silva, 2015). For the purposes of this thesis, I will be focusing on white Americans, a combination of race and nationality. This thesis focuses on white identity in America, the use of white identity in Russian propaganda and the interplay of that propaganda with the alt-right movement in the US. Because this question concerns a combination of both race (white), and cultural/linguistic distinctions specific to American whites (rather than European whites), white American identity could be considered an ethnicity rather than a race. However, “race” in America is much more than physical characteristics: race shapes most aspects of American social, political and economic structure. Omi and Winant (2015) view race in America as a “master category – a fundamental concept that has profoundly shaped, and continues to shape, the history, polity, economic structure and culture of the United States.” The power imbalance that springs from our definition of race in America transcends biological definitions of race and inflates the term to encompass multiple aspects and manifestations of identity. For these reasons, in this research, I use the term “race” to describe white American identity. As aforementioned, there are valid arguments in terming white identity in America as ethnicity or as race; however, those distinctions don’t impact this research.

### **White Identity**

Like other social identities with large and disparate groups claiming affiliation, the “white” identity is neither monolithic nor homogenous. Because white-identifying

people are the majority racial group in America, many white Americans have less awareness of their own racial identity (Hughey, 2012). As George Lipsitz (2006) noted, “Whiteness is everywhere in U.S. culture, but it is very hard to see” (p. 1). Cultural white identity is often considered synonymous with American identity and in that way, white culture gains power from its “mundane normality” (Hughey, 2012, p. 9) or what Barbara Flagg (1993) termed the “transparency phenomenon.” She observed, “The most striking characteristic of whites' consciousness of whiteness is that most of the time we don't have any” (Flagg, 1993). Some scholars (notably, Barbara Fields, 2001) decry the use of “white” as an identity, asserting that to imbue the idea of a white American race with “identity and agency,” obscures the true issues of “political, economic and social power.” Fields (2001) also notes the imbalance in exploration of race in America – there is America, and there are (nonwhite) races, strengthening the idea that to be white is to be American. “Furthermore, by equating race with identity and attributing it to white persons, whiteness seems to banish the troubling asymmetry that is the essence of racism” (Fields, 2001, p. 49).

Using Korostelina’s (2007) markers of actuality, salience and valence to view “white” as a social identity, white Americans often have low actuality for that part of their identity because “whiteness” is so ubiquitous in their culture. When the actuality is changed, as when a white American is a racial minority or when they see their identity group as threatened, their white identity becomes more salient and they are more aware of it (Hughey, 2012).

In American white identity, the chosen traumas and glories are almost identical to American chosen traumas and glories. White chosen traumas (Pearl Harbor, the Alamo, 9/11) and glories (Thanksgiving, July 4th) are also American traumas and glories, but are demonstrative of the hegemony of white culture in American culture. This is highlighted by those traumas and glories which are omitted from mainstream American culture.

Americans celebrate the granting of independence for white America (July 4th) but not black America (Juneteenth); mourn attacks on Americans by nonwhites (Pearl Harbor, 9/11) but not atrocities committed against nonwhite Americans (slavery, incarceration of Japanese Americans during WWII, genocide against Native Americans).

Our white American rituals are also often understood as simply American rituals, rather than white American. However, some of the rituals used to evoke patriotism have also become entwined with being white and become markers of white identity. One example of this is the ritual surrounding the playing of the National Anthem at sports events. This ritual became imbued with importance and elevated to become a marker of both patriotism towards the United States as well as an indicator of white racial identity when some (mostly nonwhite) football players knelt during the Anthem to protest police brutality. No longer simply a patriotic ritual, the drama surrounding the National Anthem became an indicator of race and a division between white and black. This ritual also demonstrates the way in which “love” for America – blind patriotism – is intertwined with the white culture. Blind support for law enforcement and the military has become an aspect of white culture; one reason may be because the negatives associated with those

institutions (police brutality, racially biased arrests and sentencing, deaths of civilians and abuses of detainees) disproportionately affect nonwhite people.

In “White Bound,” sociologist Matthew Hughey (2012) describes “hegemonic whiteness” or what he considered to be underpinnings of white collective axiology: “Hegemonic whiteness is formed through a process of marking the meanings of whiteness as (1) essentially different from and superior to those marked as “nonwhite” and (2) through marginalizing practices of “being white” that fail to exemplify those differences” (p. 187). He found these two markers of hegemonic whiteness in two disparate groups of white people he studied – one group that overtly espoused white nationalism and superiority and one group that actively fought against racism.

Hughey (2012) stated that his definition of hegemonic whiteness is underpinned by the belief in the superiority of whites to nonwhites; this underpinning seems to be common in many aspects of American white culture. As Eriksen (2001) noted, identity is found between and not within groups; nowhere is this more evident than in the favorable comparison by which some groups, such as American white identity, is defined. The comparison is evident in the boundaries that white Americans have formed between themselves and nonwhite Americans and the multitude of ways in which they have reinforced them.

White Americans often define themselves by who they are not – for example, an impoverished white person may nourish their esteem by the thought that they may be poor, but they are not black. The comparison of white and nonwhite identities grew in the slavery era in America, when the distinctions between white and black Americans were

immense. The institution of slavery built strong and defined boundaries around the color of a person's skin. Roediger (2007) discussed in length the distinctions that Americans made between "white" or "wage" slavery versus chattel or black slavery during the mid-1800's. The first was decried by white workers who fought against some of the class boundaries existent at the time. They used the term "slavery" to emphasize their poverty but made the distinction between themselves and black slaves; in general, advocates for workers' rights rarely concerned themselves with the plight of black Americans, enslaved or freemen (Roediger, 2007). More than just indifferent to black Americans, Roediger (2007) notes that white workers defined themselves by their whiteness; it became part of their identity and has been handed down through the generations, manifested in some of the racial undertones and stereotypes of today's "working man," "hard-working American," and "working class." Roediger notes that the invocation of the word slavery, with the racial distinction, helped make impoverished white Americans feel better about their situation: "One way to make peace with the latter [poverty] was to differentiate it sharply from the former [black slavery]" (Roediger, 2007, p. 13). Again, white Americans defined themselves by who they were not and through their comparison to other groups.

Favorable comparison can be closely linked to relative deprivation – when the favorable comparison is challenged, even if one's actual situation has not changed, the lessening of difference or shifting of statuses is viewed as a threat. Fields (2001) relates a story in which a black grandmother in 1920's Charleston walked her (black) grandchild around the local park every day in a fancy, expensive stroller. Every day, a white

policeman would smile at the woman and baby, until the day he realized that the baby was black and not the white infant of rich employers; following that realization, he tried to ban the black woman from walking in the park. The fact that a black family could afford (and chose to afford) an expensive stroller for their child so disrupted the policeman's vision of his (white) place in society that he immediately attempted to banish the family from view. This example demonstrates that the relationship between white and black Americans was strongly dependent on comparison.

Whiteness – who is considered white and who is not – has changed over time and those boundaries were guarded, in turn, by each group which gained the rights and privileges associated with being white in America. In the human tradition of desiring the exclusion of others from the benefits one has recently received, so too did those groups who joined the “white” race in America turn harshly on nonwhites. The Irish Americans, who fled structural genocide in England and were derided in America as belonging to a lower moral and mental caste, became vehemently anti-black. “Irish-Americans instead treasured their whiteness, as entitling them to both political rights and to jobs.... Even before taking a leading role in the unprecedentedly murderous attacks on Blacks during the 1863 Draft Riot in New York City, Irishmen had developed a terrible record of mobbing free Blacks on and off the job” (Roediger, 2007, p. 136). The benefit of being white impacted those who enjoyed it, prompting them to erect greater barriers around their privileges.

Despite the abolition of slavery, the ending of the Jim Crow segregation laws, and the decades which have passed since the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, white



people in America continue to enjoy benefits and privileges from their whiteness. The dominance of white culture in the US has manifested in white structural dominance of US economic, educational, professional, societal and infrastructure sectors. Racism in today's America has changed; now, it rarely includes the horrifying acts of hate or bias that defined it before the Civil Rights Movement. Racism has become "detached from its perpetrators.... it is nearly invisible, taken for granted, common-sense features of everyday life and social structures" (Omi & Winant, 2015). It is enshrined in our laws, our judges, our jails; it's found in our schools, our hiring practices, our home loans. It is mundane in its normalcy. Racism in America is similar to whiteness in America in this – it is everywhere, and because it is everywhere you can't see it.

Based on centuries of exclusion from resource ownership, black families earn fifty-nine cents for every dollar earned by white families (Lipsitz, 2006) and a white family's net worth is typically twenty times that of a black family's (Bonilla-Silva, 2015). Even among the very poor and disadvantaged in America, the race/wage gap persists: the US Department of Education found that among 25-34-year-old full time workers without a high school degree, white workers earned more than Hispanic and black workers (\$30,000 per year, versus \$22,800 and \$20,500, respectively) (Musu-Gillette, et al, 2016). Nonwhite children's education levels continue to lag behind those of their white peers: the same survey found that the white-black and white-Hispanic reading achievement gap among 12th graders was 30 and 22 points, respectively (Musu-Gillette, et al, 2016). The disparities between whites and blacks extend to social and legal systems: "[S]entences for African Americans in the federal prison system are 20 percent longer than those given to

whites who commit the same crimes” (Lipsitz, 2006). The inequalities extend to environmental and living conditions. Black children are more likely to have excess lead in their bloodstream; non-white neighborhoods are more likely to have toxic and hazardous waste facilities in grossly disproportionate numbers; nonwhite communities were more often exposed to air pollution and their children were four times more likely to have asthma (Lipsitz, 2006).

In other words, there still exists a real advantage in being part of the white culture. This does not mean that all white people empirically have more than all nonwhite people, but it does elucidate the financial, educational, professional, health and societal benefits of being white and the associated expectations held by white people. As Cheryl Harris (1993) described it, “for many whites the benefits of whiteness as property, in the absence of legislated privilege, may have been reduced to a claim of relative privilege only in comparison to people of color.... it does not mean that all whites will win, but simply that they will not lose...” (p. 1759).

Favorable comparison strongly shapes white identity in America and the comparisons are most pronounced when comparing white and black Americans. Writer Ralph Ellison (quoted in Roediger, 2007, p. 6), noted “Southern whites cannot walk, talk, sing, conceive of laws or justice, think of sex, love, the family or freedom without responding to the presence of Negroes.” The comparisons do not simply concern economics, power or politics as discussed, the comparisons extend to every aspect of life, including moral comparison and resulting axiological difference.

In the slave era, proponents of slavery used moral comparison to justify the practice. Black people were considered lazy, ignorant, morally corrupt and unable to care for themselves; these moral failings were used to defend the American South's use of black people as chattel slaves. Grynaviski and Munger (2017) discussed the cycle of racist beliefs and racist practices in moral justification of slavery:

“Bigotry justifies, but is also nurtured by, the separation and degradation of the “inferior” race. This means, of course, that the inferiority is a consequence of the institutions that reify bigotry, because — in the United States, at least — blacks were forced into servitude, denied education, and prevented from using the social and cultural capital of the family. Belief in the objective truth of the bigotry that justified the institutions of racism was partly fostered by alleged “facts”: blacks were lazy, stupid, morally dissolute, and so on” (Grynaviski & Munger, 2017).

In order to support slavery and still consider themselves moral people, slaveholders created a moral justification for the practice, built on axiological difference between black people and white people. “Racism portrayed African slaves as being less than human (and therefore requiring care, as a positive duty of the slave owner, as a man cares for his children, who cannot care for themselves), or else as being other than human (and therefore being spiritually no different from cattle or horses, and therefore requiring only the same considerations for maintenance and husbandry)” (Grynaviski & Munger, 2017). This also relied on white dehumanization of black people; as noted in the earlier discussion of dehumanization, that tactic is most useful to prompt ingroup members to impart violence on outgroup members for instrumental purposes (Rai, Valdesolo and Graham, 2017). The institution of slavery was integral to the development of the American economy and perpetuating it could be considered an instrumental goal. Individually, slaveowners absolutely relied on slavery for their lifestyle and livelihood;

dehumanizing their slaves allowed them to commit actual or structural violence against them in order to maintain that lifestyle.

The dehumanization and moral axiology that was built around black people in America, and by comparison, white people in America, did not end with the abolition of slavery. The boundaries erected were too strong; the moral investments were too great. Indeed, the axiological difference constructed around black people may have become more important to white identity with the loss of the boundary that slavery described. For a white person to abandon their belief in the inferiority of black people or to accept that slavery was an evil institution, would be to admit that their previous lifestyle, the habits of their forebearers, and the foundations on which their current financial and cultural lifestyle was laid were all implicitly immoral, wrong, bad. It is discomforting for people to think of themselves as immoral, wrong or bad and one habit that is hardwired in our human nature is to avoid discomfort. This tendency explains our difficulty with cognitive dissonance, which is when we are confronted with a fact or feeling that doesn't fit with our currently held belief system. Conflicting facts are uncomfortable and changing our belief system is hard, uncomfortable work. In order to avoid the discomfort of cognitive dissonance, we usually reject the new, uncomfortable fact. Therefore, white people whose social identity (including enjoyment of the positive esteem from membership in their group) was built on favorable comparison to black people would not subject themselves to the cognitive dissonance that resulted from accepting the evilness of slavery or the equal right of black people to personhood. Far easier for a white person to maintain and enhance their bigotry against black people, and use the continued

subjugated state of black people in America to reinforce their belief in black inferiority and resultant white superiority.

Despite this discomfort, white American has gradually recognized the mistreatment of black Americans and this recognition plays a part in white identity. In the 1960's, with the advent of the Civil rights movement, scholars believed that "white guilt" over the mistreatment of black Americans was pervasive. However, one researcher (Bardis, 1973) who believed that the "mass media, reformers, protestors, and even scientific publications have constantly emphasized white guilt feelings," conducted an experiment that demonstrated that "white guilt regarding Negro social inequality is non-existent." In contrast, writer Shelby Steele (1990) identified white guilt as the driver for change in 1960's America. He believed that highlighting the way whites treated blacks, juxtaposed with white people's perception of themselves as moral people, led to the Civil Rights Act in 1964. But this juxtaposition also brought guilt, from which poor policies were shaped and which continued to impact American racial policies when Steele wrote his article in the 1990's. "Escapist racial policies – policies where institutions favor black entitlement over development because of a preoccupation with their own innocence .... have the effect of transforming whites from victimizers into patronizers and keeping blacks where they have always been – dependent on the largesse of whites" (Steele, 1990, p. 504). Steele disputed that affirmative action was true equality; he viewed it as a cheap way for white institutions to handle white guilt, without sullying themselves with the difficult task of actual development. Steele identified the "two signposts of white guilt – white self-preoccupation and black invisibility" (1990, p. 504). This discussion on the

lack of true development, policy reliance on handouts rather than training and white guilt occurred in 1990, almost thirty years ago.

White guilt – or the attempt to avoid that guilt – impacts white identity. Steele (1990) defined white guilt as white American's understanding that they benefit from the wrongdoing of their forebears; over the years, white guilt over the enslavement of black Americans has periodically prompted calls for reparations, though these never gained traction. The idea of reparations is often traced back to the waning days of the Civil War, when President Lincoln authorized the distribution of land to freed slaves. This plan, popularly referred to by the slogan “forty acres and a mule,” was overturned within a year and the land returned to the Confederate landowners from whom it was confiscated (Myers, 2017). Scholars do not attribute this plan solely to a desire to rectify the mistreatment of black Americans; rather, General Sherman (who penned the authorization) needed to find a place to resettle freed slaves who had been relying on the Union Army for their care and protection. The aborted plan is often invoked when discussing the need for modern reparations; however, while recognizing that white Americans badly mistreated black Americans, most white Americans feel separated from the mistreatment and are unwilling to accept the financial commitment and culpability that reparations would entail. Schmitt, et al, (2018) conducted research into the interplay of collective guilt and willingness to make reparations; they concluded that while moderately difficult reparations increased collective guilt, extremely difficult reparations act as a deterrent to collective guilt. In other words, if it is too hard to make collective amends, we abandon our sense of collective guilt. This may contribute to the impact of

white guilt on white identity: many white Americans reject individual guilt for past or current mistreatment of black Americans because the issue is too difficult.

Another major impact of guilt is the feeling of discomfort that it invokes. As previously mentioned, humans instinctively reject discomfort. Guilt over injustice towards nonwhite people makes white people feel bad, so they reject it. It is possible that the negative emotion has created a backlash whereby some white Americans have, in a desire to throw off their guilt, also pushed away the group that makes them feel guilty. “As long as members of the other group evoke aversive feelings, a person may not be very motivated to seek their company, as people generally strive to avoid negative affect” (Imhoff, Bilewicz, & Erb, 2012, p. 730). Backlash over white guilt may be part of the current state of white supremacist identity, particularly the white nationalist and alt-right identities, which focuses on “protecting” white culture and white people by segregating white people into a “white ethno-state.”

### **White Supremacy**

White supremacy, as an organized movement, has existed since the certainty of white people’s absolute dominance in all aspects of society, justice and economics, was de-coupled from the law. When slavery was abolished, demonstrating the first inkling that white people’s dominance over nonwhites would no longer be absolute, the Ku Klux Klan sprang into being. In the ensuing century and a half, the white supremacist movement in the United States has changed and diversified. By the end of 2018, the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), a group dedicated to tracking, monitoring and countering hate groups in the United States, counted at least 705 hate groups in American

that could be considered white supremacist, ranging from Ku Klux Klan, skinheads and neo-Nazis to anti-immigrant, white nationalist and alt-right. These groups vary in their methods and focus, but they overlap significantly in the fundamentals of their identity: their beliefs, values, and transgressions.

A main tenet in white supremacy is that the white race is superior to nonwhite people. Most white supremacists call for varying degrees of white racial hegemony, from the extermination/subjugation of other races to the building of a “white ethno-state.” Most white supremacist movements also call for a return to “traditional” values, most often when it comes to gendered roles. “For white nationalists today, the paternalistic control of women symbolizes the protection of the white race and civil order in general” (Hughey, 2012, p. 129). Although male supremacists exist, distinct from white supremacist groups, there is a common tenor of male supremacy in most white supremacist groups.

As discussed previously, white culture is often synonymous with American culture and because of its ubiquity, it is often not seen and is not salient in many white people’s consciousness. However, the changing demographics in our country may be directly linked to increased white racial salience in the US. The 2010 US Census showed that white Americans will constitute a minority of the US population in 2043 (US Census Bureau, 2012). This change can be perceived as a threat to white people who believe that their hegemony and “way of life” is under threat by it. Studies conducted after the Census report was released showed that “exposure to the changing demographics evokes the expression of greater explicit and implicit racial bias” (Craig and Richeson, 2014). The



changing demographics and the associated threat to white culture and hegemony in the US raised the white participant's awareness of their racial identity and prompted out-group bias in the study.

### **Nonwhite threat as a tool of white supremacy**

White supremacy relies on “danger narratives” about people of color that legitimize both physical and structural violence against them. The groups believe that they must take steps to protect themselves from physical or cultural assault; often using the idea of defending “white womanhood” as a rallying cry. “By casting men of color as innately predatory, White men set themselves up as the logical defenders of a civilized White society” (Rondini, 2018). This idea is an old trope, but immensely successful in motivating white men to act against nonwhite men. Emmett Till, a fourteen-year-old boy who was tortured and killed for allegedly whistling at a white woman in 1955, was one of the most well-known cases of a black person being lynched in “defense” of a white woman's honor, but it is by no means unique. Racial group preoccupation with racial “purity” manifests itself in white supremacist taboos, transgressions and sacred ideas: white people should not “mix” with nonwhite people and white men should protect white women from the “threat” of nonwhite men. Hughey (2012), a white man, described a situation in which he was a dinner guest at the home of a member of a white nationalist group: “I was summarily “kicked out” after I mentioned that I had dated a black woman. As I was shown to the front door, I was told, “Race mixers are not welcome here” (p. 43). Hughey also described interviews with the daughters of white nationalists, who sometimes chafed under their fathers' strict attention but also believed it was for their

own good: “‘My dad has always told me what is right and wrong... He has always helped keep a lot of the black guys away.’ Such racialized and gendered paternalism rests on an ideology in which black men are preconditioned to violate white women” (Hughey, 2012, p. 131). Although most frequently used as a weapon against black people, the prohibition against race “mixing” and the idea that nonwhite men are threatening to white women is not confined to one race. During WWII, Nazi propaganda portrayed Jewish men as predatory spiders, waiting to attack German (white) women, and US propaganda portrayed villainous Japanese soldiers attacking American (white) women: “Keep this horror from your home!” (Rondini, 2018). Most recently, President Trump (prior to his election), called Mexican men “rapists and murderers.” By invoking the specter of rape, Trump used a dog whistle that alerted white identity groups to the potential danger to “white womanhood” from nonwhite immigration.

White supremacist groups view the very presence of nonwhite groups as a threat. The danger narratives built up around black people label them as a physical threat to the “purity” of white women and an economic threat to the prosperity of a white economy. The danger narratives that surround Hispanic people often center on their threat to a white person’s employment (“they’re stealing our jobs!”) as well as to the demographic hegemony of white people in America. Nonwhite immigrants are termed “invaders;” though often applied to Hispanic immigrants, it also applies to Arab immigrants. Arabs are often portrayed as a physical danger (terrorism) as well as a threat to the American way of life, as evidenced by the rallying cry against Sharia law and the reaction by some white groups to the wearing of burqas.

White supremacist groups' danger narratives about Jewish people are often confined to referencing a global (Jewish) cabal that controls all governments and corporations; it appears to gain the most relevance among groups who feel that they are disadvantaged by being white and blame the Jewish cabal for their plight.

While most alt-right and nationalist movements espouse blatant racist and anti-Semitic views, some movements, such as the Traditionalist Worker Party and Identity Evropa, do not explicitly endorse racial supremacy. These groups focus on racial segregation and support "identitarianism" ("culturally and ethnically homogenous communities") and "ethnopluralism": "ethnopluralists argue that the liberal multiculturalism is false, as it promotes a melting pot which leads to the disappearance of ethnicities, cultures or races through miscegenation and therefore is in fact monoculturalism" (SPLC, 2017). This approach softens the racism and sexism inherent in these platforms, making them more palatable to new recruits, particularly to disenfranchised young white men. The SPLC considers the Traditionalist Worker Party to be an example of the newest white supremacist movement in the US: the alt-right.

### **What is the alt-right?**

According to the SPLC, the alternative right ("alt-right") was "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" (Southern Poverty Law Center, Ideologies, n.d.).

The SPLC noted that the alt-right was by no means a monolithic group and there existed a wide swath of specific beliefs among those who call themselves alt-right.

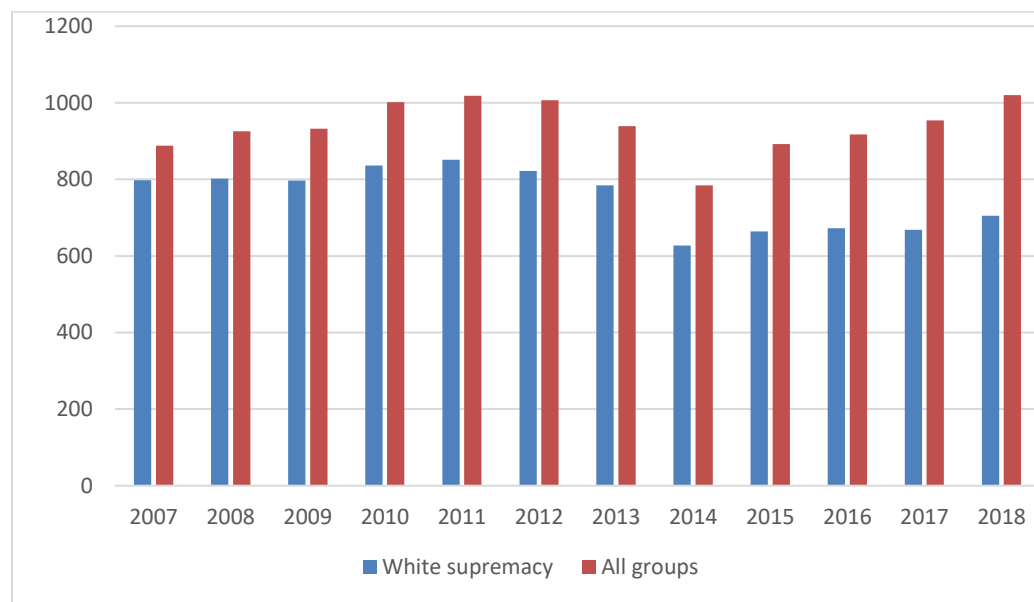
Generally, however, they were young, white males who were against the establishment, and "embrace white ethno-nationalism as a fundamental value" (Southern Poverty Law Center, n.d.). According to "A Normie's guide to the alt-right" on the online news site The Daily Stormer (Anglin, 2016), the "core concept" of the alt-right was that "Whites are undergoing an extermination, via mass immigration into White countries which was enabled by a corrosive liberal ideology of White self-hatred, and that the Jews are at the center of this agenda." Anglin described the alt-right as a leaderless movement, a "mass movement," based in the internet: an "online mob of disenfranchised (*sic*) and mostly anonymous, mostly young White men" (Anglin, 2016). Richard Spencer, who was credited with coining the phrase "alt-right," was quoted in *The Atlantic.com* as saying that the alt-right movement's long-term goal was "the establishment of a "post-American" white "ethno-state," through a slow process of awakening ethnic pride and instituting government policies that reflect a new white race consciousness" (Wood, 2017). The ADL described the alt-right movement in terms of their practices rather than their specific beliefs: "The Alt Right is an extremely loose movement, made up of different strands of people connected to white supremacy. One body of adherents is the ostensibly "intellectual" racists who create many of the doctrines and principles of the white supremacist movement.... Another strand of the Alt Right consists of younger racists savvy with social media and Internet communications" (ADL, Alt-right, n.d.). The alt-right movement used irreverence (vulgarity, irony, jokes, memes, music) or a coveted persona (Richard Spencer's projected image of educated, white collared shirt professionalism) to attract the attention and allegiance of disaffected white men.

### **Status of the alt-right.**

The rise of the alt-right and the explosion of hate crimes during the 2015-2017 time frame was a topic hyped by the media; however, it often seemed as though the “rise” had more to do with the frequency of popular media stories about the alt-right rather than actual changes in the movement. Had the alt-right grown? If so, in what ways? Did hate groups grow in number, size or influence? Did the number of hate crimes increase? Or had the nature of the alt-right and how they are viewed by the public changed?

The SPLC tracks "hate" groups in the US by type, location and size. For 2018, SPLC tracked 1020 hate groups in the US (SPLC Hate-Map, n.d.). Eliminating the anti-LGBT groups (49), male supremacy (2) and Black Nationalist groups (264), there were 705 hate groups which could be characterized as white supremacist, alt-right or connected to their ideologies. As of the end of 2017, SPLC was tracking 954 hate groups in the US (Beirich & Buchanan, 2018), 668 of which were white supremacist, alt-right or connected (eliminating 51 anti-LGBT, 2 male supremacy and 233 Black Nationalist groups). In 2016, there were 672 white supremacist, alt-right or connected hate groups operating in the US (eliminating 193 Black Separatist groups and 52 anti-LGBT groups) (Potok, 2017). In 2015, eliminating the same groups, there were 664 that could be characterized as white supremacist, alt-right or connected (SPLC, 2016). In 2014, eliminating the same groups, there were 626 that could be characterized as white supremacist, alt-right or connected (SPLC, 2015). Although that is an overall increase from 2014 to 2018, and represents a significant change, the data showed that the greatest increase was within hate groups which did not espouse white supremacist views. To

illustrate this, I used the data from SPLC.org to create the following figure, which demonstrates that hate groups are at their highest level in the years between 2007 and 2018, but that white supremacist groups were still significantly lower than their peak of 851 groups in 2011.



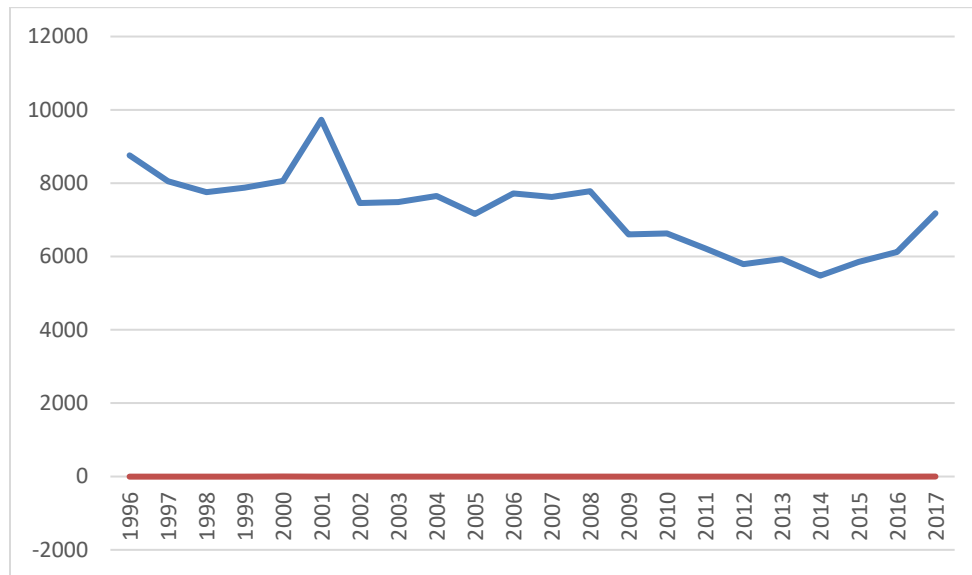
**Figure 1 Hate groups/white supremacy groups in the US, 2007 – 2018 (Data Source – SPLCenter.org)**

Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) statistics on hate crimes revealed that hate crimes, though increased in the time since 2014, are still lower than the time period from 1996 – 2008 (except for 2005) (Federal Bureau of Investigations, 1996 - 2016).

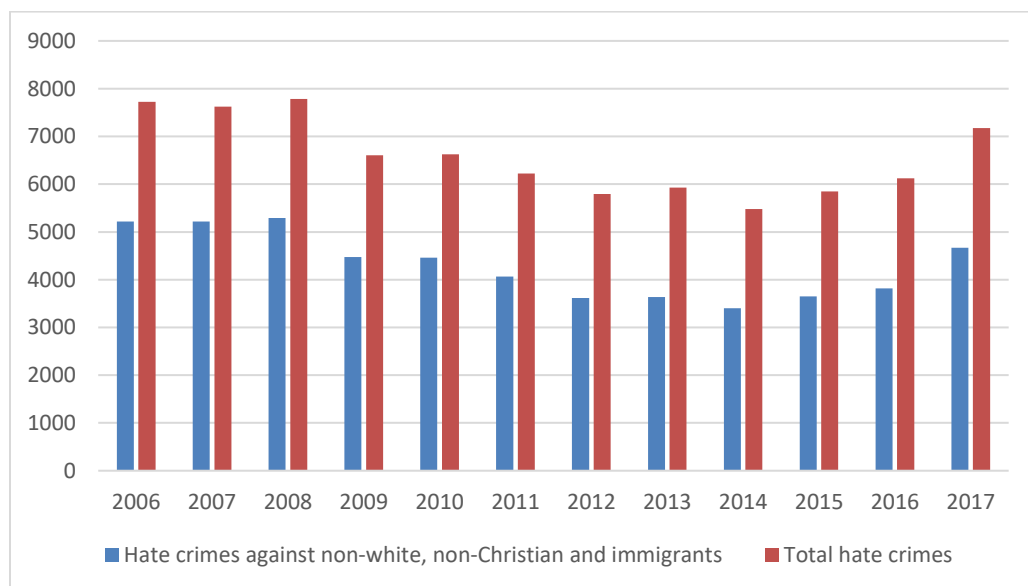
Considering the twenty-year period between 1996 and 2016, the increase demonstrated between 2014 and 2016 is not notable, but the increase demonstrated between 2016 and

2017 is notable. The only other time periods in which the hate crime statistics changed that sharply was the 20% jump in hate crimes in 2001 (likely attributed to the 9/11 attacks) and the commensurate drop back down the following year. Another notable year was the 15% *decrease* in hate crimes committed in 2009; potentially related to the 2008 election of America's first non-white President. Using data from the FBI hate crime statistics websites, I constructed the two tables below to demonstrate both the twenty-one year and the eleven year trends in hate crimes. The second table (Figure 3) provides detail on the total number of hate crimes versus the number of hate crimes against people who are nonwhite, non-Christian and immigrants (i.e., targets of white supremacist hate). It shows that the number of hate crimes against that combined group rose at the same level as crimes against the total population (including white, Christian people) in the years from 2014 to 2016 but rose more sharply in 2017 (22% rise in hate crimes against nonwhite, non-Christian and immigrants versus 17% against all people).

It should also be noted that the FBI hate crime statistics do not necessarily provide a complete picture of hate-driven crimes in the country, based on law enforcement's reporting requirements and the difficulty in getting a hateful act to be classified as a hate crime. Of note, another federal crime tracking bureau, the Bureau of Justice Statistics (BJS), notes vastly different hate crime numbers overall: 207,880 hate crimes in 2015 (Langston & Masucci, 2017), compared to the FBI's reported number of 5850 (Federal Bureau of Investigations, 2015). Despite this huge difference in overall numbers, BJS found no statistical difference between the number of hate crimes between 2004 and 2015 (Langston & Masucci, 2017) and their data do not contribute to my analysis.



**Figure 2 Hate crimes from 1996-2017 (Data Source: FBI Hate Crimes)**



**Figure 3 Hate crimes statistics, 2006 to 2017; total crimes and crimes against nonwhite, non-Christian people and immigrants (Data Source – FBI Hate Crimes)**



The preceding data demonstrates that the overall number of white supremacist groups has not grown appreciably in the last few years, though the overall number of hate crimes against targets of white supremacy *have* increased significantly in the last year (2017). If the number of white supremacist groups have not changed, but the number of hate crimes has increased, does that indicate a shift in tactics amongst those who have racially biased views? Has the nature of white supremacist groups or white supremacist individuals changed? Are they different now than they were before the onslaught of Russian propaganda?

One indicator was in the words of individuals who considered themselves to be alt-right. Andrew Anglin, writing on The Daily Stormer, an alt-right online news site, claimed that the roots of the alt-right movement began around 2012 with several groups displaying a "new type of White nationalist movement on the internet" (Anglin, 2016), which coalesced into the alt-right. Anglin (2016) stated that Donald Trump's candidacy in 2015 was the "nexus" of the alt-right formation. This indicated the alt-right believed that their movement became a distinct and identifiable movement at that time, rising in prominence and influence. Richard Spencer, leader of the alt-right think tank National Policy Institute (NPI) and frequently credited with coining the phrase "alt-right," operated the NPI out of his mother's home and received a salary of \$13,275 in 2015 (Wood, 2017). In 2017, he was able to open an office for NPI in the high-rent area of Old Town Alexandria, Virginia, which he billed as a "one-stop shop" for white nationalists

(Sullivan, 2017). This represented a change in fortune and a substantial rise in status, indicative of the changing, growing nature of the alt-right movement from 2015 to 2017.

Although outside the scope of this research, it is important to note that the alt-right movement went through another change during the period this thesis has been researched and written (2018). After the deadly rally in Charlottesville in August 2017, in which one anti-alt-right protestor was killed and many more protestors wounded, the rise of the alt-right appeared to slow. Social media sites, including Facebook, closed all “hate” linked accounts. Internet platforms refused to sponsor certain sites and some online money transfer systems closed the accounts of people and groups they viewed as hate-linked. For a group that existed largely in the virtual world, these changes certainly presented significant challenges. Whether they have impacted the groups in a lasting manner remains to be seen.

## CHAPTER SIX – RESEARCH

My goal in conducting this research was to explore the intersection of the Russian propaganda spread on Facebook and the alt-right movement. *How did Russian propaganda, propagated through advertisements on Facebook from January 2015 to August 2017, stress the discourse of the alt-right movement in the United States?* How did Russian propaganda employ stereotypes and favorable comparison, prevalent within the alt-right movement, to describe social boundaries between white and nonwhite groups? What role did moral duality and dehumanization play in this process? How did they use threat and relative deprivation to amplify their message? How were propaganda tactics and methodologies used in the discourse? In order to address this question, I first had to learn about the alt-right movement and identify their ideology and methodology. Then, I compared popular propaganda methods to the methods used by these groups to espouse their ideology. I then evaluated Facebook ads known to be produced by Russian propagandists as part of their campaign to sow discord in the US, using those same ideological, methodological and propaganda markers. Finally, I compared those findings to see if there were any correlations.

I conducted this research using a flexible, qualitative research plan. The topic is emergent, and the data was still being released and made available to the public. A "flexible" research design, which "evolves during data collection" (Robson & McCartan,

2016, p.76) and typically focuses on the collection of qualitative, non-numerical data, allowed me to take advantage of the broadest reasonable amount of data that was available during my analysis.

A qualitative research design, which "is an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (Creswell, 2014, p. 4), was the design best suited to this topic. Although I used a small amount of quantitative data (including hate crime and hate group statistics), my focus was on the qualitative analysis of text and images gathered from alt-right sites as well as from Russian sponsored Facebook ads.

This chapter will be a discussion of the methodology of my research: first, my research into the alt-right, then my research into the Russian-propaganda Facebook ads, and finally, my analytical methods.

### **Research methodology: Alt-right**

My first step in learning about the alt-right movement was to visit the Southern Poverty Law Center's website (<https://www.splcenter.org>). I chose to start with the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) because they are considered an authority on hate groups in the United States. Frequently cited by the media in discussions about hate groups, the SPLC cites monitoring hate groups as one of their four mission pillars (from <https://www.SPLCenter.org> – "What we do.") I cross-checked the information I gained from SPLC with a list of alt-right groups compiled by the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), which calls itself the "world's leading organization in fighting anti-Semitism"

(ADL, n.d.). Finally, I checked with the groups themselves to determine whether they consider themselves alt-right.

The SPLC described the ideology of the alt-right and provided biographies about some of the major players in the alt-right movement. The ADL did the same. Very few groups were considered strictly “alt-right” groups, which was defined less by strict ideology and more by their departure from previous groups, the youth of their members and the methodology they employed to spread their message. Several of the “groups” I researched were websites, blogs, think tanks, and publishing houses, rather than membership groups. Since the alt-right defined itself in terms of its online presence and the amorphous, crowd-sourced nature of its rhetoric, I viewed these non-membership sites as legitimate exemplars of the alt-right.

According to SPLC (Beirich & Buchanan, 2018), “Richard Spencer ... pushed white nationalism onto [college] campuses and raised his status even further as a figurehead for young, white men looking for a face that mirrored their own dissatisfactions.... Young white men concerned about future opportunities are lining up with Richard Spencer and Identity Evropa at neo-Nazi hubs like the Daily Stormer and fraternizing with groups like Matthew Heimbach’s Traditionalist Worker Party.” In their “Extremist files” of the alt-right, the SPLC listed personalities associated with websites/publishing site The Daily Stormer, The Right Stuff, [www.christophercantwell.com](http://www.christophercantwell.com), Occidental Dissent, Counter Currents (publishing), New Century Foundation, Freedom Radio, and groups Council of Conservative Citizens, Traditionalist Worker Party, League of the South, National Policy Institute, and Identity

Evropa (SPLC, Extremist Files, n.d.). The ADL listed websites/publishing sites Counter Currents, The Right Stuff, and Radix, as well as groups National Policy Institute and Traditionalist Youth Network (ADL, Alt-right, n.d.).

Since my research focused only on American alt-right ideology, I excluded Freedomain Radio, which was based in Canada and run by a Canadian. I excluded [www.christophercantwell.com](http://www.christophercantwell.com) and The Right Stuff ([www.therightstuff.biz](http://www.therightstuff.biz)) because they were comprised of podcasts, rather than written content. I substituted [www.amren.com](http://www.amren.com) for New Century Foundation (American Renaissance Journal, previously published by New Century Foundation and now existing only online). I conflated Traditionalist Youth Network with Traditionalist Worker Party, which was the political offshoot of the group. I also excluded the Radix Journal because it requires a login for use, which diverged from my policy to “leave no footprints” in my research methods. I omitted the League of the South because they explicitly excluded themselves from the alt-right (identifying themselves as the “Hard right,” rather than the alt-right (League, n.d.)). Finally, I omitted Occidental Dissent, Counter Currents and Council of Concerned Citizens in order to limit the scope of my research to the five most frequently mentioned alt-right exemplars. I chose to do this in order to maintain a manageable amount of research information, while retaining an appropriate pool of information.

### **Alt-right Exemplars**

Based on these exclusions, I identified my alt-right exemplars as the websites for the Daily Stormer, the National Policy Institute, Identity Evropa, Traditionalist Worker Party and American Renaissance.

The Daily Stormer was an unabashedly pro-white and alt-right online news site. In their own words, the “Daily Stormer is the biggest news publication focused on racism and anti-Semitism in human history” (Daily Stormer, n.d.). They educated the masses to become alt-right: “Trump-supporting White racial advocates who engage in trolling an [sic] other activism on the internet” (Anglin, 2016).

The National Policy Institute (NPI), billed itself an “organization dedicated to the heritage, identity and future of people of European descent in the US and around the world” and an “indispensable component of the international Alt-Right” (NPI, n.d.). NPI was run by Richard Spencer, the new face of the alt-right and a visible spokesperson for white nationalism.

Identity Evropa (Identity) described itself as “an American Identarian organization. As such, our main objective is to create a better world for people of European heritage... we believe that identity matters, inequality is a fact of life and ethnic diversity... is an impediment to societal harmony” (Identity, n.d.). They declared they were not white supremacists; rather, they were “ethno-pluralists. We believe that all ethnic and racial groups should have somewhere in the world to call home...” (Identity, n.d.).

The website for the Traditionalist Worker Party (TWP) Tennessee, declared that the TWP had been disbanded, but the website retained all its group information, as well as links to hate-affiliated funding sites (“Hatreon” and “Goyfundme”) and links to other nationalist sites. The TWP was described by the SPLC as a white nationalist and alt-right group; the TWP claimed the infamous “fourteen words” as their mission: “We must

secure the existence of our people and a future for White children” (TWP, n.d.). In their own words, they worked “to create a sustainable Homeland for our culture, identity, families, and blood. We fight for Faith, Family and Folk” (TWP, n.d.).

American Renaissance (Amren) was magazine devoted to discussing “race realism;” previously a monthly print magazine, it is now only found online (Amren, n.d.). As described by the Amren page “Our Issues,” race realism was “White survival”: “If whites permit themselves to become a minority population, they will lose their civilization, their heritage, and even their existence as a distinct people” (Amren, n.d.). The Amren website included news (focused heavily on nonwhite crime, illegal immigration, and the failings of the liberal government), commentary about race realism, podcasts and videos, links to Amren founder Jared Taylor’s books, and as well as a link to an all-white dating website, “WhiteDate (for European singles).”

As further evidence that these groups constituted alt-right exemplars, many of the sites contained links to one another. Although the personalities leading the various groups frequently feuded (Anglin of the Daily Stormer was hated by some; Richard Spencer of NPI was hated by others; Matthew Heimbach of Traditionalist Worker Party seemed universally disliked) their interactions indicated they were on the same plane of thought and in the same sandbox. Their discussions and disagreements were over tactics and nuance, rather than major disagreements over the legitimacy of white supremacy and white nationalism.



### **Coding used to evaluate alt-right**

I used the previously named exemplars of the alt-right to examine their axiology: to identify their norms and values; employment of both positive and negative stereotypes; use of favorable comparison and axiology of difference; invocation of threat and relative deprivation; and prevalence of moral duality or dehumanization.

I also used these exemplars to evaluate their methodology in spreading their message and use of propaganda techniques. Because each of the five named exemplar websites individually contain hundreds of separate pages, links, and content, I confined my evaluation of their axiology to their mission statement. This was alternatively identified as their “About Us” page, or “Our Issues” or “Statement of Purpose;” in the case of NPI, I included the “Who are we” video transcript, hung above their mission statement, to augment their meager mission statement offering. In order to evaluate each group’s methodology and use of propaganda tactics, I used both their mission statement and their home page.

My initial evaluations of the alt-right revealed several overarching themes: an affinity for the white race; concern that whites were threatened by nonwhites; feelings of relative deprivation amongst white people; negative stereotypes of nonwhite groups; support for “traditional” gender roles; and a dislike of anyone who does not follow their brand of conservatism (including neo-cons, “cuckservatives,” “normies” and above all, liberals). These six themes comprised the major tenets of the alt-right axiology. Although I focused on the text mission statements, I also evaluated associated imagery if it was available and germane.

The affinity shown by alt-righters to their race included both positive characteristics and the imperative to include other white people in their way of thinking. The positive feelings that they attempted to evoke for their race necessarily relied on including the audience under the Volkan's "tent" of ethnicity; without inclusion, the tent does not provide the warm feelings it is intended to provide. Consequently, I evaluated the ideology of affinity for the white race ("pro-white") by looking for words and phrases that equated positive characteristics with white people (positive stereotypes) and those phrases that evoked a sense of "we-ness", including "our people," "homeland," "white race," as well as examples of collective action ("we must work towards" or "we must support").

The juxtaposition of "pro-white" and "anti-nonwhite" rhetoric served to describe social boundary, often through favorable comparison. I evaluated both the use of "pro-white" rhetoric and "anti-nonwhite" rhetoric as favorable comparison and establishing social boundary, if the statement was used to differentiate between the groups. Positive ingroup and negative outgroup stereotypes both served describe social boundary, along with statements that built a sense of "we-ness." I looked for evidence of moral duality through positive ingroup homogenization, including any statement that equated white people with uniformly increased morality.

Alt-right groups often used negative stereotypes of nonwhite groups, either to increase the status of white people by favorable comparison or to increase their characterization as a threat. Any mention of nonwhite groups in a negative light (or negative image/caricature) counted in this identity factor category ("anti-nonwhite"). I

looked for evidence of moral duality through negative outgroup homogenization, including any statement that equated nonwhite people with uniform depravity or decreased morality. I also looked for any evidence of dehumanization through language/imagery that compared nonwhite people to nonhuman beings, or which otherwise stripped their human characteristics.

The alt-right groups frequently invoked the idea of invading immigrants, encroaching cultural norms or the “mixing” of the races to describe the threat from nonwhite people against the white race. In order to evaluate the prevalence of threat ideology in the alt-right, I looked for words or phrases that implied threat. Most of these were military or war-like words – “invasion,” “wiped out,” “fight,” “war,” and “attack.” If the phrase involved collective action and threat words (“we must fight”), I viewed it as both “threat” and “pro-white.”

In looking to evaluate relative deprivation in the alt-right exemplars, I utilized Smith, et al’s (2012) definition: comparison with another individual or group; cognitive assessment that there was a disadvantage; and perception that the disadvantage was unfair. Accordingly, I looked for statements that claimed an unfair advantage allotted to the out group (nonwhite) or a disadvantage accorded to the ingroup (white). This often included language about nonwhite groups “taking” resources which were “rightfully” bound for whites, including public assistance, university slots, etc. It also included language about nonwhite groups “taking” social positions that the authors believed should be retained by white people, or an assessment that nonwhite people “owned the place.” The three key characteristics of the feeling of unjust disadvantage – that it was not

the white person's fault; the system that disadvantaged them was illegitimate; and the situation won't change unless someone fixes it (Smith, et al, 2012, p. 208) – were frequently manifested in alt-right statements against outside ideologies. In those cases, the groups complained about the “insane” or “rigged” system or that the world was “upside down.”

The alt-right espoused the desire to return to “traditional” gender roles and some groups displayed explicitly misogynistic ideology. Accordingly, I looked for the prevalence of “traditional” gendered rhetoric in the alt-right mission statements (“pro-traditional values” or “pro-trad”). For example, identification of “men's roles” or “women's roles” was “pro-trad,” along with a focus on the difference in the capabilities of the genders. I included anti-homosexual and anti-trans rhetoric in this category as well.

Finally, the alt-right defined themselves by what they were not: they weren't the buffoonish Nazis of the backwoods, or the traditional KKK'ers of their grandparent's era, or the conservatives of their parent's era, or the “neo-cons” that preceded them. They weren't the “weak” liberals with whom they interacted in academia, and they definitely weren't the “Normies”: the un-redpilled sheep, still living in darkness. Despite the multitude of similarities they have with all these groups, the alt-right movement believed it was special and unique; they showed this by mocking or denigrating any group that didn't agree with their alt-right philosophy. I looked for the pervasiveness of this in the alt-right ideology by identifying instances in which the mission statement used mocking, pejorative or inflamed language about a political or philosophical ideology (“anti-ideology”). Note, I did not include instances in which the mission statement explicitly

disagreed with another philosophy; the very definition of a political or ideological movement relies on its disagreement with other movement's ideology. Rather, I focused on those statements which attacked other philosophies or their adherents in a personal, biting or ugly way.

The alt-right was known for using humor/irreverence to provide a fig-leaf of deniability or professionalism/education to provide a veneer of civility. In order to evaluate their methodology, I looked on their homepage and in their mission statements for examples of humor and examples of professionalism/education. These methodologies also operate as propaganda devices by making the message more palatable to the audience.

In order to evaluate their use of propaganda tactics, I looked for evidence of propaganda tactics and devices identified by experts and described in Chapter Two in each of the alt-right exemplar sites' mission statements and homepages. These included the seven primary propaganda devices described by Cull (2015): glittering generality, transfer, testimonial, bandwagon, card stacking, plain folks and name calling; and the devices described by Doob and Robinson (1935): co-mingling indirect and direct messaging, and "swimming with the tide" by attaching a new message to one already accepted by the audience. Some of these devices were readily apparent: the testimonial device occurred whenever an idea was associated with or espoused by a prominent figure; the bandwagon device occurred whenever an idea was claimed to be popular or spreading; transfer occurred whenever unrelated ideas, policies or people were attached to something universally accepted as "good;" and name-calling was just that. Some of

these devices, however, were not as clear cut. For this research, I considered “glittering generality” whenever an idea was presented in a provocative but vague way – it could be either generally enticing or horrifying, but presented without any associated plan or specifics. I considered “card stacking” when the cards (arguments) in question were grouped together in an unbalanced way (heavier on one side). “Swimming with the tide” was almost a combination of card stacking and transfer; the propagandist used a card stacking technique of “good” associations or ideas to walk the audience along a path towards their less-readily-accepted argument. The combination of “good’s” moved that audience with the “tide” of ideas so that the final idea seemed appropriate. The “plain folks” tactic was the most amorphous, but I considered any appeal to the audience as common or working class, or an appeal to fundamental or basic values, as a “plain folks” tactic. For the device utilizing a mixture of direct and indirect messaging, I looked for those messages to occur within proximity to one another.

### **Research Methodology: Russian-sponsored Facebook Ads**

After researching the alt-right sites to determine their prevailing ideas, I looked through the Russian propaganda disseminated as Facebook ads from 2015 – 2017 to look for those same prevailing ideas. I examined Facebook advertisements that were identified by Facebook as being created by the Internet Research Agency (the Russian sponsored propaganda company). These ads were released to the public through Congressional hearings of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence (HPSCI) in 2017 (HPSCI-Minority, 2017) and 2018 (HPSCI(D), 2018). It’s important to note that the extent of the Russian propaganda campaign is almost certainly greater than the extent

identified by Facebook, and then released to HPSCI, and then cleared for release by the HPSCI to the public. Indeed, in the months following the end of this research period, Facebook identified hundreds more pages and groups associated with Russian propaganda efforts (Mayer, 2018). For that reason, and although this thesis evaluated the information available at the time of writing, it does not and cannot represent a complete picture of the Russian efforts at influence operations on Facebook in the US during that time period.

### **Russian Sponsored Facebook Ads**

The bulk of my research was in culling through and examining the 3507 Facebook ads purchased through the Internet Research Agency and associated with Russian propaganda campaign, which were released by the HPSCI (D) in 2018 and made available to the public on the HPSCI (D) webpage: <https://democrats-intelligence.house.gov/social-media-content/social-media-advertisements.htm>.

I downloaded these files, which were saved as individual .pdf files, and opened each one to view their contents. These files were from a multitude of Facebook groups and some Instagram pages too numerous to name here (a complete listing of the page names can be found in the Appendix). I sorted the files by their Facebook group/page name and by date in order to identify those germane to this research.

After examining these files, I identified 592 ads from 13 Facebook or Instagram pages/groups which generally aligned with white nationalist collective axiology by displaying either multiple or strong sentiments of the following: pro-white, anti-immigrant or anti-nonwhite. Most of these groups also used stereotypes and favorable

comparison to differentiate racial groups; highlighted real or perceived threat to white hegemony; invoked a sense of relative deprivation compared to other groups; and used moral duality to vilify those whose ideological views differed from them. In evaluating the Facebook ads for inclusion in my analysis, I eliminated those ads for pages/groups which were solely pro-Second Amendment, pro-law enforcement and pro-Veteran; although those sentiments are aligned with overall conservative and mainstream white American culture, the Facebook ads did not display multiple or strong white nationalist beliefs. Additionally, I did not include Facebook ads for pages/groups whose only alignment with white nationalist sentiment was anti-federal government or anti-foreign intervention. Although those topics are elements of white nationalist beliefs, they also exist in a wide range of rhetoric, spanning from extremely conservative to extremely liberal politics.

I sorted the remaining ads for uniqueness and relevance – there were many duplicates of ads as well a group of 107 advertisements for a non-existent free-music-streaming extension containing malware, which, though they displayed a fascinating look into Russia's offensive collection capabilities, were not germane to this topic. I evaluated the remaining 303 ads for their use of social identity factors and propaganda devices.

### **Coding used to evaluate the Russian-sponsored Facebook Ads**

I used the same identity factors that I found in the axiology of the alt-right exemplars to evaluate the Russian sponsored Facebook ads. I searched for social boundaries expressed through pro-white stereotypes and collective action, favorable comparison through anti-nonwhite stereotypes; dehumanization; moral duality; pro-



traditional (usually displayed as anti-LGBTQ or anti-feminist), threat to white hegemony, feeling of relative deprivation from nonwhite groups and vilification along ideological lines. Additionally, I looked for the same propaganda tactics that I sought in the alt-right exemplars: glittering generality, transfer, testimonial, card stacking, name calling, plain folks, bandwagon, swimming with the tide, and direct/indirect. The evaluation criteria I used for the propaganda tactics was the same as the criteria I used when evaluating the alt-right exemplars, discussed above.

In evaluating the Facebook ads for the alt-right identity factors, I did not look for the exact same language I found in the alt-right exemplars. The identity factors I found in the alt-right exemplars were the defining characteristics of their ideology. However, the Russian sponsored Facebook advertisements were not meant to be alt-right or overtly white supremacist. As a propaganda movement, they were meant to sow discord along our racial and political lines; if they were overtly white supremacist, they would be immediately dismissed by a large segment of our population and not be as effective. Therefore, most of the language they used was more subtle, designed to infer rather than exclaim; to paint their message in shadows and doubt rather than etch it in stone.

One of the benefits of the released Facebook ads was that many of them were released with their target metadata; in other words, I could see the population for which the ads were intended, including their age, gender, location and interests. In about half the cases, the ad target audience was exceedingly broad: aimed towards Americans between the ages of 18 and 65, who have not yet “liked” or “followed” the page for which the ad was placed. However, in other cases, the target audience was dictated by their race or

gender, or by their interests (such as “Confederate States of America”). In those cases, I was able to evaluate the ad in a different light, understanding which groups the ads meant in their use of “us” and “them.”

I viewed each ad as a discrete entity; in other words, I did not use data included in one Facebook page advertisement to evaluate the meaning or intention of another ad for the same Facebook page. However, within each ad, I used the metadata, text and images to provide the context through which to evaluate the ad’s meaning and intent.

Because none of the Facebook pages in question were explicitly white supremacist, I did not evaluate their message as pro-white based on simply invoking collective action or positive group characteristics. Rather, I only evaluated an ad as “pro-white” if it invoked collective action, positive group characteristics or a sense of “we-ness” AND explicitly identified another racial group as the Other or used metadata that targeted white people (either by racial description or by targeting to pro-white interests such as “Confederate States of America” or “White Nationalism”). If I evaluated the ad as “pro-white” and it painted the “us” group with a group-wide (homogeneous) and sharply superior morality, I evaluated it as moral duality. If I evaluated the ad as “pro-white” and it painted the “us” group as generally better or superior, I evaluated it as favorable comparison.

For “anti-nonwhite,” I looked for any mention (or image) of a nonwhite group in a negative light. Many of the advertisements were for Facebook pages devoted to anti-immigration sentiment; this alone did not qualify as “anti-nonwhite.” However, a combination of anti-immigration with a negative moral assessment of the immigrants

(such as “invaders,” “stealing” or “lazy”) resulted in an evaluation of “anti-nonwhite” using negative stereotypes. These examples also described social boundaries. If I evaluated the ad as “anti-nonwhite” and it painted the outgroup with a group-wide (homogeneous) and markedly deviant morality, I evaluated it as moral duality. If the advertisement compared nonwhite people (through text or images) to nonhuman beings, I evaluated it as an example of dehumanization.

If the advertisement invoked threat and associated that threat with nonwhite people, then I assessed the ad as invoking the outgroup threat. Threat could include the use of threatening words (such as “war,” “invader,” “destroyed”) or threatening images (death, destruction, violence) linked to the actions or perceived intentions of nonwhite people.

I evaluated the advertisement as “anti-ideology” if it used inflammatory rhetoric to accuse a political group of working against America or being morally inferior. If the ad made moral assessments or accusations against a very prominent political person, such as President Obama or Secretary Clinton, I viewed the person as a stand-in for their political ideology and still assessed the ad as being “anti-ideology.”

For “pro-trad,” I looked in the advertisements for any highlighting of gender differences or anti-LGBTQ rhetoric. If the advertisement generically discussed values and the ad metadata included known anti-LGBTQ pundits or groups in their “targeted interests,” then I assessed the ad as “pro-trad.”

I used the same criteria to evaluate relative deprivation in the Facebook ads that I used in evaluating the alt-right exemplars – assessment that a nonwhite group has an

unfair advantage over white people, or that white people were unfairly disadvantaged compared to nonwhite groups. The language included being “ripped off,” “tricked” or “duped;” “paying for others” or nonwhite groups who were “greedy,” “ungrateful” or “acted like they owned the place.” As with the rest of the evaluation criteria, I utilized the metadata, images and text to establish “we” and “they” groups to identify relative deprivation groups. I also looked for examples that the “we” group viewed the deprivation as unfair – it wasn’t their fault, the system was “rigged”, or the world was “upside down.”

### **Analysis methods**

I analyzed the data using a thematic coding approach, which involved grouping the data by theme. Also called "constant comparison analysis" (Robson & McCartan, 2016), the researcher compares each new chunk of data with previous data. Thematic coding analysis can be used to analyze qualitative data inductively (using themes that arise from analysis of the data) or to analyze data using pre-determined themes (Robson & McCartan, 2016). I used the pre-determined themes of stereotypes, favorable comparison, moral duality, dehumanization, threat and relative deprivation to analyze the alt-right data. After coding the alt-right, I discovered four main tenets – pro-white, anti-nonwhite, pro-traditional and anti-ideology – which the pre-determined themes were used to enforce. I used the pre-determined themes through the lens of the four tenets to evaluate the Russian-sponsored propaganda.

After coding both data sets, I looked for clusters of themes in each and explored the data accordingly. I used the clusters and specific examples to provide a general

picture of the way in which Russian propagandists used alt-right ideology, threat and identity factors to push their message.

### **Objectivity and validity**

In this research project, I identified a limited amount of Russian-propaganda Facebook ads to analyze against an almost unlimited number of alt-right online sites and social media sites. As the researcher, I had to choose the sites that best defined the alt-right in order to have evaluation criteria against which to evaluate the Russian-propaganda Facebook Ads. This imbued even the most basic step of my research with a level of subjectivity. Additionally, the qualitative nature of this study included a level of subjectivity in the analysis stage, when looking for similarities between the alt-right and the Russian propaganda. In both aspects, my role as the researcher, including my preferences and biases, affected the research material that I choose and the outcome of my analysis.

I chose this research topic because I am very passionate about the overall influence of Russian propaganda and the growing influence/impact of the alt-right in the US. However, I also recognize that this passion could manifest itself as bias which could affect my research. In order to mitigate this bias, I worked closely with my thesis committee in the selection of alt-right websites against which to compare the Russian propaganda data. Having oversight in the selection of the sites helped to ensure I examined areas widely considered influential to the alt-right movement, rather than simply meeting my perception of influence. In order to counter the manifestation of bias in my analysis, I used a thematic coding process (Robson & McCartan, 2016), whereby I

identified themes in the alt-right sites, coded them, and looked for corresponding patterns in the propaganda data.

### **Ethical considerations**

My research plan did not involve the collection of information from individuals; rather, I conducted a study using data already existing online. This plan resulted in very few ethical considerations with regards to protecting human rights or protecting individual privacy. I did not conduct interviews or interact with in-person research subjects, alleviating the need for Institutional Review Board approval. I did not access data which was not publicly available online; presumably, anything posted online in public forums is intended for public consumption. This alleviated concerns about protection of individual privacy.

I gathered my Facebook ad data from a publicly available data site and accessed alt-right data from publicly available websites. I did not join any Facebook groups or alt-right groups. I did not “like,” “friend” or “follow” any Facebook groups or subscribe to any alt-right email lists, Twitter feeds or podcasts feeds. I used a Virtual Private Network (VPN) during my internet searches involving the alt-right. In every way, I attempted to leave as few virtual footprints as possible, both for my own safety and in order to uphold the ethical research standards that enjoin us to “respect our research sites so that they are left undisturbed after a research study” (Creswell, 2014).

### **Limitations**

The major limitation of this research is that the true range and scope of the Russian propaganda campaign on Facebook is not known. Although Facebook identified

numerous Facebook accounts/pages as Russian IRA-sponsored, it is unlikely that they found all sponsored pages. It is equally unlikely that they released the full scope of their information to the HPSCI; and even more unlikely that the HPSCI released all their information to the public. Moreover, the extremely limited scope of this research project precludes any real understanding of the impact of the Russian propaganda campaign, which spanned multiple social media platforms. This research was confined not only to one single platform – Facebook – but only to the HPSCI(D) released Russian-sponsored ads.

The other astronomical limitation is that the alt-right is amorphous. There is no one manifesto, leader or group that can confidently declare themselves THE alt-right. Additionally, it is a fairly new movement within white supremacy, so most of the information on this group is from the news media or primary source information from the groups themselves, rather than scholarly or vetted assessments. As noted in the Objectivity section, even my choice of alt-right exemplars, though based on mountains of research, cannot represent the scope of the alt-right movement.

Because of these limitations, the result of my endeavor is not an assessment of impact or causation, but a layered exploration of both the alt-right and the Russian-sponsored propaganda Facebook ads. The former is a movement which is still growing and whose rhetoric is increasingly accepted by the mainstream. The latter is an ongoing attack which will directly affect the rapidly-approaching 2020 US Presidential election. The limitations of this project serve to highlight the necessity of further research in both areas of concern.

## **CHAPTER SEVEN – IDEOLOGY, THREAT, METHODOLOGY AND PROPAGANDA USED BY THE ALT-RIGHT**

In this chapter, I describe the ideology and collective axiology of the alt-right, including their four areas of axiology: pro-white, anti-nonwhite, pro-traditional and anti-ideology. Through the lens of these four tenets, I explore the alt-right's use of favorable comparison, negative outgroup and positive ingroup stereotypes to reinforce social boundaries and heighten axiology of difference, instances of moral duality and dehumanization. I investigate the alt-right's use of relative deprivation and outgroup threat to reinforce social boundaries in the four axiological areas. Finally, I survey the propaganda tactics and methodology used to present the ideology and persuade the targets of the alt-right's message.

### **Collective axiology**

There were several major themes that defined the alt-right. These themes can be united in two clusters: Race-based, including “pro-white” feelings and “anti-nonwhite” feelings; and ideology-based, including support for “traditional values” (pro-trad) and derision for those who don't believe the same way they do (anti-ideology). The alt-right used out-group threat and highlighted feelings of relative deprivation to promote these themes. They employed positive and negative stereotypes, favorable comparison, moral duality and dehumanization to reinforce social boundaries around each of the four themes. Each group touted an ideal white ethno-state which would exclude nonwhite



people and end nonwhite immigration. In some cases, they also supported the ideals of political/economic isolationism and pre-feminist gender interactions.

***“Pro-white” ideology – positive stereotypes, favorable comparison and moral duality***

The “pro-white” tenet of the alt-right’s ideology appeared in every alt-right site included in this research as an exemplar. The alt-right groups used positive stereotypes and favorable comparison to describe social boundary around the white ingroup; they also used axiological difference to create a moral duality.

The groups’ messages were designed to appeal to white people with European identity, by discussing ancestry, blood kinship to other white people, and by raising the esteem of white people through implicitly applying ideal characteristics to them, invoking “chosen glories” or recounting glorious achievements of white people. The groups used collective action (“we” statements) and the normative prescriptions of collective axiology – the need to protect family, status and culture – to highlight their “pro-white” ideology. In combination, this “pro-white” rhetoric formed positive stereotypes which worked to establish social boundaries, particularly when juxtaposed with “anti-nonwhite” rhetoric.

NPI’s mission statement was brief, only stating that the organization was “dedicated to the heritage, identity, and future of people of European descent” (NPI, n.d.). However, the leading item on their website was an NPI-produced video created to incite feelings of racial identity. The video relied heavily on chosen glories – images of notable thinkers, leaders and warriors; inventions and structures; glorious battle scenes – to create positive feelings of white racial identity. The video, titled “Who are you?” asked the viewer to consider their “connection to culture, history, destiny.” The backdrop to the

initial question was imagery of ancient Greek and Roman structures, notable white achievers in science and philosophy, imagery of inventions and innovation, and celebrated military imagery, including Viking warriors, Knights of the Crusades and an Excalibur-style sword in a stone. The narrator, Richard Spencer, explicitly equated being an American with being “a German, or a Briton, or any other European nationality,” thereby making a parallel between being white and being a “true” American. He further defined the ideal white person and raised the esteem of the white viewer: “We aren’t just white. We are part of the people’s history, spirit and civilization of Europe.” After priming the white viewer with positive European historical imagery, the video then equated multiculturalism and diversity with a trash heap and declared: “Man doesn’t live and die for abstractions – man lives and dies for a homeland. For a people.” Then, Spencer inserted a call for action: “What our ancestors took for granted, we must renew.” He ended the video by reminding the viewer that “every other people is asserting its own identity” and asked if the viewer was “ready to become who we are” (NPI, n.d.).

Amren’s pro-white rhetoric heavily relied on assuring their audience that identifying with ones’ race – cleaving to, deriving benefit from and providing benefit to ones’ race – was both normal and necessary. They began their mission statement by invoking feelings of white racial identity, labeling those feelings “common sense” and “race realism” (Amren, n.d.). Amren asserted that “race is an important aspect of individual and group identity” and it was “entirely normal for whites ... to want to be the majority race in their own homeland” (Amren, n.d.). (Like the other alt-right sites I explored, Amren considers, without irony, the United States to be a “white homeland.”)

Amren later reiterated that “Racial loyalty or racial consciousness is normal and healthy” (Amren, n.d.). Amren also built their pro-white rhetoric by using “scientific” proof of the superiority of the white race, asserting that “science” dictates that the white people are smarter: “The more progress science makes the more secure our positions become” (Amren, n.d.). In asserting that white people are more intelligent and successful than nonwhite people, Amren accomplished two things: they built positive stereotypes of whites designed to bolster white esteem through favorable comparison, and they built distance between whites and nonwhites, designed to create and increase social boundary.

Identity Evropa built pro-white ideology through their use of collective action statements (“we” statements) and specificity about the importance of distinct racial identities and homelands. Identity was explicit in their goals, “to create a better world for people of European heritage” and their demands, “that we, people of European heritage, retain a demographic supermajority in our homelands” (Identity, n.d.). Like Amren, Identity focused on building social boundary; however, unlike Amren, they didn’t rely on stereotypes, but through their use of the term “ethno-pluralists.” “We believe that all ethnic and racial groups should have somewhere in the world to call home” (Identity, n.d.). By labeling themselves “ethno-pluralists,” Identity fought negative identity stereotypes (“We are not supremacists...”) and implied assurance that their group was an ethical, morally appropriate choice. This provided positive esteem for the white audience while further describing the social boundary between white and nonwhite people. They painted their belief system as both realistic and beneficial to everyone “identity matters, inequality is a fact of life, and ethnic diversity... is an impediment to social harmony”

(Identity, n.d.). This provided further racial esteem (demonstrating their acceptance of “common sense”) at the same time it further described social boundary.

Unlike the preceding examples which used innuendo and pseudo-scientific language to establish their pro-white stance, TWP was more explicit. Their mission statement began with the “Fourteen Words” commonly used by white nationalist groups: “We must secure the existence of our people and a future for White children” (TWP, n.d.). They were “fighting for rights and self determination of Whites in America... to create a sustainable Homeland for our culture, identity, families and blood” (TWP, n.d.). More than the other groups, TWP invoked the “kinship” aspect of white racial ethnicity, stating, “We fight for Faith, Family and Folk” (TWP, n.d.). TWP repeatedly stressed their view of white people as a kin group in describing their ideal version of government, including military/civil service, the justice system, industry, public assistance, education, and healthcare. In each aspect, they touted an all-encompassing community support system that resembled the support level that currently only exists within kin (family) groups. The view of white kinship and white people as family was included throughout the mission statement: “healthy families are the cornerstone of a healthy nation,” and “Marriage and the home is the foundation of any nation.” It flexed from family-oriented, to parochial, to autocratic: “We will be a compassionate society that seeks to rehabilitate all our sons and daughters” but “This will be a People’s State, there will be no room for subversive or alien elements because they are not members of our national community and not ‘our people’” (TWP, n.d.)

TWP displayed one of the few explicit examples of axiological difference and moral duality amongst the alt-right exemplars. They described their ethno-state as a “high-trust society,” (TWP, n.d.), an attribute which relied on the “kinship” aspect of white racial identity. A white ethno-state would produce “a nation that is safe, secure, and will protect the distinct ethnic, moral, and cultural foundation of the nation” and would once again become “[t]he orderly, high-trust way of life our forefathers took for granted” (TWP, n.d.). They implied that race is key to mutual respect, increased economic ability, and the erasure of criminality and violence. “With the establishment of a high-trust White society, we will be able to support the distribution and extension of healthcare” (TWP, n.d.). This demonstrated that they viewed the white race as morally superior to all others – merely by being white, one is worthy of “high trust,” an example of moral duality that was implied in other sites, but not stated.

The kinship language and intention to care for all the “National Community” built warm feelings of mutual support and dependence, but only within the white racial community. TWP was specific about the racial make-up of their ingroup members: “Only members of the National Community may be citizens of the State. Citizenship in the ethno-state must be therefore limited to White persons, and White persons alone” (TWP, n.d.). These warm feelings supported the ethnic “tent” of Volkan’s (1997) description at the same time they delineated the ingroup from the outgroup. TWP’s use of pro-white ideology built distinct social boundaries – you are either part of the “National Community,” or you are not. You are a citizen; you are kin; you are part of our high-trust society, or you are not. You are white – or you are not.

The Daily Stormer completely eschewed subtlety and espoused their pro-white views in specific terms, using collective action goals and positive stereotypes to build rigid social boundaries. In his “Guide to the Alt-Right,” Anglin (2016) stated that the alt-right’s goal was to “establish pure White racial states” through “mass deportations of all non-White immigrants, regardless of whether or not they were born here” and to “remove Jews from our societies.” The use of specific racial language, actions and physical space made their desired social boundaries explicitly clear. Anglin also used specific racial language to build positive stereotypes. The alt-right supported the “real science of race” that demonstrates the superiority of white peoples’ “abilities, drives and intelligence levels” (Anglin, 2016). They believed that the span of human history should be viewed through the lens of the white race: “The Alt-Right celebrates the greatness of our ancestors and the glory of our historical achievements... we view Whites as the creators and maintainers of Western civilization” (Anglin, 2016).

On their websites, TWP, Identity, Amren and NPI focused more on promoting their message of positive stereotypes of white people, rather than promoting negative stereotypes of outgroups; The Daily Stormer focused less on pro-white ideology and more on anti-nonwhite ideology.

***“Anti-nonwhite” ideology – negative stereotypes, moral duality and dehumanization***

The alt-right exemplars used varying degrees of anti-nonwhite ideology in their mission statements. One of the exemplars, Identity Evropa, explicitly stated that they do NOT believe that white people are superior to nonwhite people. This was off-set by the exemplar “The Daily Stormer,” which used the most disgusting language imaginable to

describe nonwhite people. Despite the lack of uniformity in this tenet of alt-right ideology, it was apparent that the alt-right relied on negative stereotypes, moral duality and dehumanization to increase both their own esteem as well as the distance between white people and nonwhite people.

NPI and Identity did not use anti-nonwhite language in their mission statements. (However, they both used language which established they viewed nonwhite immigration to be a threat on other portions of their website.) In its mission statement, Identity noted that “ethnic diversity... is an impediment to societal harmony” (Identity, n.d.). Although that is not an explicit anti-nonwhite statement, taken in conjunction with Identity’s focus on “creating a better world for people of European heritage” (Identity, n.d.), it can be assumed that their preference would be for nonwhite people to stop impeding societal harmony, rather than the reverse.

TWP also did not focus on anti-nonwhite rhetoric, with one large exception. They reserved their nonwhite-ire for the Jewish community, which they believed to be responsible for most of the world’s ills. “We declare war on ... international Jewry” and viewed the system run by “the Jewish and their capitalist running dogs” to be “the greatest threat to the continued existence of our people” (TWP, n.d.). They believed that the white working class was kept down by a “Jewish... stranglehold on information and resources” and the world was controlled by “globalist and Jewish elites” (TWP, n.d.). Even the TWP’s focus on a pro-traditionalist lifestyle (discussed below) concerned their hatred for the Jewish people; they blamed the “Jewish stigma against motherhood and femininity” (TWP, n.d.) for the current “non-traditional” gender roles in America. TWP

used dehumanization and moral duality in describing Judaism, equating it with Satanism. “Our Party promotes respect... for different expressions of Faith; with only Judaism, Freemasonry, Satanism, Scientology and similar... cults banned within our borders” (TWP, n.d.). For the TWP, the most threatening nonwhite group were the Jewish people, and they used them as their “other” to create axiological difference and moral duality.

Amren presented nonwhite people as less intelligent than white people, claiming that it was a “destructive myth ... that people of all races have the same average intelligence” (Amren, n.d.). This served to both denigrate nonwhite people at the same time it raises the positive esteem of white people. Amren also used negative stereotypes to describe moral duality, stating, “One of the most obvious consequences of an increase in the black population is an increase in crime” (Amren, n.d.). They equated black people with criminals, which both served to separate white and nonwhite people (social boundaries), raised the esteem of white people (favorable comparison), and created strong moral duality.

Amren used “first-person accounts” of white people working/living among nonwhite people to demonstrate that nonwhite people are generally “less than” white people. An entire section of their mission statement was devoted to “ordinary people describing their everyday experiences with non-whites.... [and] the continuing tragedy of multi-racialism” (Amren, n.d.). The examples described both axiological difference and dehumanization. One example, about Hurricane Katrina, inferred that nonwhite people were barbaric; another “first-person account” concerned “an eye-opening description of the everyday pathologies” of black people (Amren, n.d.).



The site that most clearly displayed negative stereotypes of nonwhite people was the Daily Stormer, which used explicit language, slurs, caricatures and dehumanization to denigrate nonwhite people and perpetuate stereotypes. Daily Stormer demonstrated this in both their mission statement and their website. Their favorite targets were people who were black, Hispanic, Jewish and Arab/Muslim. The frequent tropes were the predatory, dishonest and sexually deviant nature of black, Hispanic and Arab/Muslim people; laziness of black people; and that Jewish people were part of a global cabal that runs all governments and corporations to the detriment of “working class” white people. They used negative stereotypes, dehumanization and generalities to demonstrate extreme axiological difference and moral duality; this described stark boundaries between white (“us”) and nonwhite (“them”).

Within their mission statement, the first “defining value” they ascribed to the alt-right was the value of “Anti-Semitism.” They considered Jewish people responsible for “all the things we are against, the diametric opposite of everything we stand for” and must be “removed from White societies completely” (Anglin, 2016). According to the Daily Stormer, Jewish people were responsible for (among other things) pornography, communism, “the homosexual political agenda” and wars in the Middle East (Anglin, 2016), which demonstrated that they viewed Jewish people as morally degenerate. The Stormer used Jewish people as a repository for all the evil and problems in the world; they were responsible for moral failings (pornography, feminism and homosexuality), economic failings (“[E]conomics should follow basic common sense. If we were to physically remove the Jews, however, this would probably fall into place naturally”) and

political failings (the “oppressive liberal democratic system”) (Anglin, 2016). Even their distaste for other nonwhite people linked to Jewish people, since the Stormer blamed mass-immigration from nonwhite countries on the Jewish global cabal (Anglin, 2016). This view demonstrated extreme moral duality – both high generality (all Jewish people were this way) and high axiological difference (the “diametric opposite of everything we stand for”) (Anglin, 2016).

The Daily Stormer also used dehumanization to denigrate Jewish people. In their mission statement, they listed several popular alt-right memes that they believed helped define the movement. One of the memes was a “Le Happy Merchant,” which was “a Jewish caricature used to represent all Jews. It is used for the purpose of dehumanizing the Jew as a type of evil monster, rather than a human being, while also being very funny in its offensiveness” (Anglin, 2016). The Stormer explicitly recognized the dehumanization of their caricature and embraced it for that reason; this demonstrated their intention as a group was to create social boundaries through negative stereotypes of nonwhite people. Anglin also used racial slurs to refer to Jewish people, which also acts as a form of dehumanization.

By far, one of the more horrifying examples of both dehumanization and moral duality in the Daily Stormer mission statement was their discussion of “Holohoax.” “The only way to subvert the Jewish obsession with bringing up the Holocaust... is to viciously mock the story... Beyond laughing about the fact that Jews are such chronic liars that they invented a story about millions of people being gassed...the Alt-Right also asserts that if it had happened, it would have been justified due to the collective behavior

of the Jews” (Anglin, 2016). They used negative stereotypes (“chronic liars”) and, by denying their human tragedy, dehumanized Jewish people. The Stormer’s assertion that the genocide “would have been justified” demonstrated the extreme moral duality with which they viewed Jewish people.

The Daily Stormer used negative stereotypes to paint black people and Arab/Muslim people as criminal, violent and less intelligent than white people. They used the same claim of “real science” that demonstrated that nonwhite races have “vastly different abilities, drives and intelligence levels” than white people (Anglin, 2016). The Stormer presented two memes (“Dindu Nuffin” and “We wuz Kangz”) which relied on negative stereotypes of black people to paint them as criminals who refuse responsibility for their actions. “The phrase is used to mock the ineptitude of Blacks and their claims that all of their endless failures are the result of White people... rather than an innate biological incapacity to compete in White society” (Anglin, 2016). These memes served as a level of dehumanization more akin to “infrahumanization” (as discussed in [Chapter 4 – Dehumanization](#)) by “lessening” the humanity of nonwhite people and removing nuanced emotions, drives and abilities from them. One of the other memes (“The Nirvana Fallacy”) presented both black people and Arab/Muslim people as degenerate, violent sexual predators. The implication, particularly in this meme, was that this degeneracy was innate in some races and absent in others, which served as an example of moral duality that widened the social boundaries about the races.

Each group implicitly or explicitly expressed their belief that nonwhite people did not belong in the US and weren’t “real” Americans. The very idea that America should

become a white ethno-state, the core goal for all alt-right groups, demonstrated that the alt-right viewed “American” as synonymous with “white.” The Daily Stormer believed “in mass deportations of all non-White immigrants, regardless of whether or not they were born here” (Anglin, 2016). The TWP pledged to turn America into a “Homeland for Whites” in which only white people would be citizens (TWP, n.d.). Amren (n.d.) claimed its mission was to work to retain a demographic majority in their homeland, i.e., America. Every group preferred to end immigration completely, or severely limit it to only European Americans. Identity showed their activists unfurling a “Build the Wall” banner with a comment that noted, “Stop the invasion, end immigration” (Identity, n.d.). The NPI printed an article about the “dangerous” demographic change facing the US when white people were no longer a majority (NPI, 2018), which demonstrated that a nonwhite America was not the America they believed in. In each case, the groups worked to link the idea that to be American is to be white.

By using negative stereotypes of nonwhite people, heightening axiological difference, and dehumanizing nonwhite people, the alt-right exemplars created distance between ingroup and outgroup members. This social boundary not only included race but was extended to include race as a synonym for nationality. The alt-right groups linked nationality with race by using the social boundary around the white race to describe what it is to be an American.

### ***“Pro-Trad” ideology – stereotypes, moral duality and boundaries***

“Traditionalist” values appeared frequently in the alt-right’s rhetoric, usually encompassing man/woman gender roles and a rejection of anything other than

heterosexual, cis-gendered identity. “Normie’s Guide” explicitly stated that they believe that “the claim that men and women are equal is looked at as entirely ridiculous by the Alt-Right” and women should be sent “back to the home to produce and raise children, largely removing them from the workplace” (Anglin, 2016). It also was opposed to feminism, “homosexuality, as well as the emasculation of men through denying them their traditional role in society” (Anglin, 2016). These statements described sharp boundaries around gendered roles in society and implicit was that the role of women was a lesser role (equality being “entirely ridiculous”) (Anglin, 2016). That the roles are not just separate, but unequal, was echoed elsewhere on The Daily Stormer website, in which Anglin used slurs and negative stereotypes to describe women who did not fulfill their traditional role (such as police officers, politicians, etc.). The Daily Stormer did not ascribe moral degeneracy to homosexuality in their mission statement, but their opposition to it indicates as such.

In their manifesto, the TWP was explicit in the gender roles they believed should be in effect, recommending compulsory military service for all young men and for unwed young women to complete service in the healthcare and childcare services in order to “learn feminine skills for the sake of the family and the nation” (TWP, n.d.). TWP did not denigrate the role they believed women should play but stated the “position of motherhood and femininity shall be celebrated in our society and culture as an equal position with that of men” (TWP, n.d.). In this way, they created borders between men and women, though they did not assign value to either side of the border. The TWP also

considered homosexuality a “deviancy” that should be punishable by death (TWP, n.d.) demonstrating a moral duality between “us” (straight, cis-gendered people) and “them.”.

NPI did not include “pro-trad” language in their mission statement, but they did indicate similar sentiment in their website. Without being as forthright, the NPI demonstrated preference for gender-traditional roles by endorsing an article that noted the differences of ability between the genders and advising role restrictions based on those abilities (NPI, n.d.). Identity Evropa did not have language supporting “traditional” gender roles in their mission statement, but the picture hung on their website featuring their members – sixty-one young white men and two white women – indicated that this theme was not wholly absent from their organization. Amren did not address gender roles or “traditional” views regarding sexuality in their mission statement.

***“Anti-ideology” – moral duality ascribed to alternative ideologies***

The alt-right also reserved their ire for the liberals, globalists and feminists who support multiculturalism, often declaring that these philosophies were promulgated by Jewish people in order to subvert the primacy of white people. The alt-right demonstrated an unusual fervor in denouncing liberals or those who disagree with their principles, often attacking them rabidly. The alt-right used stereotypes that they built and then enforced, assigning pejorative nicknames to those who think differently than they do. These names and negative stereotypes served to create a moral duality between the alt-right and everyone else akin to religious boundary: the alt-right “ingroup” are the only keepers of the truth, the others are (at best) unknowing pagans, at worst, apostates who have rejected the truth they have been given.

The Daily Stormer used provocative language and off-color memes to portray liberals as alternately stupid or the dupes of “the Jewish system” (Anglin, 2016). The created memes to mock liberals – either “SJW’s” or “cucks” – as well as to mock conservatives who doesn’t espouse alt-right views – “cuckservative” (Anglin, 2016). “Cuck” is short for “cuckold” ... is applied to Whites who relish in giving away the resources of their people to foreigners... who support mass immigration, support Black Lives Matter or support Israel” (Anglin, 2016). They also mocked the “Normies,” those who had not yet joined the alt-right and were “incapable of objectively processing information,” also controlled by the “Jewish system” (Anglin, 2016). On the Daily Stormer website, Normies were often portrayed as sheep or as unthinking automatons (“non-player characters”) (Anglin, 2016). Identity Evropa decried the “fetishization of diversity” and “‘progressive’ morality” (Identity, n.d.) of the current (liberal) US society and highlighted the “Left’s” hypocrisy. Amren lamented the liberal “destructive myths of modern times,” the “cartoon history” taught in modern schools and that current laws benefited nonwhite people in a “triumph of [liberal] ideology over common sense, justice and the Constitution” (Amren, n.d.). In NPI’s video mission statement, “Who are we?,” Richard Spencer compared liberalism (freedom, tolerance, multiculturalism) to a trash heap (NPI, n.d.). TWP viewed the entire current government – both liberals and conservatives – as the “enemy of all humanity;” a system run by the “Jewish and their capitalist running dogs” (TWP, n.d.).

### *Other ideological tenets of the alt-right*

Prior to examining these websites, and based on my own experiences with people who hold pro-white dogmas, I would have presupposed that the collective axiology for white nationalist groups could be measured through several criteria: valuing Religions (God, Christianity, “traditional family values”), positive images of America (patriotism, the military, law enforcement, the flag, Second Amendment/guns), positive images of working class/self-made man (hard work, self-reliant, willing to fight) and the idea that these groups are the only ones who know the “truth,” as opposed to the deluded liberals/left. However, I did not find the second tenet (associated with patriotism) in the white nationalist and alt-right websites. This made sense once I understood that most of these groups sought to create a new white ethno-state, which necessarily means ending the current government. Interestingly, some of these groups support President Trump and use the American flag during their protests and rallies. While it doesn’t appear that “patriotism” is a tenet of white nationalist ideology, and that patriotism should not be equated with white supremacy, it is notable that many of these sites use the imagery and language of patriotism to advance their agenda. Many of the images of Identity Evropa protests include marchers with American flags and “American First” slogans, demonstrating an affinity for mainstream American patriotism and patriotic symbols (Identity, n.d.). The Daily Stormer editor, Andrew Anglin, specifically cited the candidacy of President Trump as the nexus around which the alt-right movement blossomed, demonstrating a level of traditional patriotism in fealty to the President (Anglin, 2016). NPI used some patriotic imagery and invoking of American (patriotic)



identity in their website, however, it appeared to be less a flag-waving patriotism than a recognition of a basic tenet of their audiences' identity (NPI, n.d.). NPI's patriotism may be confined to affinity for the current President; in a highly publicized incident, NPI's Richard Spencer hosted a post-election conference in which he declared "Hail, Trump" with his arm raised in a traditional Nazi salute (Lombroso & Appelbaum, 2016).

Traditional Worker Party, on the other hand, did not use patriotic language or imagery, and presented itself as an alternative to currently held patriotism (TWP, n.d.). These examples demonstrate that patriotism, though not fundamental to white supremacy, is recognized by white supremacist movements as being fundamental to many of their adherents and can be considered a common theme, rather than a basic tenet, of white supremacist identity.

### **Identity and threat in the alt-right movement**

In addition to using negative stereotypes to present outsiders as undesirable others, the alt-right used threat to present outgroups members as dangerous. The threat they presented was both immediate and existential – threats to ingroup members' individual safety, threats to their economic well-being, and threats to their way of life. The alt-right used both outgroup threat and relative deprivation to present the outgroup as a threatening other. They used threat and relative deprivation to reinforce social boundaries in the four axiological areas of alt-right ideology: pro-white, anti-nonwhite, pro-trad and anti-ideology. Threat also served to heighten the axiological difference between the alt-right and outgroup members, serving to demonstrate moral duality.

### ***Outgroup threat***

All five alt-right exemplars used outgroup threat to further separate in- and outgroup members. Many of the outgroup threats they presented crossed all four axiological areas of their ideology. When discussing “the Jewish problem” (Anglin, 2016), the threat narratives often included pro-white, anti-nonwhite, anti-ideology and pro-trad aspects, since some alt-right groups believe that Jewish people control liberal ideology to push nonwhite immigration and feminism in order to destroy “white homelands” (TWP, n.d., and Anglin, 2016).

The TWP explicitly viewed Jewish people as threats to white hegemony, white demographic majority, “white” ideology and “traditional values.” They wanted to “Declare war on international Jewry” and stated that the “globalist capitalist system is the enemy of all humanity and represents the greatest threat to the continued existence of our people...” (TWP, n.d.). The TWP framed the outgroup threat as a danger both immediate and all-encompassing. They blamed Jewish people for “mass immigration and anti-white “anti-racism” are an attack on the white working class... Its clear goal... is the complete replacement of our people with an endless supply of alienated peoples, cut off from ties of blood, soil, religion, and identity; who can be more easily controlled and exploited by the Jewish and their capitalist running dogs” (TWP, n.d.). This combines the threat narrative of nonwhite “invaders” with the political, economic and demographic strings being controlled by the “Jewish cabal.”

The TWP also blamed “international forces,” i.e., the “international Jewry,” for liberal ideology spread on the media that “poison the minds of our citizens” (TWP, n.d.).

They were virulent in naming the threat from outgroup along anti-ideology lines, viewing alternate ideology as the “deliberate spreading of lies” which caused “clear and evident harm to our people” (TWP, n.d.). They believed outgroups pushed the alternate ideology in an effort to destroy their way of life. “The harm that has been done to our people because we tolerated evil in our midst will take generations to recover from... that is not ‘free speech.’ That is Genocide...” (TWP, n.d.). They also framed feminism as destructive to “the family” and a threat to their desired way of life, blaming “the Jewish stigma against motherhood and femininity” (TWP, n.d.). In this way, they stereotyped those who pushed alternate ideology (“those who spread false ideas and worldviews that are anathema to the survival of our people” (TWP, n.d.)) as both degenerate and a threat. This described both moral duality as well as clear social boundary.

The Daily Stormer likewise viewed Jewish people as the greatest threat to white hegemony, blaming them for liberal ideology, feminism, and most of their complaints about nonwhite people. They used threat narratives about Jewish people to present them as existential threat to the alt-right pro-white ideology: “Jews are fundamentally opposed to the White race and Western civilization and so must be confronted and ultimately removed from White societies completely” (Anglin, 2016). Like TWP, The Daily Stormer viewed the threat from Jewish people as both immediate and all-encompassing: “[T]he struggle for the continued existence of the White race as a global battle between Whites and the Jews” (Anglin, 2016).

The Daily Stormer viewed all nonwhite people as a threat to their way of life, “[N]on-White immigration into White countries will lead to a complete destruction of

White culture, the White social order and ultimately and extermination of the White race” (Anglin, 2016). They presented the threat to white people in terms calculated to heighten the feeling of danger and present survival of the outgroup as fundamentally opposed to the survival of the ingroup: “[F]looding White nations with non-Whites amounts to a form of calculated genocide... being committed against us” (Anglin, 2016).

Amren (n.d.) used similar threat language to present both pro-white and anti-nonwhite tenets of their ideology. They presented demographic change as a threat to white identity: “If whites permit themselves to become a minority population, they will lose their civilization, their heritage and even their existence as a distinct people.” In other words, if white people became a minority, they would disappear. “[The] single greatest threat facing whites is mass immigration of nonwhites” (Amren, n.d.). Amren considered demographic change an immediate and all-encompassing threat to white lives, livelihood and way of life. “The culture of the West will not survive the disappearance of the people who created it” (Amren, n.d.).

Amren also presented outgroup threat by pushing the narrative of nonwhite people as more criminal than white people. In discussing demographic change, Amren noted, “One of the most obvious consequences of an increase in the black population is an increase in crime” (Amren, n.d.). Outside of their mission statement, on their website homepage, Amren’s choice of news stories to include in their “news ticker” was also designed to present nonwhite people as inherently dangerous, more criminal and violent than white people. The Daily Stormer did the same thing on their website homepage. In

each case, the choice of stories was designed to present nonwhite people as a physical and immediate threat to white people.

In keeping with their more mainstream focus, both Identity and NPI avoided hyperbolic threat narratives in their mission statements. However, Identity Evropa claimed that “ethnic diversity... is an impediment to societal harmony” (Identity, n.d.). As noted previously, it is doubtful that they feel that the issue is with the presence of white people, but with the presence of nonwhite people, painting nonwhite people as a threat to the happiness and well-being of white people. Likewise, NPI had limited inclusion of outgroup threat in their mission statement, though their “Who are you” video directed the viewers to “Resist your dispossession” and presented images of outgroup members marching in solidarity (a Black Lives Matter protest, group of Muslim people demonstrating, an Israeli-sponsored march, and a group of liberals marching) (NPI, n.d.). This implied that outgroups were massing against the interests of white people and presented a powerful image constituting both nonwhite and anti-ideology threat. NPI also included an article posted on their website which discussed the changing demographics in America and impending change to the white majority (“‘2050’ is coming sooner than we thought”): “‘2050’ foretells deeper, even *philosophical* changes to American politics and the American nation” (NPI, 2018).

In each exemplar, the alt-right used outgroup threat to strengthen their message of pro-white collective action, heighten fear of nonwhite people, and sharpen the boundary between both racial and ideological outgroups.

### ***Relative deprivation***

The alt-right also used elements of relative deprivation to present their axiology and heighten the social boundaries and favorable comparison between the ingroup and outgroup. Relative deprivation depends on a feeling of deprivation in comparison to another group, with that deprivation being unfair (Smith, et al, 2012). The “unfairness” is presented when the group is deprived through no fault of their own and because of a “rigged” system (Smith, et al, 2012).

In the alt-right exemplars, one of the main tenets of relative deprivation was that invoking white racial identity was considered “wrong” by the mainstream liberal ideology, though invoking nonwhite racial identity was “right.” This presented a clear picture of unfair deprivation of unifying around one’s racial identity. In Identity Evropa, they discussed the need for all racial groups to have a homeland and noted that even “the Left generally agrees with this assertion, so long as people of European heritage are excluded” (Identity, n.d.). Amren (n.d.) similarly noted this deprivation, “All other [racial] groups take it for granted that they have a right to speak out in their own self interests. Only whites have lost this conviction.” And NPI included this theme in their “Who are you” video, asking why white people “avoid and deny our identity at a time when every other people is asserting its own [identity]” (NPI, n.d.). In each of these examples, the alt-right groups use relative deprivation to bolster their pro-white ideology – if every other group can promote their racial identity, then white people are deprived if they do not. This provides favorable comparison – we’re not white supremacists, we’re

just asserting our identity – at the same time it describes firmer boundaries around each racial group.

Another aspect of relative deprivation presented in the alt-right exemplars was the assertion that white people are at an economic disadvantage, both subsidizing nonwhite people as well as receiving fewer financial benefits than nonwhite people. Amren (n.d.) believed that laws in America had “changed considerably with regard to race” and that the legal framework “evolved in ways that undermine the ability of whites to lead their lives as they wish.” TWP (n.d.) promoted a universal healthcare system which would “work” because it extended only to white people: “This healthcare system will not be one like the modern American system where White families are forced to subsidize millions of foreigners....” This paints a picture of white people unfairly disadvantaged by a rigged system that benefits nonwhites, using relative deprivation to push their pro-white, anti-nonwhite and anti-ideology tenets of their axiology.

The Daily Stormer used relative deprivation in presenting their pro-traditional values axiology. The Daily Stormer decried “the emasculation of men through denying them their traditional role in society” (Anglin, 2016). The Daily Stormer sought a return to the time when women stayed home to raise children. This would remove them from the workforce and return the jobs, financial benefits and status to their “rightful” (i.e., male) owners. Women who worked outside the home “took” jobs from men, a clear example of unfair deprivation. Likewise, the TWP described separate societal roles for men and women, with women’s roles confined to the home and asserted their intention that “no man is ever denied the “right to work” (TWP, n.d.). This demonstrated that the

TWP believed that men who lack jobs were deprived of them, presumably by someone (either female or nonwhite) who “took” that job.

Another example of relative deprivation in the alt-right axiology was the presentation of the overall economic, political, and ideological system as “rigged” by a Jewish (nonwhite) liberal (anti-ideology) cabal. This extended to the economy, controlled by “Jewish oligarchs” and “international Jewry” (TWP, n.d.) which deviated from “common sense economics;” a phenomenon which would “fall into place naturally” “if we were to physically remove the Jews” (Anglin, 2016). It included the prevalent liberal ideology in the United States and the media; “The harm that has been done to our people because we tolerated evil in our midst will take generations to recover from... that is not ‘free speech.’ That is Genocide...” (TWP, n.d.). And it included the political system: “If Trump loses, we are going to have an opportunity to very vocally blame the Jews for his loss, which will serve our purposes nearly as much as a Trump win” (Anglin, 2016). In each case, the description was of a rigged system that unfairly deprived white people, either for the benefit of nonwhite/anti-ideological groups, or at the fault of nonwhite/anti-ideological groups. This deprivation was all-encompassing and extended to both tangible and intangible things: “None of this would be happening if it were not for the Jews” (Anglin, 2016), where “this” included jobs lost, prestige lost, hegemony lost, esteem lost.

### **Propaganda and the alt-right movement**

In Chapter two, I discussed the ways in which propagandists and propaganda tactics make use of identity (“Propaganda, threat and identity”) to advance their message. The alt-right, which is built on identity, also makes use of propaganda tactics in pushing



their message. However, I don't consider their messaging to be propaganda because they don't conceal their identity or purpose. My working definition of propaganda is "*the use of words and word substitutes to propagate an idea or belief (controversial or otherwise) by an outside element who conceal their origin and purpose; propaganda can be made up of truths, half-truths, biases and falsehoods*" (Chapter two – Propaganda). Even though the alt-right movement does not fit my definition of propaganda because they do not conceal their identity from their messaging, the fact that they convey it in indirect ways and use emotional appeals and persuasion rather than education and factual information, aligns it with propaganda tactics.

The alt-right demonstrated examples of an identity movement overtly using propaganda tactics in their messaging. These tactics include the seven primary propaganda devices, described by Cull (2015): glittering generality, transfer, testimonial, bandwagon, card stacking, plain folks and name calling; the devices described by Doob and Robinson (1935): co-mingling indirect and direct messaging, and "swimming with the tide" by attaching a new message to one already accepted by the audience (also described by Jacques Ellul (1965)).

All the alt-right or white nationalist groups I investigated demonstrated the use of the "glittering generality" tactic. Using slogans like "Faith, Family and Folk" (TWP, n.d.) was a form of glittering generality; it provided an attractive, though vague, image of the future that overpowered the messy details (like ethnic cleansing or war) that may be needed to get there. NPI used imagery to convey their "glittering generality" in their

video advertisement “Who are you?”, showing pictures of great European achievers and adorable white children to present their vision and goals (NPI, n.d.).

NPI and the Daily Stormer both make use of “transfer,” the linking of one idea or symbol to another, by linking their white supremacist ideas to the concept of defending freedom of speech. TWP uses transfer by linking their support for a white ethno-state to being pro-religion and pro-family; this was also an example of using the device “swimming with the tide,” i.e., pushing ideas with which the audience already agreed and linking them to another. The TWP used transfer to raise the feeling of threat and demonstrate negative stereotypes of Jewish people: the TWP equates Judaism with Satanism (and banned it in their white ethno-state).

The greatest example of “card-stacking” was displayed in the alt-right news website Daily Stormer (Daily Stormer, n.d.). They maintained a news feed that exclusively reported on nonwhite crime. Showing only crime committed by nonwhite people “stacks the deck” against nonwhite people by feeding into negative stereotypes about them. This is also an example of the “constant and continuous flow” technique described by both Ellul (1965) and Doob and Robinson (1935). The news reports about nonwhite crime are unrelenting and unmitigated by reports about white-perpetrated crime.

The Daily Stormer was also notable as an example of stifling dialogue. The website blog and the comments that sprang from every article all focused on the “normies” – those who had not yet been “red pillled” and who were still “sheep” (Daily Stormer, n.d.). (The term “red pill” refers to a scene in the movie *The Matrix* (Silver,

Wachowski & Wachowski, 1999), in which the protagonist was given the choice between taking a red pill which would reveal the disturbing truth about life, or the blue pill, which allowed him to maintain his comfortable illusions.) This stifled dialogue and critical thinking by explicitly stating that only the commenters and the alt-right knew the “truth.” Those who still maintained liberal ideas were deluded by the lame-stream “Jewish-controlled” media; are “libtards” or “snowflakes” or “cuckservatives.”

The Daily Stormer was also the site that most frequently uses the propaganda technique of “name-calling,” using all the previously mentioned terms for both liberals and conservatives who don’t agree with their rhetoric and using racial and ethnic slurs to describe nonwhite people and Jewish people. Their name-calling was designed to both denigrate the objects of their ire and demonstrate that they (members of the alt-right) were irreverent, humorous and un-politically correct. In this way, the Daily Stormer also utilized the device “plain folks,” though in this case, the plain folks were meme-loving, disaffected white Millennial men.

“Plain folks” takes on a different tenor in the TWP; they invoked the term “traditional family values” to describe their brand of “plain folk.” The TWP used the “plain folks” device to call for the nationalization of key industries, at the same time they highlight the threat to plain folks (“the people”) by the international Jewish cabal: “remove the Jewish, internationalist and capitalist stranglehold on information and resources, and put these to work for the benefit of the nation and people, not international stockholders or Jewish oligarchs” (TWP, n.d.).

The “testimonial” device was best displayed by the NPI and Richard Spencer – Spencer is a good looking, confident young white man who has become the face of the alt-right. By linking his clean cut, frat-boy-next-door appearance with the alt-right movement, he normalized white supremacy and raised it from being the bastion of older, tattooed, toothless, uneducated back-woods white men to be an acceptable position for college educated, collared-shirt-wearing, young white men. He served as a spokesman and testimonial for the movement, and as a model or archetype for aspiring young white supremacists.

The online medium by which the alt-right pushed their messaging served as the best example of the “bandwagon” device: those who ascribed to these beliefs were able to find out they were not alone, without ever leaving their home. The blogs, comment/messaging boards and chat forums that alt-righters used embodied the “bandwagon” device because the numerous screennames attached to the comments imply that there were many people who felt the same way. The TWP also displayed an example of the “bandwagon” device through the links on its website to other white nationalist groups: the “National Front,” which linked nationalist groups around the world, and “Shieldwall TN,” which “is working to establish a growing community of like-minded White folk throughout the area to benefit themselves and their families both now and when this nation begins to balkanize” (TWP, n.d.). Another way that these alt-right and white nationalist groups used the bandwagon approach was to post pictures of their rallies, meetings and demonstrations, to demonstrate that other, real people are part of the movement.

Anglin (2016) positioned his “Normie’s Guide to the Alt-Right” as a primer; presumably, he wrote it for those who are curious about joining the movement. This was clear in the positive collective actions, both actions taken and future actions, which Anglin described towards the end of his “Guide.” Anglin claimed that the Alt-Right has a “cohesive constituency” of 4-6 million people, which he projected to grow “until a large portion of the White demographic” believed as he does. According to Anglin (2016), “the future is very bright” and “*History will remember us*” [original in italics]. All these statements served to paint the alt-right movement as inevitable, strong, growing, and noble. In these statements, Anglin used the bandwagon technique: showing that there were many people who already felt the same way and the idea would continue to grow.

The propaganda device, “swim with the tide,” was used powerfully by each group. It helped them walk their audience, particularly those who were not yet “true believers,” from a less extreme viewpoint to the alt-right viewpoint. TWP used this technique to explain how their desire to overthrow the government of the United States did not run counter to their audience’s patriotism. “Our position on sovereignty is neither treasonous nor seditious, as it is self-evident that this system’s own contradictions and self-inflicted crises will prove its undoing” (TWP, n.d.). Amren used a similar approach to convince their audience that their position on white identity was morally appropriate: “[R]ace realism ... was considered common sense... That race is an important aspect of individual and group identity... and that it is entirely normal for whites (or for people of any other race) to want to be the majority race in their own homeland” (Amren, n.d.). In this way, the alt-right groups attached their ideas to opinions that were already held by

their audience and push the audience along the “tide” of ideas until they arrive at the alt-right set of beliefs.

The Daily Stormer demonstrated the device of linking indirect and direct messaging through their use of irony, humor and memes. Their inappropriate and irreverent memes served as “gateway drugs” to attract audience members to visit the site and be exposed to the rhetoric. Some of the jokes were mildly inappropriate and some were wildly so, but even these could be dismissed as “ironic” and their associated racism is in that way diminished. The SPLC likewise noted this tactic, “The strategic ability to disown (or be discrete about) repulsive ideas has been key to the alt-right. Johnson has praised the value of the alt-right’s ironic web culture which provides “a space where people can try ideas on for size and then if Mom looks over their shoulder, they can say ‘woah, I’m just playing around here, don’t take this seriously, right? I’m not committed to this, I was just being ironic ...’ That’s very useful.” Amren’s pseudo-intellectual equivocations similarly offer an entry point to the movement for those with highbrow, academic pretenses.

### **Synopsis**

The alt-right groups used their racial and ideological axiology to strengthen boundaries and build esteem. Their axiology called for physical boundaries around in- and outgroups (a geographic “white ethno-state”); they also used stereotypes, dehumanization and moral duality to describe social boundaries between the groups. The alt-right groups built esteem through favorable comparison, justification and recounting ingroup “glories.” The alt-right axiology built boundaries based on the defining tenet of

their axiology – their call for a white ethno-state – and used threat and relative deprivation to strengthen boundaries, heighten anti-nonwhite sentiment and bolster feelings of ingroup loyalty.

The alt-right groups believed that white people were more intelligent, trustworthy and less violent/criminal than nonwhite people. The groups used these stereotypes to create positive esteem for white people, strengthening their sense of white racial identity. It gave the audience a clear picture of the ingroup – white people – and sparked feelings of “we”-ness by invoking concepts like “homeland” and “kinship.” The rhetoric established a moral imperative for white people to identify as white and to embrace a white identity, with each alt-right group pointing out that “All other groups take it for granted that they have a right to speak out in their own interests” (Amren, n.d.), so white people should, too. They also used positive stereotypes, along with collective action statements, to create powerful borders between white people and nonwhite people. In some cases, they even built moral duality around their pro-white rhetoric, connecting racial discourse with ideological discourse. These aspects – the positive esteem of being part of the ingroup, the moral homogeneity, and the sharp boundaries between white and nonwhite groups – were especially stark when combined with the second major aspect of alt-right ideology: anti-nonwhite rhetoric.

The alt-right groups used anti-nonwhite rhetoric, including stereotypes and dehumanization, to promote ingroup esteem through favorable comparison, to strengthen social boundaries between the groups, and to justify their call for a white ethno-state. One major anti-nonwhite theme was the portrayal of nonwhite people as un-American. They

were either portrayed as working against the well-being of the country (Jewish people), or invaders intent on overrunning and destroying the country (nonwhite immigrants, especially Hispanic or Muslim). All the groups called for an end to immigration and a separation of nonwhite Americans from “true” (white) Americans. The groups used moral duality to further separate nonwhite people from white people, painting nonwhite people as violent criminals, or degenerates, or evil cabal members intent on controlling the world.

The alt-right axiology encompassing pro-traditional values and anti-alternate ideology used stereotypes and moral duality to fortify social boundaries and build ingroup esteem. The alt-right created and enforced negative stereotypes to present non-alt-right thinking individuals as “less-than”: less smart, less free thinking, less common sense, less moral. This created a duality between the ingroup (alt-right) and the outgroup (everyone else); the memes and labels specifically sought to paint outgroup members as (literally) unthinking automatons.

Those groups with the most enmity for alternative ideologies seemed to be the ones which equated those ideologies with benefits to nonwhite people or which ascribed those ideologies as originating from “the Jewish system.” In fact, TWP, NPI and Daily Stormer all attributed feminist ideology as originating from “the Jews.” This attribution linked both the anti-ideology rhetoric and the “pro-trad” (traditional values) rhetoric to anti-nonwhite rhetoric.

In each exemplar, the alt-right groups used threat narratives and images to paint nonwhite groups as a danger to the hegemony of white people. The alt-right groups



presented liberal ideology as a threat to the well-being of white people; some of the groups presented non-traditional gender roles as a threat to white people. The alt-right used extreme language (“genocide” and “extinction”) to paint the threat as dire, immediate, and epic. All the threats, whether from nonwhite, other ideology or non-trad groups, were threats against the pro-white way of life.

**Table 1 Alt-right axiology**

	<b>Pro white Axiology</b>	<b>Anti-nonwhite Axiology</b>	<b>Anti-ideology / Pro traditional Axiology</b>
<b>Boundary</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Desire to establish a white ethno-state</li> <li>- Retain a supermajority in “white homelands”</li> <li>- White people as citizens</li> <li>- White people as “true” Americans</li> <li>- “Race realism”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Nonwhite people don’t belong in America</li> <li>- Nonwhite people should move/be deported to a nonwhite country</li> <li>- Nonwhite immigration is an “invasion” and must be stopped</li> <li>- Ethnic diversity is a mistake</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Men and women should have different roles in society</li> <li>- Alternate ideology (including liberalism and feminism) is against the alt-right worldview and wrong</li> </ul>
<b>Build Esteem</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Invoking glories of “Western Civilization”</li> <li>- Imagery of white luminaries, leaders, and achievements</li> <li>- Justification for boundary (race realism: “racial consciousness is normal and healthy”)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Nonwhite people are “less than” (“Dindu Nuffin” and “We wuz Kangz”)</li> <li>- Nonwhite people are not as smart</li> <li>- Nonwhite people are degenerate</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Liberals/liberalism is degenerate</li> <li>- Liberals have been “cuckolded” by nonwhites into giving up their resources</li> <li>- Liberals have “fetishized” diversity</li> <li>- Non-alt-right people are dupes,</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- White ethno-state would be more moral, prosperous and “high-trust” by being white</li> <li>- White people are smarter and more ambitious</li> </ul>		<p>controlled by the Jewish system</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Liberals espouse a false history; liberals are ignorant</li> </ul>
<b>Collective Action</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “We must secure the existence of our people and a future for White children”</li> <li>- “We must create a better world for people of European heritage”</li> <li>- “Resist your dispossession”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “We declare war on... international Jewry”</li> <li>- “Every other people is asserting its own identity”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “Man doesn’t live and die for abstractions [like liberty, democracy]”</li> </ul>
<b>Sense of “we”</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “Homeland”</li> <li>- “Our people”</li> <li>- “Faith, family and folk”</li> <li>- “Our culture, identity, families and blood”</li> <li>- Only we know the truth (not “cartoon history”) (have been “red-pilled”)</li> </ul>		<p>“There will be no room for subversive or alien elements because they are not members of our national community and not ‘our people’”</p>
<b>Dehumanization</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Judaism as Satanism</li> <li>- “Le Happy Merchant,” caricature representing Jewish people as an “evil monster”</li> <li>- “Holohoax,” stripping of human tragedy</li> <li>- Black people as barbaric post-Katrina</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Non alt-right thinking people as “Normies,” “sheep” and “non-player characters”</li> </ul>
<b>Moral duality</b>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Jewish people are the “diametric opposite of</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Homosexuality is a “deviancy”</li> </ul>

		<p>everything we stand for”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Holocaust “would have been justified” because of the perfidy of the Jewish people</li> <li>- Jewish people control dominant ideology to push nonwhite immigration and feminism to destroy “white homelands”</li> </ul>	<p>punishable by death</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- The government system is the “enemy of all humanity;”</li> <li>- Liberal ideology encourages nonwhite immigration and feminism in order to destroy “white homelands”</li> <li>- Liberal ideology and media influence are evil and harmed “our people...” “that is not ‘free speech.’ That is Genocide...”</li> </ul>
<b>Threat</b>	<p>“The struggle for the continued existence of the White race as a global battle between Whites and Jews”</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Nonwhite immigration is “genocide” and the “single greatest threat;” “extermination” of white people and the loss of “their civilization, their heritage and existence as a people”</li> <li>- Nonwhite people as a physical/safety/criminal threat</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Liberal ideology “poisons the minds of our people”</li> <li>- The “globalist capitalist system is the enemy of all humanity and represents the greatest threat to the continued existence of our people...”</li> <li>- “Anti-white ‘anti-racism’ [is] an attack on the white working class...”</li> </ul>
<b>Relative Deprivation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- White people are vilified for racial consciousness but other groups are not.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Social and civil laws have changed to disadvantage white people</li> <li>- System that disadvantages white people is “rigged” by</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Women who work outside the home “take” jobs from men</li> <li>- The liberal system (political, social and</li> </ul>

		<p>the Jewish cabal that controls political, social and economic world.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- White people subsidize healthcare for nonwhite people</li> </ul>	<p>economic) is “rigged”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Culture “normalization” (alt-right “seeks to restore balance to society more broadly... deal with degenerate ills”)</li> </ul>
<b>Stereotypes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “High trust”</li> <li>- “Western civilization”</li> <li>- more intelligent</li> <li>- more ambitious</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Criminal</li> <li>- Violent</li> <li>- Degenerate / subversive</li> <li>- Less intelligent</li> <li>- Jewish people as diabolical</li> <li>- Black people as incapable</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Liberals as deluded, degenerate, duped into giving away “white” resources</li> <li>- Feminists as subversive</li> <li>- Women as less capable (gender equality is “entirely ridiculous”)</li> </ul>

## **CHAPTER EIGHT – IDEOLOGY, METHODOLOGY AND PROPAGANDA OF RUSSIAN-SPONSORED FACEBOOK ADS**

The Russian sponsored Facebook ads that I evaluated (the 303 unique ads that fit into the alt-right rhetoric) displayed the same identity aspects as those found in the alt-right: racial identity (pro-white and anti-nonwhite) and ideological identity (anti-ideological and pro-traditional). The ads also invoked threat and relative deprivation in order to push their messaging. They used stereotypes, including racial stereotypes and ideological stereotypes, to enforce social boundary and build esteem through favorable comparison. They strengthened those boundaries by comingling anti-ideological identity factors with anti-nonwhite identity factors. There were infrequent (but extreme) examples of dehumanization and several examples of invoking moral duality; both identity aspects were aimed at building and reinforcing the borders between “us” (conservative, white, Christian, straight) and “them” (everybody else).

All of the Russian sponsored Facebook ads cited here were found on the homepage for the U.S. House of Representatives Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence, Democrats (HPSCI(D), 2018) , <https://democrats-intelligence.house.gov/social-media-content/social-media-advertisements.htm> . To differentiate them, the ads have been identified here by their associated Facebook page, the year and quarter they were released, and the ad number found in the upper left corner of their metadata page, rather than a traditional in-text citation.

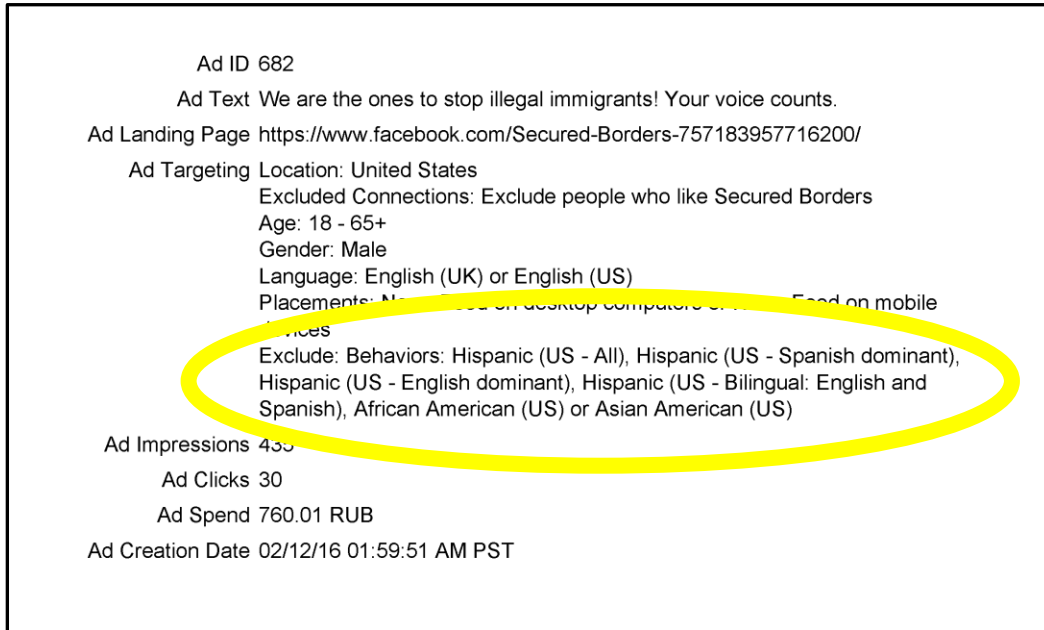
## **Ideology**

### **Pro-white**

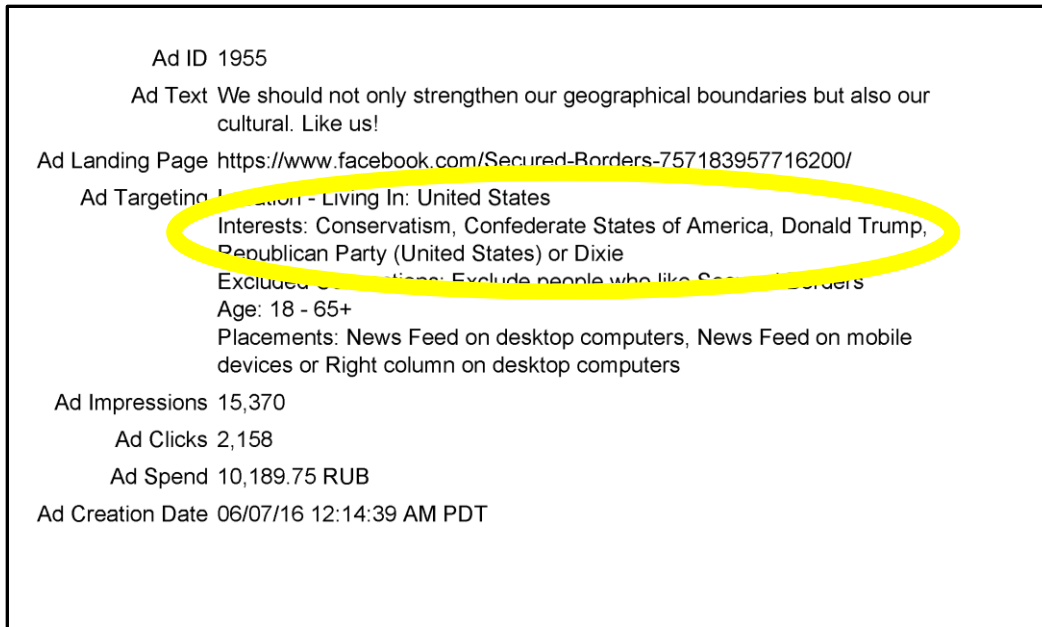
The Russian-sponsored Facebook ads used collective action, positive stereotypes and favorable comparison to spread pro-white rhetoric. The pro-white rhetoric was not as straightforward as it was in the alt-right websites; since these Facebook ads did not purport to be white supremacist, espousing openly pro-white views would have alienated the audience. However, the ads found other ways to ensure that the audience understood that white people comprised the ingroup “we” in their messaging. In many cases, the ads used pro-white rhetoric juxtaposed with anti-nonwhite rhetoric in order to more subtly identify the racial boundaries around the ingroup “we”. In other cases, the ads demonstrated that the ingroup was white through the “targeted” audience in their metadata.

One example of the use of metadata to describe racial boundaries targeted the ad to only white men by excluding all who were Hispanic, African American and Asian American. They included a call to collective action - “We are the ones to stop illegal immigrants!” and added a measure of esteem for their (white) audience - “Your voice counts.” (Secured Borders, 2016 Q1, 0682) (Figure 4). This allowed the “we” to be defined narrowly as white men. In other ads, rather than specify racial groups for targeting, some of the ads targeted their ads towards “Interests” which were strongly aligned with pro-white interests, such as Confederate States of America or White Nationalism. One ad explicitly discussed the need for boundaries – “We should not only strengthen our geographic borders but also our cultural.” (Secured Borders, 2016 Q2,

1956) and racialized those boundaries by targeting their ad at people whose “Interests” included “Confederate States of America” (Figure 5).



**Figure 4 Metadata (Secured Borders, 2016 Q1, 0682)**



**Figure 5 : Metadata (Secured Borders, Q2, 1955)**

When metadata was not used to identify a white audience, the ads usually relied on the exclusion of nonwhite people to identify the ingroup as white. For example, ads often identified the nonwhite outgroup; then, with the boundaries drawn between the ingroup “we” and outgroup “they,” invited the ingroup to collective action or used positive stereotypes to build esteem. One ad defined the outgroup as immigrants, who caused “interethnic tensions” and could destroy “our culture.... We don’t hate foreigners, we are glad to see tourists.... But we cannot allow them to stay here” (Being Patriotic, 2015 Q3, 0448). The ad drew the boundary between ingroup (white) and outgroup (nonwhite) before calling on the ingroup to end immigration. The attached image was crystal clear in describing the racial boundaries: a picture of a group of 1900’s era white



immigrants on a ship, juxtaposed against a present-day picture of nonwhite immigrants at a land border crossing, with the caption, “See the difference?” (Figure 6). This echoed the alt-right’s delineation of “good” and “bad” immigration – good immigration included the centuries of white migration that allowed white people to live in America; bad immigration is nonwhite immigration.

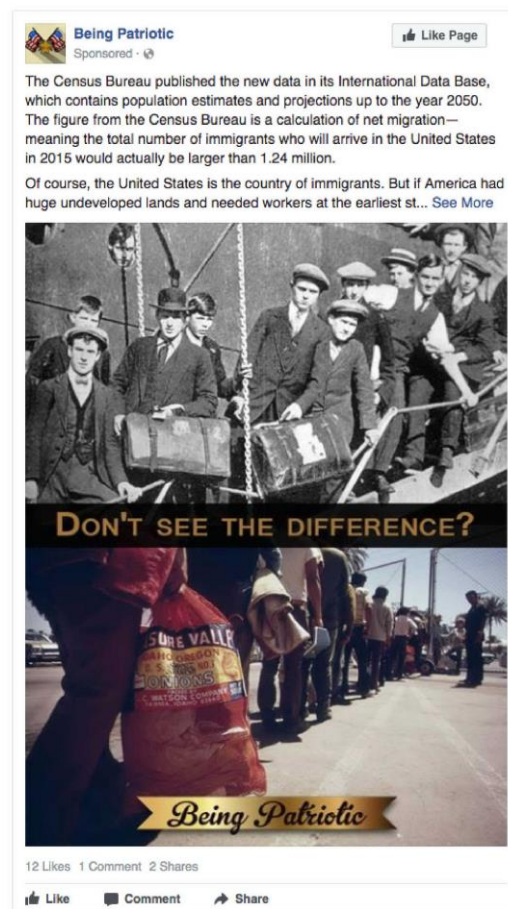


Figure 6 : Ad (Being Patriotic, 2015 Q3, 0448)

One of the common tropes of white supremacy is that American culture is synonymous with white culture; the natural conclusion of that assumption is that being American is synonymous with being white. Many of the Russian-sponsored Facebook ads used this same assumption, describing racial boundaries around being American or being a citizen. One ad described people from south of the border – describing boundary around the nonwhite people to the south – and declared, “America for Americans!” (Being Patriotic, 2015 Q3, 0514). This indicated that “citizenship” was the bastion of white people. An ad for the page “Instagram of the United States” (InstaOTUS) targeted their ad to those whose interests included “Confederate States of America” and their ad text read: “InstaOTUS for American patriots only” (‘MericanFury, 2016 Q2, 1885). This ad demonstrated the belief that patriotism and the associated benefits of citizenship is for white people. One ad combined a call for collective action with their description of boundary around white (citizens) and nonwhite (refugees) by advertising an anti-refugee rally titled, “Citizens before refugees” (Secured Borders, 2016 Q3, 1957); the ad was targeted at those whose interests included “Confederate States of America” and the ad image was that of a scared white child, a stranger’s hand clapped over her mouth.

In some cases, the pro-white rhetoric was promoted by imbuing the audience with positive esteem for the ingroup by invoking ingroup values. One ad declared that “We fight for constitution and traditional values;” then showed an image of the American founding fathers, guns, Confederate flags and a smiling white family with the caption, “If you support all this, we need you here!” (Southern\_Rebel\_Pride, 2015 Q4, 1891). The ad used positive images to strengthen the ingroup’s sense of shared identity and culture, to

shore up the “tent” of racial identity (Volkan, 1997). Another ad showed images of the Dukes of Hazzard, Confederate Flag, Stone Mountain, guns, a Civil war soldier and Abraham Lincoln (Southern\_Rebel\_Pride, 2015 Q4, 1887) in a bald display of “white” identity, designed to inspire feelings of white esteem.

The ads also used “history” to reinforce feelings of white esteem. Several ads discussed the “real” origins of the Civil War: “Many of y’all know that the civil war was not at all about slavery, it was about freedom and independence from the Union,” with a late 19<sup>th</sup> Century photograph of people, including some black men gathered around a Confederate flag, (Southern\_Rebel\_Pride, 2016 Q1, 1880) (Figure 7). In this case, the ad used the presence of nonwhite people in the ad’s image to prove their version of history.

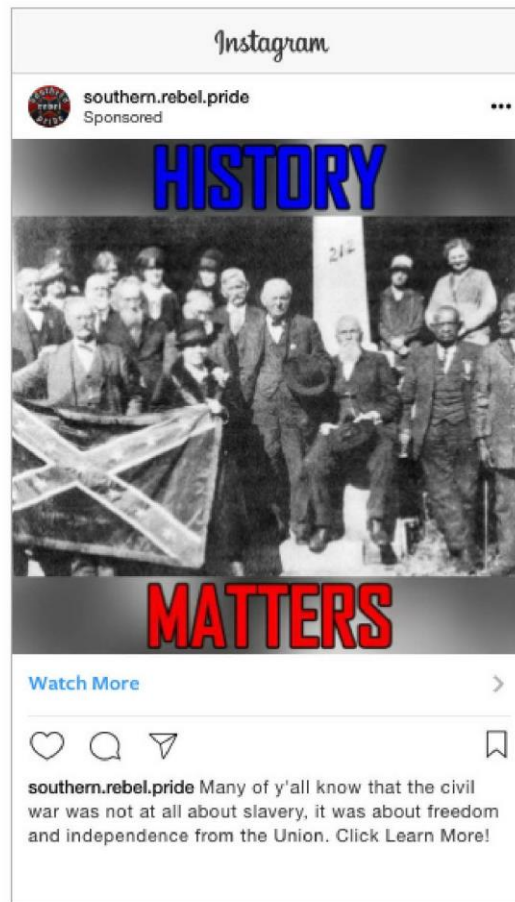


Figure 7 : Ad, (Southern\_Rebel\_Pride, 2016 Q1, 1880)

In an echo of the alt-right’s focus on telling the “real” history of white greatness, some of the ads also promised their pages would deliver the truth. One ad exhorted, “Learn about our country’s history with us!” and “South was not the Center of Slavery” (Southern\_Rebel\_Pride, 2015 Q4, 1896). Another ad cited the disparate pay scale of the Confederate Army and the “Army of Union” to prove their assertion that the Confederacy was not racist (Southern\_Rebel\_Pride, 2016 Q1, 1876).

Some of the ads specifically described the boundary between white people and nonwhite people by invoking “culture” and describing nonwhite cultural attributes as anathema to American culture. One ad declared: “No more mosques – Protect American culture” (Stop AI, 2017, Q2, 3258). Another quoted a Surah from the Quran about killing nonbelievers, “This... is how Syrian refugees respect our culture.... That’s the difference between our cultures” (Stop AI, 2016 Q2, 1300). Some Facebook ads used a combination of pro-white inclusion with anti-nonwhite stereotypes (“Islam is an invasive war cult... with no place in any civilized society” (Stop AI, 2017 Q2, 3263)) to promote pro-white rhetoric. Other ads described white collective action through relative deprivation (“Stop refugees! They’re [sic] taking our jobs!” (Stop Refugees, 2015 Q4, 1303)) or white collective action with outgroup threat (“Syrian refugees... are not victims of war, they are the war itself. We need to protect ourselves from this menace....” (Secured Borders, 2016 Q2, 1960)) to describe the boundary between white and nonwhite, Christian and non-Christian, ingroup and outgroup.

### **Anti-nonwhite**

Many of the examples of pro-white and anti-nonwhite rhetoric in the Russian-sponsored Facebook ads were the result of either favorable comparison or equivocation/justification involving aspects of both types of rhetoric. In favorable comparison, the white audience’s feelings of esteem were raised through the juxtaposition of both negative outgroup stereotypes and positive ingroup stereotypes. In equivocation/justification, the ads raised the white audience’s feelings of ingroup esteem

and defense of their outgroup derision through applying fundamental attribution error to both positive and negative stereotypes.

Fundamental attribution error (described in Chapter 4) is our human tendency to attribute different reasons to the errors of ingroup versus outgroup members. For ingroup members, an error or disadvantage (such as being convicted of a crime) is usually attributed to outside circumstances like bad luck or an unfair judge; for outgroup members, the same error or disadvantage is often attributed to innate character flaws. In the Russian sponsored Facebook ads, using equivocation raised the esteem of the white audience by assuring them that they weren't racist, and the system wasn't racist; but rather, the nonwhite people being disadvantaged were bad people. One Facebook ad decried then-candidate Clinton's promise not to deport children, only criminals: "And we know what's behind this word "children" — young men who claim to be less than 18. Same way the "illegals without a criminal record" is also those who are not proved to be criminals yet" (Being Patriotic, 2016 Q1, 0539). Reinforcing the stereotype that Hispanic men are criminals provided the justification that the audience needed to ignore the pricking of their conscience: they're not really kids, they're criminals.

Similarly, another Facebook ad used the same anti-nonwhite stereotype to oppose the Obama administration decision to release nonviolent inmates: "Obama has criticized overblown sentencing laws that "disproportionately impact communities of color." But ...If Latinos commit crimes often than whites, it doesn't mean that some Latino criminals should escape penalty?" (Being Patriotic, 2015 Q4, 0503) (Figure 8). Don't worry, the ad

assured the white audience; the system we support isn't racist, nonwhite people are inherently more criminal than white people.

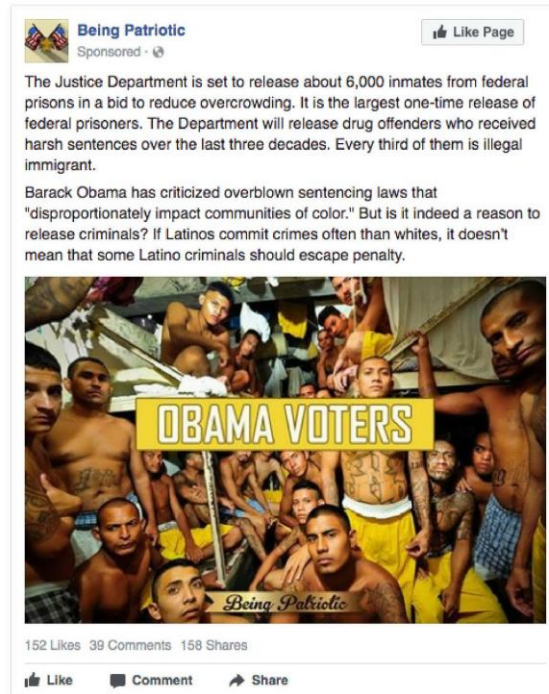
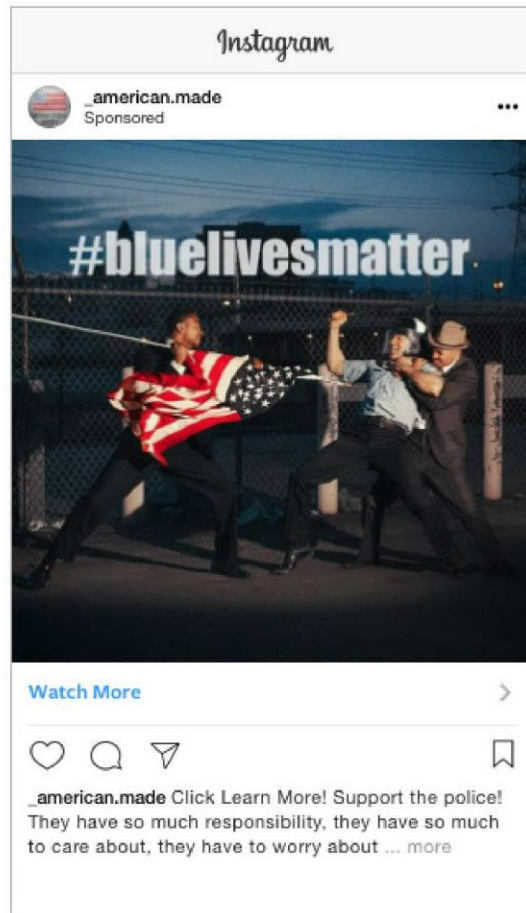


Figure 8 : Ad (Being Patriotic, 2015 Q4, 0503)

The other integration of pro-white and anti-nonwhite rhetoric was in the use of favorable comparison, using positive ingroup and negative outgroup stereotypes to widen the distance between white esteem and nonwhite derision. In one extreme example, used to promote a pro-police rhetoric in the face of a popular outcry against police brutality,



**Figure 9 : Ad (AmericanMade Tea Party, 2016 Q1, 1918)**

the juxtaposition between the “good” white police officer and the “evil” black criminals demonstrates moral duality. Not content with the black versus white imagery, the Facebook ad also included aspects of patriotism in the staged photo by having the black man stab the white police officer with an American flag to demonstrate the nonwhite ruination of America (American Made Tea Party, 2016 Q1, 1918) (Figure 9).



Another example of moral duality was in the Facebook ads comparison between the “good” white police officers and the “bad” nonwhite activists, particularly Black Lives Matter (BLM) activists, and their liberal supporters. This was also an example of anti-nonwhite rhetoric being linked to anti-ideology rhetoric. One ad railed against Obama’s speech during the funeral of slain police officers: Obama “takes sides with rioters and racists... literally called for open war against police officers and white.” (Heart of Texas, 2016 Q3, 0751). Another example of boundary that approaches moral duality was in a Facebook ad for a rally against Clinton; it described two opposing sides with Clinton (liberals) and BLM (nonwhite people) on one side, and law-abiding citizens (white people, conservatives) and the police on the other side. The image was of a formation of white police officers, “Hillary Clinton calls these people ‘racists’ and ‘white terrorists.’ We call them heroes and patriots” (Being Patriotic, 2016 Q3, 0465) (Figure 21). In this way, the use of both positive and negative stereotypes served to create boundary and moral duality.

Another way in which the ads created boundary was in comingling the concept of “nonwhite” with “non-American.” This is the mirror to the boundary created by equating “white” with “American.” The most common display of this was in the use of the term “invader” to describe nonwhite immigrants, which delineated boundary between Americans (white) and invaders (nonwhite). Many of these ads also called for collective actions, for white Americans to protect their homeland against the invaders (many examples, including Stop AI, 2016 Q2, 1362).

Another ad described the boundary between white people as Americans and nonwhite as non-Americans; the ad discussed a confrontation between “residents” (nonwhite Muslim women) and “Americans” (white men) which took place in Minnesota. The “Americans” spoke out against Sharia and refugees while the “residents” demonstrated for tolerance. This ad also used negative stereotypes of Muslim people as primitive to describe social boundary: “...Muslims ... should be deported back to their 7th century countries” (Being Patriotic, 2015 Q3, 0508). In another example, Obama is pictured as an ISIS leader, demonstrating that nonwhite people – even those we elect President – are not true Americans (Stop AI, 2016 Q2, 1332) (Figure 10). Many of the Russian-sponsored Facebook pages discussed in this research demonstrated strong pro-gun/pro-Second Amendment rhetoric, equating that rhetoric with being pro-American. However, that same rhetoric was used to describe boundary between white and nonwhite Americans, with the former “worthy” of the Second Amendment and the latter, unworthy. One of the ads featured a news story in which a gun shop owner banned Muslims from his shop because “A lot of Muslims become Islamists, who pose a real threat to our national security. We consider that it is really dangerous to sell arms to Muslims, as there're a lot of terrorists among them. The 2nd amendment was written for



Figure 10 : Ad (Stop AI, 2016 Q2, 1332)

the people, but...” The gun shop owner used a Confederate flag as a background to his announcement, specifying that to be an American was to be white (Being Patriotic, 2015 Q3, 0432).

The most common display of nonwhite rhetoric was in the use of negative stereotypes about nonwhite people. One stereotype of nonwhite people displayed in the Russian-sponsored Facebook ads was of nonwhite people as violent criminals. One ad described “illegals” as “Rapists, drug dealers, human traffickers; and others. The percent of innocent poor families searching for a better life is too small to become an argument for amnesty and Texas warm welcome” (Heart of Texas, 2016 Q3, 0708). One ad featured the picture of a rapist who was also an undocumented immigrant; his criminal

actions were characterized as the US government “letting the invaders do all they want” (Stop AI, 2017 Q2, 3260). Another ad declared, “More than 2,000 illegal aliens commit sex assaults every year in Texas alone. Americans would really feel safer, if the government closes the borders and deports all illegal aliens” (Stop AI, 2016 Q3, 1278). The Russian-sponsored Facebook ads used the negative stereotype of nonwhite people (Hispanic men) as violent criminals to heighten anti-nonwhite sentiment.

The ads also used negative stereotypes of Muslim people as violent, religion blinded extremists, to invoke anti-nonwhite sentiment. The ads also used the negative stereotypes to strengthen boundaries: “Islam is an invasive war cult... with no place in any civilized society” (Stop AI, 2017 Q2, 3263). This ad drew sharp boundaries around us (“civilized”) and them (a “war cult”). One ad used pro-white collective action and negative nonwhite stereotypes to promote their message: “We Americans are united against the Muslim aggressors... we’ve got to stop playing with fire and send all the Muslim invaders out of the country!” (Heart of Texas, 2015 Q4, 0754).

There were some examples of anti-nonwhite stereotypes being used to dehumanize the outgroup. One frequent example was the use of the term “illegals” to describe undocumented or illegal immigrants; using the description “illegal” without an associated noun (“immigrant”) removes the humanity from the term and leaves only the criminality. There were many examples of this, including “We call them illegals, she [Clinton] calls them voters” (Being Patriotic, 2016 Q1, 0539). Another ad that demonstrated dehumanization began with negative stereotypes about illegal immigrants “flooding our country with drugs” who “are a major threat to Americas integrity. They

don't care about American laws, history and heritage.” The ad concluded by saying, “Considering the fact that they multiply like rabbits, soon we will all wear sombreros. We need to stop this invasion” (Secured Borders, 2016 Q2, 0695). By far, the most dire example of anti-nonwhite rhetoric using dehumanization was the ad that included a



Figure 11 : Ad (Stop AI, 2016 Q2, 1289)

caricature of a Mexican man, wearing a sombrero, superimposed on a picture of a bug. The ad stated “Parasite is an organism that lives in or on another organism and benefits by deriving nutrients at the host's expense. About 20 million parasites live in the United States illegally. They exploit Americans and give nothing in return. Isn't it time to get rid

of parasites that are destroying our country?” (Stop AI, 2016 Q2, 1289) (Figure 11). By equating immigrants with bugs, the ad removed their humanity and applied an overlay of disgust before promoting collective (white) action to “get rid of [the] parasites.”

Another negative stereotype was that nonwhite immigrants were “ungrateful” – “[N]ot even trying to be modest and grateful for our help!” (Secured Borders, 2016 Q2, 1960) – or were “uppity” – “Illegals think they are the proprietors in America” (Stop AI, 2017 Q2, 3259). The theme of nonwhites being “uppity” – undeserving of a place in the ingroup’s world – was not confined to nonwhite immigrants but extended to black people. In advertising an anti-Beyoncé rally, following the artist’s show highlighting police brutality, one ad declared: “No more chaos! InstaOTUS stands against racism” (‘MericanFury, 2016 Q1, 1942). In other words, when nonwhite people advocate for their rights (act “uppity”), it is chaos.

In some cases, the stereotypes were implied using the coded language of the alt-right: “American national identity is undermined and replaced by ridiculous social experiments... The Nation must unite against reverse racism, against those who want to destroy America” (Being Patriotic, 2016 Q4, 0433). In this ad, “ridiculous social experiment” means “diversity” and “reverse racism” means BLM activists. By using (slightly) coded language, the ads spoke clearly to those who had already been exposed to the alt-right movement. Other examples of alt-right language about nonwhite people were common among the ads that pushed for an anti-interventionalist platform. The negative rhetoric extended to both Jewish people and Muslim people: “Our [American] soldiers are there [Syria] to fight and die for Globalists, Saudis and Israelis, but not for

Americans.” (Being Patriotic, 2017, Q2, 0767). Often, “globalist” was used to mean “Jewish people”: “Trump and the American nation must defeat globalist politicians and the Establishment” (Being Patriotic, 2017 Q2, 0769). The alt-right anti-nonwhite verbiage of the world being run by a globalist, Jewish cabal, was echoed in the Russian-sponsored Facebook ads.

### **Anti-ideology**

The anti-ideology sentiment invoked by the Russian-sponsored propaganda Facebook ads was the same type of sentiment displayed by the alt-right movement. It was not simply that the ideology differed from their own, it was that they attributed negative characteristics to those who held the ideology. Liberals were stupid: “Stop liberal ignorance! Defend our confederate heritage” (Southern\_Rebel\_Pride, 2015 Q4, 1882). Liberals were deluded as to the “true” history: “Libtards are eager to blame our forefathers for being racist... but they don’t underpin their empty words with facts...” (Southern\_Rebel\_Pride, 2016 Q1, 1876). Liberals stifled free speech: “Have your say about Muslim Immigration without politically censorship!” (Secured Borders, 2016 Q1 0681).

The Facebook ads highlighted moral duality through anti-ideology rhetoric: more than simply holding an ideology that differed from that of conservatives, liberals (particularly Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama) wanted to hurt America and Americans. One ad stated that “democrats continue to let illegals into the US. They want to keep the border open so violent illegal aliens can victimize our citizens” (Being Patriotic, 2015 Q3, 0514). Liberals not only had differing ideas on immigration, they held those opinions

in order to “victimize” American citizens. This difference served to ascribe boundaries between the ingroup – conservatives – and the outgroup – liberals – as well as to the racial groups loosely aligned with those ideological groups.

The Facebook ads used anti-ideological sentiment to paint the Obama (liberal) government as threat to the well-being of the country. “Our traitor government does nothing to prevent drug influx.... our government officials continue to make some kinds of vile deals with drug cartels to get filthy rich and gain more control over weaken nation” (Secured Borders, 2016 Q2, 1961). This example showed the government as corrupt and complicit with evil. Other ads called Obama a traitor and a criminal: “We are losing so far, because our leader is one of them. Obama has betrayed America and now he is just executing orders of his bosses... Arabian Sheikhs” (Stop AI, 2016 Q2, 1331) and “Thanks to Barack Hussein Obama we have at least one big terror attack each year; not to mention illegals raging out and poisoning our country with drugs. For what he did to America Obama should rot in prison for the rest of his life (Secured Borders, 2016 Q3, 0699). Both ads used text and imagery to demonstrate that Obama was part of the outgroup – “one of them.” The ads used his full name to portray Obama as a Muslim outsider; one ad superimposed Obama’s face on a picture of an ISIS leader (Figure 10); both ads ascribed anti-American sentiment (“traitor,” “what he did to America”) to his ideological leanings. These ads used both racial and ideological sentiment to describe and strengthen boundaries between the “ingroup” (white, conservative) and “outgroup” (nonwhite, liberal) and create moral duality.



The Facebook ads presented the difference between liberal and conservative people as moral duality; they also used language that invoked the choice of life/death and God/Satan language to heighten the sense of moral duality. One Facebook ad implied that military veterans would die if Clinton were elected President and explicitly stated, “It’s wrong if you support Hillary” (Stop AI, 2016 Q3, 1328). Another ad lambasted liberals and Clinton by stating that liberals were “brainwashed,” following Clinton was “totally insane” and the idea of a Clinton presidency was a “mean joke.” The ad continued by stating that Clinton had “blood on her hands” and the mother of a Benghazi victim hoped that Clinton “burns in hell” (Being Patriotic, 2016 Q1, 0513). The language used in the ad (“blood on her hands” and “burn in hell”) equated Clinton with evil and demonstrated moral duality between the ingroup (conservatives) and the outgroup (liberals).



Figure 12: Ad (Army of Jesus, 2016 Q4, 1257)

The most extreme example of anti-ideological moral duality was in an ad that equated Clinton with the devil and voting for her with supporting evil. The image showed Satan and Jesus arm-wrestling, with the caption “Satan: If Hillary wins, I win. Jesus: Not if I can help it.” The text of the ad was just as explicit, “Hillary is a Satan, and her crimes and lies had proved just how evil she is” (Army of Jesus, 2016 Q4, 1257) (Figure 12).

Although most of the anti-ideological sentiment in the Russian-sponsored Facebook ads focused on liberals, some of it included conservatives who did not quite align with their ideals. One ad declared that “Republicans who renounce Trump are

committing treason” (Heart of Texas, 2016 Q4, 0724). The same ad urged its followers to “Say NO to the establishment robbers.” This example drew boundaries that more closely aligned with some of the alt-right rhetoric, which did not just pit conservative against liberal, it pitted white nationalists (anti-government, anti-establishment, anti-liberal) against all others. Some of these ads specifically used the language of the alt-right: “[T]hey treat us like stupid sheep... the corrupt media....” (Heart of Texas, 2016 Q4, 0724). One Russian-sponsored Facebook page (The Red Pill – Nothing Left) was directed towards the alt-right, with targeted interests including “White Nationalism” (The Red Pill, 2017 Q1, 3381) (Figure 13). Other ads from that group promised to present “true” information: “Tired of liberal propaganda and biased media sources? Take your red pill!” (The Red Pill, 2017 Q1, 3385). These ads demonstrated the anti-ideological sentiment that “only we know the truth” and all others – the “un-red pillled normies” – were living as deluded sheep.

Ad ID	3381
Ad Text	Finely selected conservative memes that make them cry again! Nothing Left
Ad Landing Page	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/Nothing-Left-362365657452374/">https://www.facebook.com/Nothing-Left-362365657452374/</a>
Ad Targeting	Location - Living In: United States
	Age: 20 - 45
	Language: English (US)
	Placements: News Feed on desktop computers, News Feed on mobile devices or Right column on desktop computers
	People Who Match: Politics: Likely to engage with political content (conservative)
	And Must Also Match: Interests: Far-right politics, White nationalism, Internet meme or Right-wing politics
Ad Impressions	488
Ad Clicks	20
Ad Spend	458.75 RUB
Ad Creation Date	02/09/17 01:49:21 AM PST

**Figure 13 : Metadata (The Red Pill, 2017 Q1, 3381)**

The ads heightened anti-ideological sentiment through invoking feelings of potential deprivation linked to the 2016 US Presidential election, in which many conservatives believed that the liberal candidate (Clinton) had an unfair advantage from the “establishment.” One ad declared that the 2016 election was rigged in favor of Clinton and the “election is going to be taken away from us” (Stop AI, 2016 Q3, 1295). The anti-ideological sentiment against the government/establishment also included imagery that branded anti-establishment as a morally upright stance. One set of advertisements promoted a rally in Atlanta to “Stop federal overreach” and “Stand with the patriots!” (Being Patriotic, 2016 Q2, 0455); it was promoted as an opportunity to “Join the crusade against Federal Tyranny! Protect the Constitution!” (Being Patriotic, 2016 Q2, 0434) (Figure 14). The imagery used to promote the rally included pictures of medieval Crusaders on horseback, with the implication that the current government was morally corrupt, and the “patriots” needed to crusade against it. It demonstrated both

moral duality (their ideological aims were so morally superior as to be God-blessed) but also demonstrated the desire to act against the established government of the United States.



Figure 14 : Ad (Being Patriotic, 2016 Q2, 0434)

This link between political ideology and religious ideology continued. One ad decried Obama's professed Christian faith: "Obama is nothing more than an ignoramus and provocateur shamelessly mocking the Bible. [Obama is] destroying everything we hold of worth" (Heart of Texas, 2016 Q2, 0717). More than simply mocking the Bible, Obama represented a threat to the ingroup's faith. One ad stated that America was becoming an Islamic state and that the government was pro-Islamic. Liberal leaders

“don’t want America to believe in the one and only Jesus Christ. Texas stays Christian even when odds are against us!” (Heart of Texas, 2016 Q2, 0714).

### **Pro-traditional values (pro-trad)**

The anti-ideological link between political and religious sentiment closely aligned with the pro-traditional values (pro-trad) rhetoric. Some of the Russian-sponsored Facebook ads used religious and anti-ideological sentiment to express pro-trad views. One ad blasted Obama’s declaration that his faith led to his decision on transgender bathroom rights (Heart of Texas, 2016 Q2, 0717); the implication was that liberals were wrong, transgender people were wrong and only “true” Christians were right. The difference between right and wrong, conservative and liberal, straight and gay were further demonstrated in another ad, which included an image of the outline of Texas, separated from the rest of the US. The area inside Texas was filled with images of people dressed in red, white and blue. The rest of the US was filled with images of people with rainbow flags, images of immigrants, images of Muslims (Heart of Texas, 2016 Q4, 0724). The implication was clear: gay people were outgroup members, along with those whose race, religion or ideological values differed.

Most of the pro-trad rhetoric surrounded sexuality or gender identity rather than gender roles. When included, the pro-trad rhetoric around gender roles was subtle. One ad, which was targeted only at men, declared “Every man should stand for our borders!” (Secured Borders, 2016 Q1, 0691), thereby describing roles and boundary between men and women. The ads more clearly described boundary around heterosexuality. One ad declared, “We fight for constitution and traditional values” and showed imagery of those

values, including the Confederate flag and a white family nuclear family: mother, father, two smiling children (Southern\_Rebel\_Pride, 2015 Q4, 1891). Another ad defined ingroup values, stating “We are Patriots. We fight for the traditions, for the National Symbols and for the Future. [We are against] gun control, gay marriage and black lives matters activists” (‘MericanFury, 2016 Q2, 1936). This ad drew unambiguous boundaries around ideology and race, placing non-straight/non-cisgender people clearly in the outgroup. The attached image was of a “bathroom” figure of a man and a woman holding hands, with the caption: “Straight Pride” (Figure 15).



**Figure 15 : Ad (‘MericanFury, 2016 Q2, 1936)**

The comingling of anti-ideological sentiment and pro-trad sentiment was often displayed through expressions of relative deprivation. Straight, conservative people were “disadvantaged” by the “dominance” of non-straight people. One ad complained that “The USA is out of balance now. We loose [sic] our history! The gays, lesbians and trans-sexuals have more rights now then other folks. They bring pervert culture in our



houses as something normal. Today, LGBT community has turned into the head and everyone else is the tail” (Being Patriotic, 2015 Q3, 0507). The ad railed against the “unfairness” of cultural shifts while still ascribing moral duality (“pervert culture”) to those in the outgroup.

### **Outgroup Threat**

The Russian-sponsored Facebook ads often combined negative nonwhite stereotypes with aspects of threat, either outgroup threat or relative deprivation. This served to strengthen the boundary between white and nonwhite people and amplify the anti-nonwhite rhetoric. To demonstrate threat, the ads either characterized the nonwhite people as physical threats to the safety of white Americans – describing nonwhite people as rapists, drug dealers, criminals or terrorists – or describing nonwhite people as existential threats to white Americans’ “way of life” – their culture or hegemony.

The negative stereotype of nonwhite people (black men) as violent was often used to evoke threat, particularly threat against the police and law-abiding (white) citizens. The ads used vivid language to highlight the threat; one ad described a gunfight with police in Boston: “This bloody massacre is a vivid example of the fact that the war with police is too far from being OVER. It's only coming...” (Being Patriotic, 2016 Q4, 0433). By painting a picture of a gruesome present and pointing towards a threatening future, the ads were intended to prompt the audience to turn towards the safe ingroup and defend against the threatening outgroup. The ads characterized black people as a danger to the police and the law-abiding: “The Black Lives Matter are terrorists, and the sooner we admit it officially — the sooner this war on cops will end and people running a

conservative rally won't be afraid to be attacked by a hateful gang" (Being Patriotic, 2016 Q3, 0445). In this example, the danger from the nonwhite "war on cops" extended to people at a "conservative rally," which could potentially include the (white) audience.

The ads used martial language to invoke threat: "war," "invasion," "enemy" and "attack." The "war on cops" was frequently mentioned, describing boundary between BLM activists (nonwhite people) and police officers (white people). Martial language and threat imagery were also used to describe the immigration of Muslim people into America. One ad that supported a rally ("Citizens before refugees") used the image of a frightened white child with a stranger's hand held over her mouth to evoke feelings of threat from the "refugee" outgroup (Secured Borders, 2016 Q3, 1957). Other ads were less subtle in their characterization of Muslim people as a threat – one warned: "America is diseased. Islamic terror has penetrated our homeland" (Stop AI, Q3, 1330). Another ad used negative stereotypes and explicit threat language to display extreme moral duality and dehumanization. The ad warned that "We are under attack... war has already started." The ad delineated ingroup (white Americans) and outgroup (nonwhite people/Muslim people) by linking the "enemy" to Obama. "The enemy is smart and ruthless. We are losing so far, because our leader is one of them. Obama has betrayed America...." The ad warned that the outgroup – Muslim people – is homogenous and that the threat is all-encompassing. "Refugees... are soldiers with one simple goal... to terrorize the nation until it agrees to convert. To win this war we need to gather our forces and elect a leader.... only Trump is strong enough to overpower this snake of an enemy and choke it to death. We are at war gentlemen!" (Stop AI, 2016 Q2, 1331). This ad

equated all Muslim people with soldiers, terrorists, and snakes and implied that they would not only attack the audience's physical safety, they would also attack their spiritual safety and force them to convert.

Some of the ads used threat to combine several aspects of anti-nonwhite rhetoric, including anti-black, anti-Hispanic and anti-Muslim, as well as aspects of anti-ideology rhetoric. One ad demanded that Obama go to prison for failed healthcare reform and for "flooding America with countless criminals and giving them all an absolute omnipotence. Thanks to Barack Hussein Obama we have at least one big terror attack each year; not to mention illegals raging out and poisoning our country with drugs" (Secured Borders, 2016 Q3, 0699). Another ad characterized both Muslim and Hispanic people as enemies: "Bombing Syria will bring a wave of refugees...Some of our enemies are way closer than Syria" (Stop AI, 2017 Q2, 3262).

The Russian-sponsored Facebook ads also used threat to heighten anti-ideology or pro-traditionalist rhetoric. One ad described Obama's statement that he used his Christian beliefs to defend his decision regarding transgender people and bathroom use. "Obama is nothing more than an ignoramus and provocateur shamelessly mocking the Bible. [Obama is] destroying everything we hold of worth" (Heart of Texas, 2016 Q2, 0717). In this case, the threat was to the audience's way of life; the threat was not physical but no less dire. Threat language was also used to link religious belief to anti-ideology rhetoric. One ad claimed that America is becoming an Islamic state and the government is pro-Islamic; they "don't want America to believe in the one and only Jesus Christ. Texas stays Christian even when odds are against us!" (Heart of Texas, 2016 Q2, 0714).

Another ad asked if Sharia law should be banned (Stop AI, 2017 Q2, 3261) (Figure 16).

In these examples, the ads used a perceived threat of “Islamization” to heighten anti-nonwhite rhetoric.



Figure 16 : Ad (Stop AI, 2017 Q2, 3261)

## Relative deprivation

The Russian sponsored-Facebook used relative deprivation, or the feeling that the ingroup has been unfairly denied or deprived because of the outgroup, to support their anti-nonwhite and anti-ideology rhetoric. The Facebook ads frequently used the theme that immigrants/refugees are “taking” jobs or benefits from “Americans” to demonstrate relative deprivation. One ad simply proclaimed: “Stop refugees! The’re [sic] taking our jobs!” (Stop Refugees, 2015 Q4, 1303) and another warned: “They [Illegal immigrants] take your job and money!” (Stop AI, 2016 Q1, 1276). Not only did immigrants/refugees

“take” Americans’ jobs, they also took their benefits. There were many examples of “Take care of our Vets, not illegals!” (Stop AI, 2016 Q2, 1369); the implication was that the liberal government cared more for outgroup members than ingroup members. “Again and again he (Obama) ignores the needs of American citizens, but has no problem taking their hard earned money just give it to people who deserve it the least [immigrants/refugees]. I guess Veterans don't need a better social security” (Secured Borders, 2016 Q2, 0697). These examples displayed the aspects of relative deprivation – the perception that another group benefits over the ingroup and that it is unfair. In this case, the deprivation was that “real” Americans paid for the benefits and outsiders received those benefits, because of an unfair system (liberal government).

Many ads combined anti-nonwhite rhetoric, outgroup threat and relative deprivation to promote their ideology. One example described illegal immigration as an “invasion .... tearing America apart one piece at a time. This unstoppable force is polluting our land, stealing our jobs and receiving insane amounts money for that.... drugs are coming through the Mexican border. No good comes from these people” (Stop AI, 2016 Q2, 1274). This ad combined negative stereotypes (drugs, “no good”) with outgroup threat (“tearing America apart”) and relative deprivation (“stealing our jobs and receiving insane amounts of money”).

The Facebook ad describing parasites (Figure 11) used the language of relative deprivation to deliver its dehumanizing message: “About 20 million parasites live in the United States illegally. They exploit Americans and give nothing in return” (Stop AI, 2016 Q2, 1289). Not only did immigrants and refugees receive more benefits than “real”

Americans, they were ungrateful: “Why do immigrants think that the U.S. government should create good conditions for them? ...The worst thing is that illegal immigrants who broke the law to live in the United States demand ask [sic] for indulgences. What nonsense! Illegals should be deported from the country invariably” (Being Patriotic, 2015 Q2, 0556). These examples key into the “unfair” aspect of relative deprivation – the disparity between the benefits that “real” American, compared to “invaders,” was especially galling in the face of the “ungrateful” and “uppity” recipients: “Illegals think they are proprietors in America” (Stop AI, 2017 Q2, 3259).

There were examples of relative deprivation in which nonwhite people “deprived” white people of non-monetary benefits. One Facebook ad stated that the white police officer who shot black teen Michael Brown was unemployable after the shooting: “a man's life may be ruined because he had the audacity to defend himself against huge man with malicious intent. Michael Brown was a thug... [this situation] proves how upside-down society has become.... Instead hate Wilson, we should pray for him. He did nothing wrong but idiots turned society against an innocent man.” (Being Patriotic, 2015 Q3, 0547). The claimed deprivation was due to an unfair system: the world was “upside down” and “idiots turned society against an innocent man.” This example used negative nonwhite stereotypes (Brown was a “thug” with “malicious intent”) and relative deprivation to promote anti-nonwhite sentiment.

Many of the Facebook ads featured BLM as the perceived enemy and their ire against BLM included the complaint that BLM is racist because “all lives matter.” It was unfair that Black Lives Matter got to say that black lives mattered – white people were

deprived of the same opportunity. “They say racism rises among the police officers, but in fact it rises among radical groups. Only black activists say “black lives matter”, forgetting the fact that justice is when all lives matter. Americans are not against blacks, Latinos, etc. But if somebody breaks the law, he should be punished despite of his color or religion...If somebody breaks the immigration law, he should be deported.” (Being Patriotic, 2015 Q4, 0459). This same argument frequently segued into the complaint that immigrants who were in the country illegally broke the law to enter the country and should not be “above the law.” In these cases, relative deprivation was used to heighten anti-nonwhite sentiment by claiming that immigrants/refugees acted with impunity in the US. “Why citizens cannot break the law, but illegals can? What nonsense!” (Being Patriotic, 2015 Q3, 0506).

The Facebook ads also invoked feelings of relative deprivation for white and conservative hegemony in the US, the feeling that their “way of life” was being threatened. This extended to both racial and ideological sentiment. One ad used Census data to inform white audience members they would become a minority in 2050 and then described immigration as a cause of “interethnic tensions” in the US (Being Patriotic, 2015 Q3, 0448). This ad used the threat of changing demographics to invoke future relative deprivation – white people will no longer be the majority – and prompt anti-nonwhite sentiment. The ad continued to invoke feelings of relative deprivation: not only were immigrants the cause of social problems, they didn’t speak English: “One-fifth of Americans speak a different language at home.... America can't be the Tower of Babel”

(Being Patriotic, 2015 Q3, 0448). White hegemony was under attack; their linguistic hegemony was likewise threatened.

Some of the ads demonstrated threat against “our way of life” from an ideological standpoint. One ad railed against a retired Marine whose military-themed bumper sticker conflicted with his Homeowners’ Association rules: “Have you ever heard of someone



Figure 17 : Ad (Being Patriotic, 2016 Q2, 0464)



receiving a notification to remove Obama stickers? LGBT stickers? Those terrorists Black Lives Matter stickers? Well, me neither! The liberal rage comes only to those who love the Old Glory or U.S. Armed Forces. Our whole society is ill. Libtards are allowed to do whatever they want” (Being Patriotic, 2016 Q2, 0464) (Figure 17). This example of relative deprivation highlighted the sentiment that it was unfair that conservative hegemony was diminishing. The “whole society is ill” and “libtards are allowed to do whatever they want.” Liberal thinking people received “benefits” at the expense of conservative thinking people and the world was upside down because of it. This example used relative deprivation to invoke anti-nonwhite sentiment, pro-traditional sentiment and anti-ideology sentiment.

### **Propaganda**

The Russian-sponsored propaganda on Facebook took advantage of all the propaganda tactics described by Cull (2015) and by Doob and Robinson (1935) and displayed the characteristics of propaganda as codified by Ellul (1965).

#### **Glittering generality**

The tactic “glittering generality” is one in which the propagandist uses vague but enticing language to convey their message. Glittering generality relies on imagery and feelings but doesn’t provide detail. This tactic can be used to convey a glorious/glittering message, or it could be used to convey a horrifying message.

One Russian-sponsored Facebook ad declared, “We want Independence - we fight for constitution and traditional values” (Southern\_Rebel\_Pride, 2015 Q4, 1891). The text

and imagery implied patriotism – “we fight for constitution” – at the same time it called for independence from the United States and (presumably) that very same Constitution. Another ad declared, “We are Patriots. We fight for the traditions, for the National Symbols and for the Future” (‘MericanFury, 2016 Q2, 1936). These terms, “traditions,” “national symbols” and “future” provided a “glittering” slogan that reified the ad’s next statement, which was against gay marriage and Black Lives Matter activists. This use of “glittering generality” provided the audience with a slogan that expressed racist and homophobic views without mentioning either. One Facebook ad complained about immigration and then declared, “America for Americans!” (Being Patriotic, 2015 Q3, 0514). This use of glittering generality equated being America with being a non-immigrant and “true” citizenship with being white. It was able to convey racism without using an explicit reference to race.

“Glittering generality” could also apply to the use of a horrifying slogan or idea. One Facebook ad, devoted to keeping Muslim people out of America and deporting American Muslims, referenced the “fires burning in Europe” (Being Patriotic, 2015 Q3, 0508). This statement conveyed the idea of mayhem, danger and war, caused by strife with Muslim people and all due to “very bad progressive ideas.” This statement obscured the details about the actual state of social life in Europe, or whether strife may have originated with non-Muslims in Europe.

## **Transfer**

The “transfer” tactic occurs when the propagandist equates two unrelated ideas, transferring the value characteristics of one idea to the other. One example, frequently

used in the Russian-sponsored Facebook ads, was that being patriotic (a “good” value) was equated with being against immigration. This was demonstrated in both text and imagery: the Facebook page “Stop AI” (“stop all invaders”) used flag imagery (Figure 18), imagery of Revolutionary War patriots (Figure 19) and a picture of the WWII Iwo Jima memorial (Figure 20) to equate patriotism with stopping immigration.

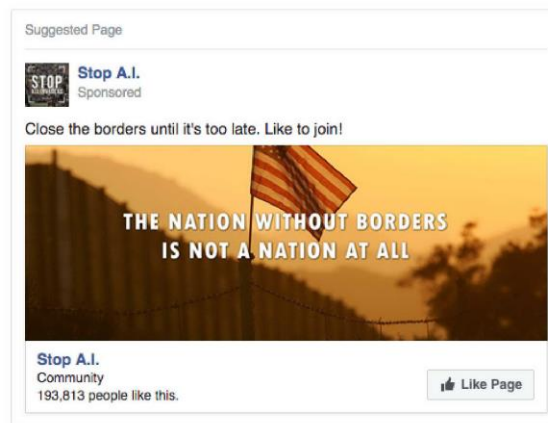


Figure 18 : Ad (Stop AI, 2016 Q1, 1346)



Figure 19 : Ad (Stop AI, 2016 Q1, 1357)



**Figure 20 : Ad (Stop AI, 2016 Q1, 1344)**

Another example of transfer was equating patriotism with being pro-police. “Defending the police against liberal and racist accusations is a solemn duty of every American Patriot” (Being Patriotic, 2016 Q4, 0433). This idea was extended by painting BLM activists as being anti-police, rather than against police brutality. By characterizing BLM activists in that way, the ads were able to describe boundaries around two groups of ideas and use the transfer tactic to place value judgements on those groups. One example declared, “America has to stand against radical activists who threaten not only officers lives, but also our security” (Being Patriotic, 2015 Q3, 0519). Patriotism was good; patriotism equaled pro-police; pro-police equaled white people. Black people were BLM activists; BLM activists were against the police; being against police was being against America, which was bad. Another example of this was a Facebook ad promoting a rally against Clinton, which added ideological leanings (conservative versus liberal) to the

groupings affected by the “good” and “bad” transfer. The ad stated, “it’s unfair and vilely [sic] to accuse our heroes of every sin and crime” (Being Patriotic, 2016 Q3, 0465) and the attached image showed a formation of white police officers, “Hillary Clinton calls these people ‘racists’ and ‘white terrorists.’ We call them heroes and patriots” (Figure 21).



Figure 21 : Ad (Being Patriotic, 2016 Q3, 0465)

In one example that included both “transfer” and “Swim with the tide,” the ad made freewheeling connections and “good/bad” value assignments for two groups: the nihilists, illegal immigrants, gun control advocates and elected officials who “spit on the Constitution;” and God, America, the Constitution, and the Confederate flag. “America has a hard time. And we have to save the U.S. Constitution. We have to do it in God's name! America has to be great again because we are one nation under God!” (Being Patriotic, 2015 Q3, 0516). By equating the second grouping with God and opposing it from the first grouping, the ad demonstrated the transfer technique to assign moral duality to the “others:” the liberals and immigrants who were not “real” Americans.

### **Testimonial**

The “testimonial” technique is used by propagandists to attach their intended message to a trusted figure or expert. This was used by the Russian-sponsored Facebook ads to lend credence to the individual message of their ad or to lend credibility to their entire Facebook page. The Facebook pages often used pictures of the Founding Fathers or invoked what the Founding Fathers would have wanted as a testimonial technique to push their message (one example, *Southern\_Rebel\_Pride*, 2015 Q4, 1891). “Being Patriotic” Facebook page ads used former US President and conservative icon Ronald Reagan to push their message. In two examples, the ads used quotes they attributed to Reagan to advocate for their platform: “If we ever forget that we are One Nation Under God, then we will be a nation gone under. Ronald Reagan” (Being Patriotic, 2016 Q2, 0042) and “I believe the best social program is a JOB” (Being Patriotic, 2016 Q2, 0521). In two other examples, the ads used images of Reagan to lend credibility to their page: one image was

of Reagan kissing an American flag, (Being Patriotic, 2015, Q3, 0485) and another was a Rockwell-esque image of a young Boy Scout saluting a picture of Reagan (Being Patriotic, 2015 Q3, 0498) (Figure 22).



**Figure 22 : Ad (Being Patriotic, 2015 Q3, 0498)**

In one example, the ads used statements by MMA fighter Rhonda Rousey to support the conspiracy theory that 9/11 was “an inside job” (Being Patriotic, 2015 Q3, 0499) and in another example, the ads quoted Governor Bobby Jindal to demonstrate that illegal immigration was overrunning the country (Being Patriotic, 2015 Q3, 0514). The “Dukes of Hazzard” car was also used as a testimonial technique – juxtaposed against a message that equated the Confederate flag with “heritage, not hate,” the car and the associated popular television show provided a veneer of respectability and deniability to support for a Confederate symbol (Southern\_Rebel\_Pride, 2015 Q4, 1882).

Another example of the testimonial device was using “the military” as a testimonial figure. By grouping all military members together and presenting them as having a single opinion, the ads used the military as a mouthpiece to push a conservative agenda. One example cited a poll which showed American military members were more likely to vote for Trump than Clinton in the 2016 US Presidential election; the ad declared, “US Troops want Trump for President” (Being Patriotic, 2016 Q2, 0530).

The most frequent use of the testimonial technique was the reverse testimonial – namely, using a reviled or hated figure to push negative messaging. The Russian-sponsored propaganda on Facebook often invoked Clinton or Obama as the negative figure; whatever idea the ad associated with them was likewise reviled by the audience. This technique was used to push Russia’s opinion regarding international policy issues, including US policy in Syria and US policy towards Iran, about which the audience may not have had strongly felt views. By claiming that President Obama was in support of the Iran deal (Being Patriotic, 2015 Q3, 0431) or US troops in Syria (Being Patriotic, 2017



Q2, 0767), the ads used him as a reverse testimonial to convince their audience not to support those policies.

### **Bandwagon**

In the “bandwagon” technique, an idea is presented as being popular, prompting the recipients of the propaganda to want to join the “bandwagon.” This inspires those with tepidly held opinions to join the bandwagon in order to fit in; it strengthens the opinion of those who already held it by providing esteem; and it silences dissent from those who hold opposite opinions. All social media supports the bandwagon technique; by joining a Facebook group, whether it is for cat lovers or Trump supporters, a person joins that bandwagon. Joining the group exposes the person to more of the same ideas, strengthening their opinion and belief that their opinion is the correct and most widely held one. These Facebook pages examined in this research operated the same way and the advertisements for the pages supported the “bandwagon” technique.

Beyond the bandwagon technique inherent in all Facebook groups, the Russian-sponsored Facebook pages also demonstrated the bandwagon technique through validating their members’ opinions, advertising rallies to promote collective action, and assuring the audience that many people felt the same way they did.

The rallies promoted by the Facebook ads were an opportunity to assure the audience that other, real life people felt the same way they did. The existence of the rallies moved the “bandwagon” feelings out of the virtual world and into the real world. The most frequently advertised rallies were pro-Trump or anti-Clinton, including “Miners for Trump: Unity Day in Pennsylvania” (Being Patriotic, 2016 Q3, 0468) and “Down

with Hillary! Rally in NYC” (Being Patriotic, 2016 Q3, 0477). There were also rallies that worked to heighten racial boundaries, including “Citizens before Refugees: Rally in Twin Falls” (Secured Borders, 2016 Q3, 1957) and “Anti-Beyoncé Protest Rally: No More Chaos” (‘MericanFury, 2016 Q1, 1942). There were rallies that served to promote anti-government sentiment in the guise of patriotic action, the “Crusade against Federal Tyranny” in Atlanta (Being Patriotic, 2016 Q2, 0434). Whether the audience members attended the rallies or not, the advertisements guaranteed the audience that they existed in a community with like-minded people. Other Facebook ads similarly assured their members that they were not alone. One Facebook ad declared, “You are not the only one to despise immigration!” (Stop AI, 2016 Q1, 1383). Another promised the audience, “Your voice counts” (Stop AI, 2016 Q1, 1286).

In some cases, the Facebook ads provided esteem for their audience by using language that pulled them onto the bandwagon. One ad, promoting a petition to stop Obama from nominating a Supreme Court Justice, declared, “Together we can make America better!” (Being Patriotic, 2016 Q1, 0541). Another ad railed against gun control, arguing that only criminals and psychopaths should be restricted in gun ownership and “we’re none of these” (Being Patriotic, 2016 Q2, 0528); this statement pulled the audience onto the bandwagon of respectability and gun-worthiness, providing esteem. This technique also appeared in ads which assured the viewer, “You’re part of us!” (Stop AI, 2016 Q1, 1357) (Figure 19) or “[W]e need you here!” (Southern\_Rebel\_Pride, 2015 Q4, 1891).

## **Plain Folks**

The “plain folks” propaganda tactic is closely related to the identity of the audience, which determines the commonly held values that could be considered “plain folks” values. The Russian-sponsored propaganda most often employed the “plain folks” values that prized a strong work ethic and accepted that “plain folks” do not benefit in the same way the rich and powerful do.

One ad stated that immigration was causing a “work ethic breakdown” (Being Patriotic, 2015 Q3, 0514), indicating that “real” Americans, i.e., “plain folks,” have a strong work ethic. Another ad lauded the gun shop owner who banned Muslims from his store, praising his initiative: “Real American doesn’t ask his government to protect him; he acts himself” (Being Patriotic, 2015 Q3, 0432). Again, this ad equated “real” Americans with “plain folks” values. One ad used “plain folks” values to describe racial boundary by describing the white police officer who shot an unarmed nonwhite man as “just doing his job” (Being Patriotic, 2015 Q3, 0547). Using “plain folks” values to describe the police officer marked him as an ingroup member.

The Russian-sponsored Facebook propaganda invoked the “plain folks” tactic when painting “rich folks” as benefiting from the hard work and sacrifices of the audience. They used this tactic to push the message that the US should withdraw from Syria, arguing the war only benefited the rich and powerful. American troops in Syria “doesn’t serve American interests. Our soldiers are there to fight and die for Globalists, Saudis and Israelis, but not for Americans.... This is not our war” (Being Patriotic, 2017 Q2, 0767). Another ad stated that the wars were “wasting lives of our American

soldiers;” an image of a combat soldier reminded the audience that the war should not benefit the “interests of military and oil corporations” (Being Patriotic, 2017 Q2, 0769) (Figure 23).

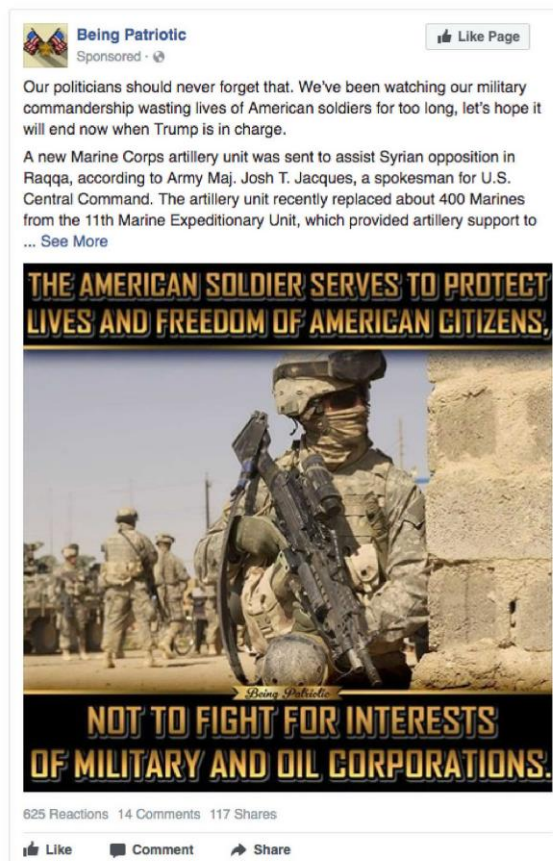


Figure 23 : Ad, (Being Patriotic, 2017 Q2, 0769)

Some of the ads used more amorphous “plain folks” values – the general equating of American life circa 1950’s with “real American” values. One ad featured an

image, in the 1950's style, of a young woman holding a rifle, which equated gun rights with "plain folks" old-time values (Being Patriotic, 2015 Q2, 0551). Another ad clearly delineated the "plain folks" values for ingroup members: "... praise our Lord, honor American traditions and obey the Constitution written by our forefathers. Do that - and we will make our great nation live in a perfect society and make America great again" (Being Patriotic, 2016 Q2, 0478).

### **Name-calling**

The ads frequently used the "name-calling" technique, to quickly and forcefully push their message. Most frequent were the names lobbed at those who differed ideologically and liberal leaders. Liberals were "libtards" and "SJWs" (acronym for "social justice warrior") (Southern\_Rebel\_Pride, 2016 Q1, 1876). Obama was an "ignoramus and provocateur" (Heart of Texas, 2016 Q2, 0717) and a traitor (Stop AI, 2016 Q2, 1332); Clinton was "Killary Rotten Clinton" and "Hitlery" (Heart of Texas, 2016 Q4, 0724). The government was the "Swamp in DC" (Being Patriotic, 2017 Q2, 0769) run by "the establishment robbers" (Heart of Texas, 2016 Q4, 0724). The ads also used name-calling to push their anti-nonwhite rhetoric. Immigrants were "invaders" (all ads from "Stop AI," including Stop AI, 2016 Q2, 1362) and "parasites" (Stop AI, 2016 Q2, 1289) who "multiply like rabbits" (Secured Borders, 2016 Q2, 0695). Muslim people were a "snake of an enemy" attacking America (Stop AI, 2016 Q2, 1331); Muslims belonged in their "7<sup>th</sup> Century countries" (Being Patriotic, 2015 Q3, 0508). As a propaganda tactic, name-calling efficiently conveyed the message, while strengthening racial and ideological boundaries.

## **Card Stacking**

Consistent with Ellul's (1965) characterization of propaganda as continuous, stifling dialogue and suppressing critical thinking, the "card stacking" device provides overwhelming information on one side of an argument to "stack the deck" for that side. Sometimes the card-stacking technique is displayed with a small amount of information on the opposite side of the argument that serves to "inoculate" the audience against that side of the argument. In the Russian-sponsored Facebook ads, the propagandists frequently used the card stacking device to present a one-sided argument, often without providing any opposing information.

Some of the ads, in an effort to prove that the Civil war was not about slavery, provided facts about the "true" origins of the Civil War (Southern\_Rebel\_Pride, 2016 Q1, 1880) or the egalitarian pay structure of the Confederate Army (Southern\_Rebel\_Pride, 2016 Q1, 1876). In a similar bid to raise the esteem of the audience members by denying the Confederate flag's racist history, one ad used the card stacking device to describe the flag as a "symbol of patriots," "heritage, not hate," "pride from the South," "history and heritage" which represented the "War for Southern Independence" (Being Patriotic, 2015 Q2, 0555).

Many of the ads used the card stacking device to provide "facts" to support their anti-immigration rhetoric. One ad warned that there would be 1.24 million refugees arriving in the US in 2015; immigrants don't pay taxes; they increase the crime rate; one-fifth of Americans speak another language at home (Being Patriotic, 2015 Q3, 0448). The ads used specific threat information to "stack the deck" against illegal immigration,

though they did not validate the facts with sourcing. “More than 2,000 illegal aliens commit sex assaults every year in Texas alone” (Stop AI, 2016 Q3, 1278); this ad invoked fear, but did not provide the context of non-illegal immigrant sexual assault numbers. Another ad described the “Illegal immigrant invasion... polluting our land, stealing our jobs... 5% of population is committing 40% of all crimes in America. 65%



Figure 24 : Ad (Stop AI, 2016 Q2, 1275)

of all drugs are coming through the Mexican border” (Stop AI, 2016 Q2, 1275). The attached graphic projected the number of illegal immigrants in America (Figure 24). The

ad did not provide sourcing for their “facts” or directly state that illegal immigrants were responsible for the crimes and drugs mentioned; but by stacking inflammatory information, the ad projected the feeling of threat.

Some ads used the “inoculation” aspect of the card stacking device, by providing a small amount of information to support the other side of the argument. One ad characterized immigrants “Rapists, drug dealers, human traffickers; and others” noting that “the percent of innocent poor families searching for a better life is too small to become an argument for amnesty and Texas warm welcome” (Heart of Texas, 2016 Q3, 0708). Most of the “cards” were stacked in opposition to immigration, with the small amount of “inoculation” information (innocent poor families) to convince the audience that the argument in support of immigration was negligible.

The card stacking technique was also used to persuade the audience of the ad’s anti-ideology rhetoric. In one example, the ad stacked up “evidence” of Obama’s misdeeds: “failed medical reform,” “unbelievable national debt,” “flooding America with countless criminals,” responsible for “at least one big terror attack each year,” and “illegals raging out and poisoning our country with drugs” (Secured Borders, 2016 Q3, 0699). The “Clinton as Satan” ad (Figure 12) demonstrated another example of the card stacking device to support anti-ideology rhetoric. First, the ad “stacked the deck” against Clinton: “Hillary is a Satan, and her crimes and lies had proved just how evil she is.” Then the ad provided a dose of “inoculation” by admitting that “Donald Trump isn’t a saint,” but continued to stack the deck by declaring that “he’s at least an honest man and he cares deeply for this country” (Army of Jesus, 2016 Q4, 1257).



## **Swim with the tide**

The “Swim with the tide” device was one of the most frequently used. In this device, the propagandist attaches their message to a message the audience already agrees with, taking advantage of the “tide” of agreement the audience feels. This device was frequently used in conjunction with the “card stacking” device, with the “stack of cards” acting as the “tide” to sweep the audience along. In the previously mentioned example in which the ad listed all of Obama’s “crimes,” the ad went on to say that Obama should be in jail. The propagandists relied on the fact that the audience would dislike some of Obama’s actions, and use that feeling to sweep them along to agree that “For what he did to America Obama should rot in prison for the rest of his life” (Secured Borders, 2016 Q3, 0699). Some of the occurrences were subtle: Stop AI ads equated agreeable messages, “If you want to save America” and “Take care of our Vets” with “stopping all invaders” (Stop AI, 2016 Q2, 1355 and 1351). The audience agreed with the first message and eventually found themselves swept along with the assertion that the “invaders” must be stopped.

One ad opposed Clinton’s promise not to deport children, and only prioritize criminals for deportation (Being Patriotic, 2016 Q1, 0539). The ad asserted that all illegal immigrants should be deported because they were all criminals (some hadn’t yet been caught) and all adults (those who claimed to be children were lying about their age). This ad took advantage of people’s tendency to believe that the exception proves the rule and to swim with the tide. The audience would believe that some illegal immigrants lied

about their age and some were criminals; they could then “swim with the tide” to agree that all were lying and were criminals.

One ad demonstrated a combination of transfer and swimming with the tide; the ad first built up groupings of “good” (Constitution, America, Confederate Flag, and God) and “bad” (nihilists, elected officials, illegal immigrants). Once the audience was swimming with the tide and agreed with the “good’s” and the “bad’s,” the ad continued: “the same regards the Iran deal” (Being Patriotic, 2015 Q3, 0516). In this example, the propaganda operated by tacking on an idea that the audience may not have considered in the same light. A similar example of this technique demonstrated all the ways in which Obama was a crooked politician and then asserted that the Iran deal was bad for America and only served Obama’s “outsized ambitions” (Being Patriotic, 2015 Q3, 0431). Again, the ad took advantage of the audience’s existing negative opinion about Obama and used it to convince them to view the Iran deal in a similarly negative light.

One of the Facebook ads demonstrated the swim with the tide device by linking several ideas, hoping that one of them would be the “tide” that could pull each audience member along to agree with the others. The ad denounced Obama for not lowering the flags after the attack in Chattanooga that left five military members dead, accused him of disrespecting the military and veterans and viewing them as “meat” for his “next unknown operation.” The ad denounced refugees and Muslims and claimed Obama’s presidency increased racism, division and “more illegal immigrants who do not even bother to learn English” (Being Patriotic, 2015 Q3, 0549). This ad combined several

aspects of anti-ideological and anti-nonwhite rhetoric in order to attract audience members who agreed with at least one part.

Another ad which demonstrated the swimming with the tide device also displayed the mixture of direct and indirect messaging; the ad provided information about an attack in Chattanooga in which the gunman was an Islamic extremist, but who did not have links to a specific terror group (Being Patriotic, 2015 Q3, 0510). After establishing that the attacker was an unaffiliated Islamic extremist and hooking onto the audience's fear of Islamic extremists, the ad then used the "swim with the tide" device to argue that any Muslim could be an extremist. The direct messaging was that "ordinary Muslims [can] become radical Islamists and take the path of war and death." The indirect message was that the US should restrict/deport all Muslims so they "won't tend to radical activities and the destruction of peaceful life of Americans."

### **Direct/indirect**

The direct/indirect messaging tactic can take several forms. One form is the use of implied messaging, using inferences, images or coded references to convey the message without explicitly stating it. The other form is the use of unrelated entertainment, such as jokes or music, to attract the audience to the propaganda. The Russian-sponsored Facebook ads displayed both forms.

One example of the former technique of direct/indirect messaging was an ad describing Obama's statement following a police shooting. Obama "takes sides with rioters and racists... literally called for open war against police officers and whites" (Heart of Texas, 2016 Q3, 0751). The direct message denounced Obama; the implied

message was one of threat against white people by nonwhite people. Another example of direct/indirect messaging used an image to convey the indirect message. After decrying immigration – “ruins our economy,” “tears our social fabric,” increases crime and “destroys our culture” – the ad included a picture of immigrants from the 1900’s and modern immigrants, captioned, “See the difference?” (Being Patriotic, 2015 Q3, 0448) (Figure 6). This ad’s direct message was a message against immigration; the indirect message, conveyed through the attached image, was specifically against nonwhite immigration.

One example of the direct/indirect technique that used unrelated entertainment was in the Russian-sponsored Facebook page “The Red Pill.” This page promised “funny conservative memes” to entice audience members; although their true messaging was not apparent in their ads, their targeted audience, including “White Nationalists,” provided a clue as to what that messaging might be (The Red Pill, 2017 Q1, 3382). The same page used direct/indirect messaging to convey that they knew the “truth” and that un-Red Pilled people did not: “Revealing the uncomfortable truth and supporting conservative ideals! Let’s get Red Pilled!” (The Red Pill, 2017, Q1, 3386). In an echo of the alt-right’s claim to be the guardians of the “truth,” The Red Pill Facebook ads promised the audience a path to enlightenment (getting “Red Pilled”) and access to truth that they could not find elsewhere.

Although there were fewer specific examples of the direct/indirect technique, all propaganda included in this research could be considered an example. The ads advertised

Facebook pages purporting to support the stated mission. They attracted audience members in order to push Russian-sponsored propaganda aimed at dividing the US.

### **Synopsis**

The Russian-sponsored Facebook ads employed all four identity aspects that comprised the alt-right axiology: pro-white, anti-nonwhite, anti-ideology and pro-trad. They used positive ingroup and negative outgroup stereotypes to highlight favorable comparison between the groups and bolster ingroup esteem. They also used stereotypes, along with dehumanization and moral duality, to reinforce social boundaries. The ads employed outgroup threat and relative deprivation to intensify the anti-nonwhite and anti-ideology rhetoric.

Although the Facebook ads weren't specifically alt-right or white supremacist, in some cases, the rhetoric they displayed explicitly matched that of the alt-right. One ad depicted the American founding fathers, guns, Confederate flags and a smiling white family with the caption, "If you support all this, we need you here!" (Southern\_Rebel\_Pride, 2015 Q4, 1891), demonstrating that their axiology was pro-American, pro-conservative, pro-white and pro-trad. Another ad identified the group's ideology as patriotic, conservative, pro-trad and anti-nonwhite, by stating: "We are Patriots. We fight for the traditions, for the National Symbols and for the Future. [We are against] gun control, gay marriage and black lives matters activists" ('MericanFury, 2016 Q2, 1936).

The Facebook ads often comingled the different rhetoric, demonstrating that the ingroup comprised both white and conservative people; while the outgroup comprised

nonwhite, liberal and non-straight people. White people were considered Americans and citizens, “patriots” and “heroes.” Nonwhite people were considered “invaders,” “foreigners” and “terrorists.” Liberals were considered “traitors” and “Anti-American.” Islam was an “invasive war cult;” Muslims were a “menace” and inherently violent. Immigration was “polluting our land;” Hispanic people were “parasites;” and immigrants were rapists and drug dealers. Black people were “thugs,” “hateful gangs” and “terrorists.”

A dominant theme was that of liberal people enabling the destruction of America at the hands of nonwhite people. The liberal government was in league with drug cartels to destroy America; Democrats had called for “open war against whites;” Clinton was the embodiment of Satan. Both liberals and nonwhite people were painted as un-American – a “ridiculous social experiment and “pervert culture” which has turned society “upside-down.” In contrast, white people were presented as the core of the “National Identity” and “our culture.”

All the Facebook ads in this body of research were Russian-sponsored propaganda; unsurprisingly, they used propaganda devices and techniques to push their message. The most common propaganda devices used in the Facebook ads were “transfer” and “swim with the tide.” The Facebook ads made use of both of those devices to attach their messages to ideas which had already been accepted by their audience or intensify already-held beliefs. This tactic was also used to introduce Russian policy preferences (such as opposition to the Iran deal or US involvement in Syria) about which the audience may not have held an opinion. The Russian-sponsored Facebook ads used

all of the devices discussed, including name-calling (“libtard,” “parasites,” “Satan”) and glittering generality (“Citizens before refugees” and “America for Americans”).

**Table 2 Axiology displayed in Russian sponsored Facebook ads**

	<b>Pro white Axiology</b>	<b>Anti-nonwhite Axiology</b>	<b>Anti-ideology / Pro traditional axiology</b>
<b>Boundary</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- White people are citizens and “true” Americans (“America for Americans” and “Citizens before refugees”)</li> <li>- White people respect traditional values; Christian</li> <li>- White people support America, Donald Trump, and gun rights</li> <li>- White people support the police and the military</li> <li>- Ingroup is the “National identity” (“traditions, national symbols, future; against gun control, gay marriage and BLM”)</li> <li>- Secessionist ideals or anti-government ideals are “patriotic”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Nonwhite immigration is an invasion (“an unstoppable force”) (“flooding our country”)</li> <li>- Nonwhite people are not American (“We don’t hate foreigners... But we cannot allow them to stay here”)</li> <li>- Nonwhite people don’t support the police (“those terrorists BLM” have declared a “war on cops”)</li> <li>- Nonwhite people don’t support America and are unworthy of 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment rights (“dangerous to sell guns to Muslims”)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Liberals oppose the police (“Clinton, the main hardliner against police”)</li> <li>- Liberals oppose the military (“Support Vets not illegals!”)</li> <li>- Liberals oppose white people (“Obama called for open war against... whites”)</li> <li>- Liberals don’t support America (“Anti-American ambitions... socialism and tyranny”)</li> <li>- Liberals want to take away gun rights (“Clinton will abolish the 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment... and then the 1<sup>st</sup> and the 4<sup>th</sup>”)</li> </ul>
<b>Build Esteem</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- White people are patriotic (“heroes and patriots”)</li> <li>- White people are law abiding</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Ethnic diversity is a mistake (a “ridiculous social experiment”)</li> <li>- Nonwhite people are not patriots</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Liberals are ignorant of “true” history</li> <li>- Liberals are degenerate (“pervert culture”)</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- White people are Godly (“Texas stays Christian” and “traditional values”)</li> <li>- History is pro-white (Civil war was not about slavery)</li> <li>- Work ethic</li> </ul>	(“Obama is a traitor”) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Nonwhite people are criminals (“Rapists, drug dealers, human traffickers”)</li> <li>- Nonwhite people are not Godly (“refugees... terrorize the nation until it agrees to convert”)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Liberals are not Godly</li> <li>- Liberals are brainwashed and ignorant (“not underpinned with facts”)</li> </ul>
<b>Collective Action</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “We fight for the traditions, for the National Symbols and for the Future”</li> <li>- “Stop all invaders!”</li> <li>- “Every man should stand for our borders”</li> <li>- Rallies</li> </ul>		
<b>Sense of “we”</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- “Our culture” and “our country”</li> <li>- “You’re one of us!”</li> <li>- “Your voice counts!”</li> <li>- We know the true history of the Civil War (“not like those SJWs”)</li> <li>- Not duped by the corrupt media (“Red-pilled”)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Nonwhite people are “foreigners”</li> <li>- Intervention in Syria doesn’t benefit “us”: “Our soldiers are there to fight and die for Globalists, Saudis and Israelis, but not for Americans.”</li> </ul>	
<b>De-humanization</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Border wall is “cure”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Islam is a disease</li> <li>- Immigration is “polluting our land”</li> <li>- Hispanics are parasites</li> <li>- Muslims are “snake of an enemy”</li> <li>- Immigrants “multiply like rabbits”</li> <li>- Immigrants are “invaders”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Clinton as Satan</li> </ul>



		- “Illegals”	
<b>Moral duality</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- America is a civilized society (unlike the “7<sup>th</sup> Century countries” of Muslims)</li> <li>- Immigration could turn the US into the “Tower of Babel”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Islam is an “invasive war cult;” refugees “are the war;” refugees “are soldiers” and a “menace”</li> <li>- Black people who protest police brutality are “Gang of anarchist thugs,” and “hateful gang”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Clinton is a Satan</li> <li>- Clinton should “burn in hell”</li> <li>- Obama portrayed as ISIS; is a traitor (“one of them”)</li> <li>- Military veterans will die if Clinton is elected</li> <li>- “Wrong” to support Clinton</li> </ul>
<b>Threat</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Police are “guardians” and “heroes”</li> <li>- Demonstrating against the government is patriotic, because the government system is tyranny</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Immigrants are invaders; immigration will destroy “our culture”</li> <li>- Criminals (drug dealers, traffickers)</li> <li>- Violent (rapists, sex predators)</li> <li>- Islam as threat: “we are at war, gentlemen!”</li> <li>- Nonwhite activists as threat: “Obama has called for open war on police officers and whites”</li> <li>- “The war on police is far from over. It’s coming...”</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Liberal officials enable criminals for political and financial gain (“government ... [makes] vile deals with drug cartels to get filthy rich”)</li> <li>- Liberals enable violence for “political correctness”</li> <li>- Liberal government has/will take away your rights</li> </ul>
<b>Relative Deprivation</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Refugees and immigrants take white people’s “hard-earned money”</li> <li>- White people are colorblind, not like “racist” BLM</li> <li>- White people are subject to reverse racism</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Nonwhite people are lazy, rely on welfare and handouts</li> <li>- Nonwhite people are ungrateful for their benefits (unfair)</li> <li>- Immigrants act like they “own” the country (“Illegals think they are</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Society is “upside-down”</li> <li>- Country is “out of balance...[LGBTQ] have more rights [than] other folks”</li> <li>- “Establishment robbers”</li> <li>- International interventions benefit the global elites, not the common people</li> </ul>

		proprietors in America”	
<b>Stereotypes</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- White people are hard working</li> <li>- White people are respectful</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Nonwhite people are violent, criminals, predators</li> <li>- Nonwhite people are racist (BLM)</li> <li>- Nonwhite people are ungrateful and “uppity”</li> <li>- All Muslims are religious terrorists</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Homosexual people are “perverts”</li> <li>- Liberals are brainwashed/ignorant /deluded</li> <li>- Liberals stifle free speech</li> </ul>

## **CHAPTER NINE – ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION**

### **Discussion**

Russian propaganda, propagated in the US between 2015 and 2017 in the form of Facebook ads, demonstrated a remarkable ability to look and feel like alt-right propaganda. Their rhetoric was closely related and even their word choice displayed similarities. However, in the immortal words of every statistician that ever lived, “Correlation doesn’t equal causation.” I found that the two bodies of data showed similarities and correlations, but this research did not measure the impact of one on the other.

The alt-right showed four main axiological areas in their rhetoric, composed of two clusters: racial identity factors (pro-white and anti-nonwhite) and ideological identity factors (pro-traditional values and anti-alternate ideological views). The Russian-sponsored Facebook ads chosen for this research displayed the same axiological areas.

#### **Comparisons in pro-white axiology**

The alt-right’s main tenets of pro-white axiology were the supremacy of white people and the desire to build a white ethno-state in America. They used favorable comparison, stereotypes, dehumanization, moral duality, outgroup threat and relative deprivation to build these tenets and the boundaries separating their ingroup from all racial outgroups. Though they try to rebrand themselves as a different, new and edgy

group, the core belief of the alt-right is the same as old-school white supremacy: promotion of white esteem, boundaries around white culture, exclusion of nonwhite people, retention of benefits for white people, and protection of those boundaries and benefits. The alt-right movement painted a picture of white Americans as under attack from nonwhite Americans and nonwhite immigration (Anglin, 2016). Those ascribing to white supremacist and alt-right doctrines believed that their resources, culture and physical well-being were threatened by nonwhite people.

Some corners of the alt-right expressed their white supremacy in different ways, even claiming that they were not white supremacists, but “ethnopluralists” (Identity, n.d.) or “race realists” (Amren, n.d.). This demonstrated the way in which the new white supremacy of the alt-right is the embodiment of the de facto white supremacy of our society. George Lipsitz (2006) felt that everyday societal white supremacy manifested itself in more subtle ways than the hood-wearing Klansmen: “White supremacy is usually less a matter of direct, referential and snarling contempt and more a system for protecting the privileges of whites by denying communities of color opportunities for asset accumulation and upward mobility” (p. viii). The vision of the alt-right is to make manifest these unwritten systems for protecting privileges: to return to a time in which white men retained unquestioned dominance in their homes, politics and businesses, and the world was returned to its pre-globalization status of racial, cultural and ethnic segregation.

The Russian-sponsored Facebook ads similarly yearned for an earlier time, with “traditional values” and when immigration to the US was “good” immigration, i.e., white

immigration. The Facebook ads pushed pro-white axiology that was similar to that of the alt-right: white supremacy and the belief that America should be for white people. The major difference between the two was that the Facebook propaganda did not explicitly call for a white ethno-state; instead, they painted nonwhite people as not Americans and white people as “true” Americans (“America for Americans!” and “See the difference?”). In doing so, they echoed the alt-right rhetoric that to be American was to be white; white culture was American culture; nonwhite culture, and presumably, nonwhite people, did not belong in America.

The Facebook ads drew boundaries around white/American culture, using favorable comparison, stereotypes, collective action and a sense of “we-ness.” The ads also used the propaganda tactic “transfer” to reify their rhetoric; by attaching their pro-white message to other “good” things, they painted their message as similarly “good.” The Facebook ads described a white/American culture that was Christian, straight and white, and which supported the police, the military, and Donald Trump. The white/American culture was patriotic, but not pro-government. In this aspect, the Facebook ads walked the same balancing act that the alt-right groups walked.

Both the alt-right groups and the Facebook ads separated the white virtue of “patriotism” from supporting the government. In order to achieve their main goal, a white ethno-state, the alt-right desired to dissolve the current system of government and build a new one. In other words, they wanted to act against the American government: commit treason. To balance that desire with the repulsion their members would have for treason, the alt-right used the propaganda tactic “glittering generality.” They discussed the new

white ethno-state as an evolution of government, chosen by the people. TWP even declared that their intentions were not treasonous because the current government's "own contradictions and self-inflicted crises will prove its undoing" (TWP, n.d.). The Facebook ads also balanced the white virtue of "patriotism" with anti-government rhetoric. One set of advertisements from the Facebook page "Being Patriotic" promoted a rally against "federal overreach" to "crusade against Federal Tyranny!" These ads demonstrated moral duality – the pro-white rhetoric was so moral as to be a Crusade – and the ads supported action against the current system of government of the United States. Interesting, then, that a page devoted to "Being Patriotic" would ask their members to act against the government, and that the audience could mentally hold those actions alongside a vision of themselves as patriotic. It was a balancing act mirrored from the alt-right, which conflated love of their race with love of their country, and in their aim to create a new white ethno-state, ignored the sedition that would have to accompany it.

Both the alt-right groups and the Facebook ads built pro-white esteem through invoking glories, positive stereotypes, collective action and a sense of "we-ness." Both used the word "homeland" to describe America, which created a sense of kinship/blood and cultural ties to the physical land. This word bolstered the sense of emotion that the audience felt for the physical country and worked hand in glove with the stated aims of the alt-right and of the Facebook ads. Either directly or paraphrased, the alt-right groups used the "Fourteen words" to describe their mission: "We must secure the existence of our people and a future for White children." TWP used them directly; the other exemplars used variations to discuss their desire to support a white ethno-state for their

own hegemony and for the “future.” One of the Russian-sponsored Facebook ads made a similar declaration, “We fight for the traditions, for the National symbols, and for the Future” echoing the alt-right mantra. Their pro-white anti-immigration slogans were also similar; the alt-right directed their members to “Resist your dispossession!” (NPI, n.d.) and the Facebook ads instructed, “Every man should stand for our borders” (Secured Borders, 2016 Q1, 0691).

The sense of “we-ness” linked their pro-white identity with their ideological axiology. Both the alt-right and the Facebook ads focused on the “truth,” known only to the ingroup. The alt-right decried the “cartoon history” (Amren, n.d.) that did not properly glorify white achievements and the Facebook ads decried the false historical accounts that linked the Civil War with slavery. In both instances, the groups/ads claimed that they knew the “real” truth. This ability to see the truth extended from history to the current world – both the alt-right and the Facebook ads offered their audience the opportunity to be “red-pilled” and escape their current “Normie” state, with Normies being “incapable of objectively processing information” (Anglin, 2016). In this aspect, both the alt-right and the Facebook ads benefited from the propaganda device “name calling” to show the difference between the ingroup (truth-knowing) and outgroup (deluded).

The alt-right and the Facebook ads both used stereotypes to build pro-white esteem. The alt-right unambiguously portrayed white people as smarter, more ambitious, “high-trust”: the creators of everything of worth in our world. The Facebook ads depicted white people as hard-working and law-abiding, Godly and moral. In both cases, the

stereotypes used to build esteem were often juxtaposed with the anti-nonwhite or anti-ideology axiology to increase the favorable comparison.

Both the alt-right and the Facebook ads used relative deprivation to increase pro-white feelings, particularly about the injustice surrounding white people's expressions of racial solidarity compared to nonwhite people's expressions. Every alt-right group exemplar noted, "All other groups take it for granted that they have a right to speak out in their own interests. Only whites have lost this conviction" (Amren, n.d.). The alt-right painted the disparity as unfair. The Facebook ads also highlighted the organization of nonwhite groups as relative deprivation; it was "racist" to declare that Black Lives Matter because "all lives matter." The ads depicted the BLM activists as racists who organized and spoke of black supremacy, rather than as activists against police brutality.

### **Comparisons in anti-nonwhite axiology**

The major tenet of the alt-right's anti-nonwhite axiology was that nonwhite people were not American and did not belong in this country. They justified and bolstered this tenet by using stereotypes, dehumanization and moral duality to represent nonwhite people as "less than." The Russian-sponsored Facebook ads demonstrated similar rhetoric to separate white people ("citizens") from nonwhite people ("invaders").

The alt-right was direct in their view that nonwhite people do not belong in America; one exemplar recommended mass deportations of all nonwhite people, "whether they were born here or not" (Anglin, 2016). The alt-right described immigration and nonwhite demographic growth as an invasion, "destroying" the fabric of America. The Facebook ads used similar language to separate nonwhite people from white



Americans. Nonwhite immigration was an invasion, “an unstoppable force,” “flooding” and “polluting our country.” The Facebook ads frequently called immigrants “invaders” and worked to draw borders between white Americans and nonwhite “residents.” In drawing the lines around their concept of Americans as white, the Facebook ads alternately strove to justify their actions through negative nonwhite stereotypes or by declaring nonwhite people not-American (“We don’t hate foreigners... But we cannot allow them to stay here.”)

Both the alt-right and the Facebook ads rationalized their support for separating the races by claiming that ethnic diversity was a mistake. The alt-right declared ethnic diversity “an impediment to social harmony” (Identity, n.d.) and a Facebook ad echoed this statement, declaring diversity to be “a ridiculous social experiment.” By blaming the “failed” system of ethnic diversity, the groups/ads removed any blame for racial disharmony from their audience. This served to raise their pro-white esteem, strengthen the boundaries between racial groups, and intensify anti-nonwhite rhetoric.

Both the alt-right groups and Russian-sponsored Facebook ads used stereotypes, dehumanization and moral duality to substantiate their claim that ethnic diversity was a mistake. They used these devices to paint nonwhite people as “less than” and build boundaries around white and nonwhite people. Although the alt-right groups and the Facebook ads used the same tactics, the objects of their ire were different. The alt-right believed that the Jewish people were the greatest enemy of white people; they viewed other racial groups as a threat to their hegemony, but one orchestrated by their true (Jewish) enemy. In contrast, the Facebook ads barely mentioned Jewish people, but

reserved their harshest stereotypes for Hispanic people and Muslim people. Both groups demonstrated anti-black bias, but rarely elevated that bias to the level of moral duality they used against the other nonwhite groups.

The alt-right groups viewed Jewish people as the “diametric opposite of everything we stand for,” holding them responsible for every “disadvantage” that faced white people in America. Even the potential demographic change predicted to render white people a racial minority was blamed on Jewish people, who encourage nonwhite immigration to destroy “white homelands.” Although the alt-right viewed nonwhite immigration as their biggest threat – immigration was “genocide” and the “extermination” of white people – the alt-right did not hate the immigrants who were exterminating them, but rather the Jewish people who “orchestrated” that threat. The alt-right viewed Jewish people with true moral duality, equating Judaism with Satanism and claiming that that Holocaust, if it were true, “would have been justified” (Anglin, 2016) because of the perfidy of the Jewish people. Even the casual loathing the alt-right bestowed on black people (“criminals,” “barbaric,” “innate biological incapacity to compete in White society”) paled in comparison to the virulent hatred they felt for Jewish people. When the alt-right considered the changing face of white hegemony in all aspects of social, political and economic life, they found one group to blame: “None of this would be happening if it were not for the Jews” (Anglin, 2016).

In contrast, the Facebook ads only mentioned Jewish people indirectly, referring to “globalists” and “Israel” in their appeal to end US intervention in Syria. Hispanic people and Muslim people received the most negative sentiment in the Facebook ads’

anti-nonwhite rhetoric; the ads used dehumanization and moral duality to separate these groups mightily from white people. Frequently termed “immigrants,” “illegals,” and “invaders,” Hispanic people were not judged on their actual citizenship but lumped together so that anyone whose ancestry was south of the US border was considered the same. Likewise, Muslim people, whether American or not, were grouped together and frequently referred to as “refugees.” Hispanic people were criminals (“Rapists, drug dealers, human traffickers”) or “parasites” who “multiply like rabbits.” Immigrants were violent invaders (“rapists and sexual predators”), destroying “our culture.” Muslim people were also dehumanized; the differences drawn between their culture and white culture represented moral duality. “Ordinary” Muslims could be radicalized; refugees were “soldiers” and “terrorists” who would force white people to convert; Islam was an “invasive war cult” and a “menace.” American Muslims were singled out by the Facebook ads as not deserving of the rights and freedoms accorded to other Americans (“The 2<sup>nd</sup> Amendment was for [the] people, but...”). Both the alt-right and the Facebook ads viewed Hispanic people and Muslim people as a threat, but the alt-right viewed their presence/threat as the outcome of a greater threat from Jewish people. Because of that distinction, the way the alt-right and Facebook ads portrayed those nonwhite groups differed as well.

The Facebook ads anti-nonwhite rhetoric towards black people was like that of the alt-right. In both cases, black people were portrayed as violent criminals. The alt-right displayed this more tepidly, using propaganda devices of “name calling” (“Dindu Nuffin”) and “card stacking” (news blogs devoted solely to nonwhite crime against white

people) to demonstrate negative stereotypes of black people. The Facebook ads concentrated their anti-black rhetoric against Black Lives Matter, using that group as a stand-in for all black people. The Facebook ads characterized black people as a “gang of anarchist thugs,” and “hateful gang;” BLM was an “extremist” group and its activists were “terrorists.” The Facebook ads used favorable comparison to build up the duality between white people, portrayed as “guardians,” “heroes” and “patriots”, and black people, portrayed as violent thugs intent on “open war against police officers and whites.”

In this instance, the Facebook ads relied on the direct/indirect propaganda device. The direct message was clear (“black people are bad”) but it also doubled as an indirect “dog whistle,” a message employed by the alt-right. The ad (erroneously) claimed that Obama called for “open war” against whites, but the underlying dog whistle was: “A race war is coming... get ready.” This example was one of the many in which the Facebook ads echoed and mirrored alt-right and, whether intended or not, served to amplify its message.

The Facebook ads and the alt-right both used relative deprivation to deepen their anti-nonwhite rhetoric; however, the focus of the deprivation differed along the same lines as the rest of their anti-nonwhite rhetoric. The alt-right felt that the source of their deprivation was the “rigged” system controlled by Jewish people. The system served to disadvantage white people legally, economically and socially. In contrast, the Facebook ads believed that the greatest deprivation white people faced was in subsidizing nonwhite people, who “received insane amounts of money.” The Facebook ads also focused on the

attitudes of nonwhite people, who were “ungrateful” or who acted like they “owned” the country (“Illegals think they are proprietors in America”). In this way, the Facebook ads showed that the “ownership” and sense of confidence displayed by nonwhite people was the true deprivation to white people, who no longer had a stranglehold on confidence, respect and belonging in America.

### **Comparisons in anti-ideological and pro-traditional axiology**

The area in which the alt-right and the Facebook ads showed the most similarity and dissimilarity was in the ideological rhetoric. The ads closely mirrored the alt-right’s language and intention when deriding those whose ideologies differed from their own. In contrast, the alt-right and the Facebook ads did not align on their pro-traditional axiology, which was almost entirely absent from the Facebook ads.

The alt-right used stereotypes, dehumanization and moral duality to depict liberals and non-alt-right conforming conservatives in a negative light. They portrayed liberals as “sheep” or “non-player characters” – homogenous and unthinking, saying and doing as their leaders prescribed. The use of the “name calling” propaganda device was particularly useful here: liberals were “libtards” or “SJWs” or “cucks” (Anglin, 2016). Those in the middle were characterized as “Normies” who had not yet been “red-pilled.” And those on the right who had deviated from the alt-right ideology were “cuckservatives,” conservatives who had given over their power to an outside group.

The Facebook ads used these same stereotypes and name calling devices, echoing the alt-right in their name calling of liberals. To a limited extent, they also derided conservatives who weren’t “right” enough, declaring that Republicans who did not

support Trump were traitors. The Facebook ads did not deride those people who remained in the middle but did offer them the same opportunities to learn “the truth” that the alt-right promised. The most obvious was the Russian-sponsored “Red-Pilled” Facebook page, which promised to “reveal the uncomfortable truth” and “expose liberal bias” for people “tired of liberal propaganda and biased media sources.” The metadata in these ads showed that they were directed at a target audience that fit that alt-right age demographic (the ads skewed twenty years younger than other ads) as well as towards those whose interests included “White Nationalism.”

The Facebook ads used the same rhetoric in their anti-immigration propaganda, promising “Facts about refugees your government doesn’t want you to know!” and “Lies about illegal immigration and refugee crisis REVEALED” (Secured Borders, 2016 Q1, 0683 and 0678). They both viewed the popular “liberal” version of history as marred; a “cartoon history” according to the alt-right or not “underpinned by facts” according to the Facebook ads. Echoing the alt-right anti-ideology rhetoric, the Facebook ads declared (presumably without irony) that liberals were brainwashed by propaganda; liberals were deluded; liberals stifled free speech.

Where the alt-right and the Facebook ads parted ways was the alt-right’s blame of Jewish people for the liberal “system” that oppressed white people and suppressed “traditional family values.” Both the alt-right and the Facebook ads viewed the ideology that differed from their own as an affront to their way of life, painting it in terms of moral duality, but they blamed different parties. The alt-right unambiguously blamed Jewish people for the liberal ideology that “poisons the minds of our people;” the “globalist

capitalist system is the enemy of all humanity and represents the greatest threat to the continued existence of our people...” In this way, the alt-right co-mingled their anti-nonwhite and anti-ideology rhetoric. The Facebook ads also combined those two aspects of axiology but did so through the figure of President Obama.

Obama served as a nexus between anti-nonwhite rhetoric and anti-ideology rhetoric in the Russian-sponsored Facebook ads. The ads blamed the Obama government for all the ills that white people faced: job losses, drug use, crime and racism were all blamed on Obama. The Facebook ads did not only believe that liberals differed ideologically, they believed that liberals acted against America to the detriment of “the people” and the benefit of the liberal “tyrants.” The Facebook ads viewed liberals as anti-Americans, “destroying everything we hold of worth.”

The ads used moral duality to paint liberal leaders as evil: Obama was depicted as an ISIS leader and Clinton was equated with Satan. The ads claimed that Obama was enabling Muslim “soldiers” who would forcibly convert American Christians; Obama was “one of them.” Clinton was characterized as having “anti-American ambitions;” she was a socialist and a tyrant; she “spit on the Constitution” and would revoke American freedoms. The whole system was dirty: the liberal government was in league with the drug cartels, enabling illegal immigration and drug trafficking to line their own pockets. The Facebook ads directed their depictions of moral duality towards specific liberal leaders in a way that the alt-right did not, but mirrored the way in which the alt-right characterized the “rigged” system.

Although pro-traditional values rhetoric was rare in the Facebook ads, it did exist. The pro-trad rhetoric in the alt-right was linked to their hatred for Jewish people and the liberal system; the alt-right blamed those groups for the “unbalanced” state of society, which included feminism, gender equality and rights for non-straight, non-cis-gendered people. The alt-right was dedicated to “Culture normalization” in which the alt-right sought “to restore balance to society more broadly... deal with degenerate ills” (Anglin, 2016). The Facebook ads echoed this idea in their examples of pro-trad rhetoric, stating that homosexuality was a “pervert culture” and the country was “out of balance...[LGBTQ] have more rights [than] other folks.” The Facebook ads expressed more offense at the fact that non-straight people had rights, rather than at their lifestyle or morality. It was one more example of an “upside-down society” in which non-straight, nonwhite people had rights and privileges. In contrast to the alt-right movement, the Facebook ads rarely included “gendered” pro-trad views and there were no instances in which men/women’s roles were explicitly delineated.

Despite the differing focus of the pro-trad aspect, the overall ideological rhetoric was very similar. One of the ways it was most similar was in its conveyance of the “pro-patriotism/anti-government” concept that appeared in both the alt-right and the Facebook ads. The ads used the “glittering generality” tactic for this messaging: if society is upside down and the government is anti-American, then being anti-government was the best way to demonstrate one’s patriotism. By conveying a strongly felt message with no actual detail, the ads provided their audience with the ability to hold conflicting ideas in their mind at the same time. The audience of these ads still felt like patriots, at the same time



they were espousing secessionist (treasonous) ideals. Several of the Facebook ad pages were devoted to Southern secessionist ideals, conflating pro-white, anti-nonwhite and anti-ideology rhetoric as perfectly as the alt-right platforms constructed their white nationalism. If the overall intentions of the Russian-sponsored Facebook ads were to divide the country, then they struck gold by operating along racial and ideological lines that could literally cleave the country in two.

### **Conclusion**

The idea to study the intersection of the Russian propaganda and the rise of the alt-right was predicated on my interest in propaganda and fascination with the alt-right's affinity for Russia, which was evidenced by their Charlottesville chant, "The South will rise again! Russia is our friend!" (Svrluga, 2017). A comparison between the alt-right rhetoric and the Russian-sponsored Facebook ads' rhetoric revealed a major overlap; the alt-right and the Facebook ads used the same language, the same dog-whistles and the same slurs to demonstrate the same intentions – to divide America.

The alt-right used racial and ideology rhetoric to push their message of white supremacy and their desire for a white ethno-state. The alt-right groups' pro-white axiology hinged on America being a "white homeland" in which white people had cultural ties, apparently oblivious to the fact that white people have only been the majority population on this continent for a few centuries. In order to push this narrative, the alt-right painted nonwhite people as "not American", building strong racial boundaries around the same physical boundaries they wished to impose. The alt-right used all four areas of their rhetoric – pro-white, anti-nonwhite, anti-alternate ideology and

pro-traditional values – to describe boundary between “us” and “them,” ingroup and outgroup, white and nonwhite, conservative and liberal. They used stereotypes, favorable comparison and dehumanization and to promote their rhetoric and build axiological difference and moral duality. They heightened this rhetoric by invoking outgroup threat and highlighting relative deprivation. The Russian-sponsored Facebook propaganda ads used the same rhetoric and identity factors to push their messaging of white supremacy: that “white” people were the “true” Americans. They built boundaries between white and nonwhite, and liberal and conservative, through stereotypes, dehumanization, and moral duality. The Facebook ads used slurs and dog-whistles to highlight outgroup threat against ingroup (white/conservative) members and prompt feelings of relative deprivation.

The major difference between the alt-right rhetoric and the Russian propaganda was in the objects of their anti-nonwhite moral duality. The alt-right was obsessed by anti-Semitism. They blamed Jewish people for all of society’s ills, as well as the loss of absolute hegemony for white men. In their anti-Semitism, the alt-right combined their rhetoric of anti-nonwhite, anti-alternate ideology and pro-traditional values, by blaming the “Jewish” system for nonwhite immigration, the promotion of liberal ideology and feminism. In contrast, the Russian propaganda barely mentioned Jewish people, but concentrated the bulk of their anti-nonwhite rhetoric on building moral duality around the immigration (“invasion”) of Muslim people (a “war cult”) and Hispanic people (“parasites”). The Russian propaganda Facebook ads combined their anti-nonwhite and

anti-alternate ideology rhetoric into moral duality surrounding liberal leaders Obama and Clinton, who they blamed for this country's crime, drug use, and racism.

Both the alt-right and the Russian-sponsored Facebook ads used propaganda devices to push their messaging. One of the propaganda devices, the linking of indirect and direct messaging, could characterize the entire alt-right movement. Their carefully crafted message of white pride and white homeland, their denial of white supremacy and racism, obscured their ugly goal of eliminating nonwhite people from this country. The blithe slogans and agreeable-sounding rhetoric mask the path that would have to be walked to realize their vision, and the violent hate (or more horrific indifference) which would have to be expressed to create a white ethno-state. The indirect messaging – we aren't racist, we're just pro-white! – acclimatized the audience to accept the direct message – a plan for ethnic cleansing. The indirect messaging moved the audience along until they were no longer able to be offended or shocked by the direct messaging. There's a line in the movie "The Usual Suspects" that goes, "The greatest trick the devil ever pulled was convincing the world he didn't exist" (Kokin, McDonnell, Singer & Singer, 1995). By walking their audience along the path from awareness of racial differences, to white pride, to white protection, to white homeland, to the elimination of nonwhites, the alt-right movement erased the ethical barriers that had previously been built around racism and convinced them that the "devil" (racism) doesn't even exist.

In the same way, the deep political and ideological divides in our country have affected our view of Russian propaganda, so much so, that there still exists debate in our country as to whether the Russian propaganda pushed on social media from 2015 to 2017

actually existed and whether it impacted our country. As the alt-right has obscured racism (the “devil” that doesn’t exist), our ideological myopathy, manipulated by Russian propaganda, has likewise convinced portions of the American public that Russian propaganda itself does not exist.

While we can never know the true impact of the propaganda, we do know its intent: to split the country along racial and ideological lines. The alt-right movement has the same intent. When viewed in that light, the question of whether the propaganda impacted the alt-right, or vice versa, becomes immaterial. What matters is that there is a movement – the alt-right – which lives and works and hides inside of our country and which espouses the same rhetoric as an adversary nation. The alt-right spews the same hatred that Russia spread through their propaganda, and for the same end – to destroy our country. Although this research has ended, Russian propaganda campaigns against the United States continue and are likely to intensify with the impending 2020 US Presidential campaign; if nothing else, this research demonstrates the need for continued research into both Russian propaganda and the alt-right.

## APPENDIX

List of Russian sponsored Facebook pages which sponsored ads released by the U.S.

House of Representatives Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence (Minority)

(HPSCI(D), 2018):

- American\_made (tea\_party\_news)
- American Veterans (veterans\_us)
- Army of Jesus
- Angry Eagle
- Being Patriotic
- Bernie Sanders for President
- Black4Black
- Blackedification
- Blackluive
- Blackstagram
- Blacktivist
- Blackunion
- Black\_Baptist\_Church (Black Liberation Church)
- Black Excellence (iloveblackexcellence)
- Black guns matter (ProtectBlackGunOwners)
- Black journey to justice
- Black Matters
- Black pride
- Black voice
- Born black
- Born Liberal
- Brown Power
- Brown United Front
- Clinton FRAUDation
- Cop Block (Cop\_block\_us)
- Defend the Second
- Donald Trump America
- Don't shoot
- Fit Black (Black Fist)
- Gov\_spending

Heart of Texas  
Hell\_and\_Back (hellandbacktolife)  
Hilltendo  
InstaOTUS  
LGBT United  
Liberty Rising  
Memopolis  
Musliminst  
Muslim\_voice  
Nuts news  
Panther-Melanie  
Native Americans United  
Nefertiti's Community  
Pan-African roots MOVE (panafrootsmove)  
Pray(stay)4police  
Proud Blacks (sincerely\_black)  
Rebeltexas (south\_lone\_star)  
Red Pill  
Secured Borders  
South United  
Southern\_rebel\_pride  
Stand for Freedom  
Stop AI  
Stop Refugees  
Trumpsters United  
United Muslims of America  
Veterans Come First Watch the Police  
Williams & Calvin  
Woke Blacks

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## **BIOGRAPHY**

Margaret E. DeLany received her Bachelor of Science from the United States Naval Academy in 2000. She earned her commission and served in the Navy until 2008; then continued government service as a Department of Defense civilian until 2017. She received her Master of Science in Conflict Analysis and Resolution from George Mason University in 2019.