

In Love with Masculinity: Understanding Gay Men in the Alt-Right

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Abstract

Gay men and the alt-right appear ideologically opposed. The alt-right holds up an ideal of the hegemonic man-cishet, powerful, domineering, casting out anything antithetical to the model. Gay men appear to violate this ideal since queer identity is a sign of weakened masculinity, blurring the clearly defined categories of man and woman. The existence of gay men within alt-right circles challenges this incongruence. To explain such a discrepancy, this paper uses the theory of hegemonic masculinity to argue that the alt-right has begun to shift its definition towards a particular focus on homosocial bonding and hypermasculinity. Gay men who feel alienated from queer communities engage in these new aspects of the alt-right in an attempt to join. A virtual ethnography and short-form interviews corroborate this thesis, revealing that gay men do engage with these concepts, but the alt-right is not always willing to accept them into the wider community.

Introduction

In 2017, *The Cut* published an article titled “The Philosophical Fascists of the Gay Alt-Right.” In the article, author Maureen O’Connor compiles interviews with high-profile gay men associated with the alt-right, particularly Jack Donovan and James O’Meara. Profiling their ideological perspectives, she concludes that gay men can and do exist within the alt-right. As Alternative Right editor Colin Liddell said to O’Connor, “gays can be particularly useful to the alt-right” (O’Connor, 2017, para. 9).

At a glance, O’Connor presents a compelling argument backed by big names in alt-right scholarship and community members. Based on the interviews and texts that she compiles, gay men in the alt-right are spearheading a fundamental shift in dogma. However, the alt-right does not have a central leadership structure and possesses incredible divergences in opinion. In framing the alt-right as a monolith, O’Connor fails to account for its diversity (Hawley, 2017). It is nearly impossible to point to a few individuals and accurately imply that they reflect the values of everyone in the alt-right.

O’Connor correctly identifies a strong emphasis on what Donovan calls “gang masculinity,” which crafts a hypermasculine, violent means of demonstrating manhood (O’Connor, 2017). Gay men in the movement who adopt this form of hegemonic masculinity then become much more interesting insofar as they present a contradiction: Many communities (especially the alt-right) decry homosexuality as an unmasculine trait. By being homosexual, they are less of a “man” than their heterosexual counterparts (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Hegemonic masculinity, or a “pattern of practice” that men use to demonstrate their masculinity, is the tool from which the alt-right derives its strength (Connell & Messerschmidt; Eguchi, 2009; Sunderland, 2023, p. 13). The alt-right takes the core traits of a hegemonic man—cishet, powerful, domineering—to the extreme, cutting out anything antithetical to the model. In the traditional view, gay men violate this model because their queer identity is a sign of weakened masculinity, blurring the clearly defined categories of man and woman (Eguchi; Goldstein, 2003; Hayes & Nagle., 2016). O’Connor recognizes that gay men in the alt-right violate hegemonic masculinity but she quickly abandons further inquiry in favor of explaining the movement through its more notable figures. In doing so, she only presents an intriguing glimpse into how gay men rationalize their alignment with the alt-right and vice versa but fails to consider the importance of a relationship she identifies as essential to understanding the “gay alt-right.”

This paper uses the theory of hegemonic masculinity to argue that the alt-right has begun to shift its definition towards a particular focus on homosocial bonding and hypermasculinity. Gay men who feel alienated from queer communities that do not emphasize hegemonic masculinity engage in these new aspects of the alt-right in an attempt to join. By utilizing homosocial bonding and hypermasculinity, they reconcile their homosexuality and their masculinity, demonstrating the latter in the interest of alt-right acceptance.

To understand how these appeals appear and work at the community level, I conducted a virtual ethnographic study of discussions around gay men and the alt-right, focusing on engagement on Reddit, Twitter (now X), and 4chan over the past decade. In addition, I conducted two anonymous interviews with men who identify with some (or all) parts of “gay” and “alt-right” labels during October and November of 2024. This study reveals that gay men do engage with hypermasculinity and homosocial bonding to appeal to the alt-right. However, the alt-right is not always willing to accept them into the wider community. Following a brief review of relevant concepts, I analyze the process of gay male entry into the alt-right and the variation of responses by the alt-right that it triggers. Informed by several posts, threads, and other forms of digital content, the debate between proponents and detractors of inclusion demonstrates that alt-right acceptance of gay men is as complicated and chaotic as the rest of the movement.

Literature Review

Queer politics and alt-right politics appear fundamentally opposed to each other. Unlike the LGBTQ+ community, the alt-right centers personal and cultural identity around adherence to hegemonic masculinity. It uses this distinction to determine what men are allowed within their ranks. For instance, painting one’s nails might not attract attention within the queer community, but those in the alt-right would immediately flag it as a feminine practice. The assumed contradiction between the LGBTQ+ community and the alt-right pervades scholarship to the extent that they argue that even if the two groups were to intersect, it would not be of political importance (Waldner et al., 2006). Scholars reach this example by approaching queer issues as one purely of sexual identity or gender subversion, failing to recognize the importance of gender identity and expression in gay political affiliation.

To explain the missteps taken by current scholarship, I first highlight the emphasis on sexuality and gender nonconformity in the current literature. I then examine the importance of hegemonic masculinity in alt-right political identities, which mirrors justifications for gay inclusion in the alt-right. I conclude that current literature fails to create a convincing narrative for gay men’s relationship with hegemonic masculinity by ignoring it in favor of sex and gender subversion. In addition, its surface-level understanding of the alt-right’s structure leaves the question of alt-right response underexplored.

Academic History

Currently, the academic portrayal of the gay alt-right rarely includes an emphasis on the importance of hegemonic masculinity to the movement. Instead, scholars refer to queer political identity as a purely sexual or gender-challenging phenomenon and, in doing so, ignore LGBTQ+

people who endorse or even advocate for gender norms. By erasing the key actors within the gay alt-right, these academics cannot understand their importance.

The issue of sexuality-based relegation often happens to gay men, where academics ignore that both sexual and gender identities come with different forms of cultural belonging. In doing so, their work only functions as a sex-related conversation rather than engaging with actual views or ideologies (Waldner et al., 2006). For example, Waldner et al. (2006) rely on emerged from the UK in the 1960s and sexual meetup requests that involve Nazism, white supremacy, or other forms of bigotry. Her sources fail to connect gay men with alt-right communities based on anything besides sexual aesthetics. Skinhead culture is not inherently far-right, and kink culture is by no means reflective of the political agendas demonstrated by gay alt-right organizations and thinkers (Buchanan, 2022; Donovan, 2012b; Lamerichs et al., 2018; O'Meara, 2012; Tobin, 2022). Waldner herself seems to recognize that her sources are insufficient, requesting further examination through interviews with members of the gay skinhead community. Still, she finds it suitable to claim that since the far right is at odds with LGBTQ+ people, there is no political importance to the times they unite. Her inability to move past aesthetics and sex is reflective of a greater recognition of heterosexist bias in social research, which reduces gay identity to its sexual components (Herek et al., 1991). Gay men inherently express their identity through their sexual behavior, but their roles are not wholly reducible to it.

Even as scholars begin to recognize the importance of gender in queer political engagement, their assumptions on how the LGBTQ+ community addresses gender obscures those who engage with the alt-right (Egan, 2008; Mallory, 2019). While these scholars go beyond Waldner and disrupt the assumption that queerness is sex-specific, they only investigate it in the context of queer actors challenging gender norms rather than enforcing them. Based on the historical presence of queer people in politics, they continue to categorize LGBTQ+ people as a monolith that generally does not engage with the right. In the past, queer rights movements have tended to align with the political left, who emphasize civil individual freedoms of freedom of expression (Egan; Lefevor et al., 2024; Mallory, 2019). As gay rights have gained social acceptance, many movements have turned to discussions of gender issues, especially the treatment of transgender and nonbinary individuals. The shift did not occur under universal assent – a significant portion of the community sought and continues to seek to exclude trans individuals and issues from queer communities. Scholars note that trans-inclusive and transphobic actors alike center their perspective on gender in their queer political identity, categorizing trans individuals based on whether or not they are “really” the gender they identify with. How society grapples with gender, combined with the expectations queer people hold themselves to with regard to gender presentation informs their political perspective (Mallory, 2019). Still, academics do not acknowledge the presence of queer community members that seek to uphold traditional gender norms. The consensus they reach is that even if some queer people identify with the political right, the characteristics of the far-right are too inhospitable for them to inhabit (Mallory; Lefevor et al., 2024; Waldner et al., 2006). Despite this assumption, gay people

have been and continue to be involved in alt-right spaces (Byman, 2022; Chaouat, 2019; Donovan, 2012a; Donovan, 2012b; Goldstein, 2003; O'Meara, 2012; Sopelsa, 2017; Tobin, 2022). As the alt-right continues to grow, the proportion of gay voices in the movement has also increased. Examining the role of masculinity in the philosophies of both groups helps explain why the two have intersected in the past.

The Alt-Right's Relationship with Hegemonic Masculinity

Richard Spencer's publication *The Alternative Right* popularized the term alt-right. This term emphasizes masculinity as the central tenet of its ideology, though it does not exclude other elements. The alt-right emerged out of fear that conservatism is too focused on economic issues over the preservation of the dominant culture (Taylor, 2020). In the alt-right view, all identities exist in a hierarchy with cis-gendered, heterosexual, white men at the top (Rieger et al., 2021; Taylor; Wetzel, 2020). Members of the alt-right place different values on these identities, notably elevating gender above racial purity and white nationalism (Wetzel). The community has placed an emphasis on intellectual validation, using academic language and prestige to legitimize their values (Taylor). However, the alt-right also has a distaste for established political hierarchies, rejecting a set leadership structure within their movement (Sunderland, 2023). According to members of the alt-right, groups aiming to oust "cishet men" from their position of power have poisoned mainstream American media, and so they turn to loosely regulated online communities to disseminate their platform.¹⁰ Spaces like *The Alternative Right* give white men a place to find confirmation that the world is indeed against them and how they can help maintain the proper cultural order (Greene, 2019; Rieger et al.; Taylor).

Though many political groups emphasize a crisis in white male cultures, the alt-right predominantly focuses on gender. This is a unique perspective within the far right, and centering masculinity has created a rift between the alt-right and white nationalism. White nationalists advocate for a white ethnostate based on a white racial identity (Beirich & Hicks, 2009; Greene, 2019; Hayes & Nagle, 2016). Though they also advocate traditional standards of gender, they are more focused on the purity of the white race. Sunderland attributes the break between the alt-right and white nationalism to differing conceptions of hegemonic masculinity: "[white nationalist masculinity] embraces traditional tenets of white nationalism: racial superiority and patriarchal protection of white women and families... [alt-right masculinity] is a regressive, domineering, and vitriolic enactment that draws heavily from alt-right ideology" (Sunderland, 2023, p. 18). By demeaning the role of women and centering hegemonic masculinity, the alt-right creates

¹⁰ By cishet men, I am referring to cisgendered, heterosexual men. In other words, these are men who identify with the gender they were assigned at birth and are attracted to the opposite gender (women). Although the term is controversial due to current debates around transgender rights, I use it here to highlight the exclusion of transgender men from alt-right circles.

irreconcilable differences between itself and white nationalism. The alt-right advocates a return to traditional or tribal gender roles to curb “out of control” women. They advocate doing so with violence, coercion, and intimidation, which white nationalist misogynists claim is an improper use of the gender hierarchy (Sunderland; Wetzel, 2020). The resulting break creates two subgroups within the far-right: White nationalists who think that race mixing and the death of white culture are the biggest threat to the white American nation, and members of the alt-right who believe that the betrayal of women and the growth of feminism threaten its continuation. Feminists, in the eyes of the latter, have normalized weakened masculinity and threaten the sanctity of being a man. To combat the threat, the alt-right advocates that men demonstrate their masculinity in increasingly extreme ways (Luger, 2023).

Gay Men’s Relationship with Hegemonic Masculinity

Despite the alt-right labeling gay men as less hegemonically masculine because of how they blur gender lines, the two groups have intersected. The existence of gay men in alt-right spaces, along with organizations like the National Socialist League (NSL) and the Wolves of Vinland, challenges the view that homosexuality is incompatible with the alt-right. Before the twenty-first century, the most recognizable face of the queer alt-right was the NSL, based in Los Angeles and active from 1974 to 1990 (Buchanan, 2022). More recently, the Neo-pagan culture has proliferated in the alt-right as an instance of ancient, tribal masculinity. One of the communities that emerged through this trend, the Wolves of Vinland, combines pagan, Norse, and Nazi themes to create a physical escape from a world where masculinity appears endangered (Hayes & Nagle, 2016). Gay men have been and continue to be involved with the Wolves of Vinland, and Jack Donovan led the Cascadia chapter for three years (Hayes & Nagle; Luger, 2023). Not only have gay men intersected with the alt-right successfully, they have communicated that they feel like the alt-right represents their beliefs despite their sexual identity (Byman, 2022; Chaouat, 2019; Copsey, 2008; Donovan, 2012a; Donovan, 2012b; Donovan, 2016; O’Meara, 2012; Sopelsa, 2017; Tobin, 2022).

Though gay men in the alt-right acknowledge their sexuality, they rarely use it to rationalize their alt-right membership. Particularly in political discussions, gay men in these movements explain that their attraction to the alt-right comes from a feeling of alienation from other queer people rather than a fetishization of far-right communities. There is undoubtedly a philosophical basis for this phenomenon based on Bartky’s theory of psychological alienation. She argues that an individual experiences psychological alienation when they believe they exist within a structure that manipulates their psyche into complacency, whether perceived or genuine (Bartky, 1979). For gay men, this means that they think “[they] are penalized, as it were, unjustly; [they’re] placed outside a certain safety to which [they] think [they] were born... [they] feel cheated because they were born into a society where they were supposed to be safe” (Baldwin & Goldstein, 2014, Goldstein, 2003, p. 32). Groups

like the NSL use language that reflect Bartky's theory, proclaiming that "the sexual non-conformist must shed the image of freak, Third World militant, and street faggot for that of responsible citizen" (Buchanan, 2022, p. 505). In doing so, they argue they could exit the state of psychological alienation and return to their proper place in the far-right hierarchy. Echoed by modern figures, there is a clear pattern of gay men rallying against societal "othering" by attacking the "responsible parties." Under this mindset, many gay men have discovered that the alt-right most effectively allows them to reassert their masculinity.

The increased prevalence of gay men in the alt-right, such as Jack Donovan, highlights that the alt-right can incorporate homosexuals. Scholarly analysis recognizes that these relationships frequently utilize homosocial bonding to demonstrate adherence to hegemonic masculinity (Anderson, 2009; Johnson, 2016; Ravenhill & de Visser, 2017).¹¹ Eguchi points out that gay and straight men are only seen as "equal" if gay men *hyperindulge* in masculine activities (Eguchi, 2009; Frasure-Yokley, 2018; Ravenhill & de Visser, 2017). During social activities with other masculine men, men perform activities strongly associated with masculinity, such as sports, drinking, or financial dominance. Likewise, heterosocial bonding—emotional vulnerability, care for appearance, and so forth—constitutes the most compelling indicators of unmasculine weakness (Frasure-Yokley, Ravenhill & de Visser). The hypermasculine gay man removes himself from all possible ways of interacting socially with women, preventing further degradation of his status. Of course, this is a possibility in theory only: as of this study, only figureheads in the alt-right have actively advocated for this change. Perspectives from gay men and those in the alt-right without a platform are noticeably absent from the picture of their intersection.

Given the prevalence of hegemonic masculine adherence in both gay and alt-right circles, sexuality, or gender nonconformity-based explanations for their intersection are unsatisfying. Rather, gay men appear to appeal to alt-right hegemonic masculinity to try and gain acceptance. The alt-right then evaluates these men on how well they demonstrate masculinity. Though gay alt-right figureheads advocate for gay inclusion along these lines, online spaces have given individuals the opportunity to redefine hegemonic masculinity in a way that includes— and sometimes valorizes— gay men.

Methods and Study Results

The following study paints a picture of a community grappling with concerns of gender and masculinity through gay acceptance. Rather than focus on dogma advocated by figureheads, I explore how gay men seek acceptance within alt-right communities, taking stock of the ways they make their appeals and how the alt-right either accepts or rejects them. I analyzed 57 posts and

¹¹ Homosocial bonding refers to activities done with members of the same gender to build camaraderie. Likewise, activities with members of the opposite gender can be classified as heterosocial bonding.

discussions shared on 4chan, Reddit, and Twitter. Although I found these posts based on keyword searches, I analyzed all relevant pages closely to account for responses to content about gay men and what received more or less attention. To supplement these findings, I conducted two short-form interviews with two men who considered themselves to identify with some (or all) of the alt-right label. Each interview consisted of explicit questions about acceptance within the community and gender identity.

This study supports the view that gay men advocate for themselves by either separating themselves from deplorable gays or embracing homosexuality as a hallmark of masculinity. Specifically, gay men demonstrate their willingness to join the alt-right through four themes; (1) they reject the “feminization” of the queer community; (2) they dissociate themselves from the queer community; (3) they highlight their gender over their sexuality; and (4) they argue that homosexuals have an ideal conception of masculinity.

Though gay inclusion is unlikely to be a popular tenet of the alt-right anytime soon, questions around homosexuals have forced the alt-right to reevaluate their definitions of masculinity to explain their motivations to accept or reject them. Below, I present a more elaborate explanation of how gay men make appeals based on the language and ideas used by the alt-right, highlighting important themes about how gay men and the alt-right interact with each other. In doing so, I argue that they create a narrative that appeals to the values of both communities. Though the perspectives differ, both communities have framed their arguments around what they think alt-right masculinity is and should be. The explanation below attempts to present a recreation of the narrative that many gay men present in their appeal to members of the alt-right when moving through the four previously identified themes. Afterwards, I explain how the alt-right responds to gay men’s conception of hegemonic masculinity and how they grapple with the issue of sexuality.

Themes in Gay Appeals to the Alt-Right

Reconciliation Triggered by Anti-Feminism

In the first component of appeals to the alt-right, gay men argue that they have to reconcile their masculinity and sexuality because feminism has overtaken the queer community and feminized them. Since feminists, the queer community, and society generally assign femininity to gay men, they become victims without agency. Thinking back to Bartky’s lens of alienation, gay appellants engage with the idea of psychological oppression by implicating a feminist system. The 12 posts I found argued that feminism makes gay men feel inadequate as men because people assign them femininity based on their sexuality. They asserted that feminists encouraged gay men to endorse feminine stereotypes, alienating those that did not want to express themselves in that fashion. These men highlight their hypermasculinity as a way to reassert their gender identity. I provide examples of this

train of thought, noting how specific language references anti-feminist hypermasculinity to avoid the femininity associated with being gay.

Several posts blame feminists for creating the conception in popular culture that gay men are feminine. Self-proclaimed gay right-wingers asserted that feminism relies on “this false dichotomy that men are oppressors, women are the oppressed” (Fun-Pool6364, 2024). Women transplant this identity onto the LGBTQ+ community, turning queer people into the oppressed and cis het people into the oppressor. Gay appellants to the alt-right argue that creating that dichotomy makes the LGBTQ+ identity inherently feminine and that being accepted in society as a gay person means forsaking masculinity. Many said that they felt like feminists hated gay men because they were men and that engaging with masculinity was a betrayal of male queer identity. Rather than capitulate to feminist queer identity, gay men discuss engaging with their masculinity as much as possible to protect themselves from becoming emasculated. Be it “the woke mind virus,” “feminazis,” or “bitches,” gay men discuss women as a degenerative force that they can combat by being hypermasculine. Especially on 4chan, posts advocate for physical assault against women who defy traditional gender roles the alt-right expects them to follow. This masculine “defense of gender norms” defends men, especially gay men, against forced feminization. By engaging in hypermasculinity, gay men can demonstrate that they are not the victims that feminists paint them to be.

Amongst the posts in this study, gay appellants commonly invoke feminists’ feminizing of homosexuals as the impetus of their radicalization, and as gendered forces that have replaced traditional far right scapegoats (such as racial and religious minorities). The growth of incel culture as an ideology has meant that many straight men on 4chan, Twitter, and Reddit see women as their primary barrier to national survival. Instead of maintaining traditional gender roles, women have become sexually promiscuous, disobedient, and eager to feminize their male counterparts. These platforms echo the sentiment that the alt-right hates women, and gay men have taken advantage to assert their inclusion.

Alienation and Separation from the LGBTQ+ Community

The second theme I identify concerns gay men’s departure from the queer community. Using homosocial bonding, they create a gay male in-group that is separate from the larger LGBTQ+ community that has been tainted by identity politics. Gay men who desire a hegemonically masculine life argue that the rest of the LGBTQ+ community has accepted the role of femininity placed upon them by society. The “genderqueer menace,” as one user called it, presents a greater struggle for gay men who want to emulate alt-right masculinity (hKraeXoI, 2019). While both groups intend to demolish the masculine foundation of society, gay men can distance themselves from women. The LGBTQ+ community, however, acts as a false representative for them because of the tendency in popular culture to treat queer people as a monolith. Since the larger community has

“accepted degeneracy,” gay appellants to the alt-right must prove to the online world that they detest association with abnormality. This gay-but-not-queer perspective asserts that they identify with the community that fought to get into a heteronormative society but not with the one that has become corrupted with feminine degeneracy. The 15 posts that argued for this separation directed interested gay men towards smaller groups that would engage in homosocial bonding. They encourage attacking a queer identity that no longer includes them, bonding over a masculine assault on degenerates.

In spaces frequented by individuals from all sides of the political spectrum—such as Reddit or Twitter—users disagree about how gay men should behave. One Reddit poll asked gay men if they feel like they need to be “more masculine” (p3tr000, 2022). 51% of respondents said they felt the desire to appear manlier at least some of the time. Men across platforms echoed this sentiment. Many discussed their difficulty feeling included in a community that seemed to center on hypersexuality¹² and femininity. In moderate spaces, gay men voiced their frustrations towards the queer community more generally. For those who wanted to pursue the alt-right ideal of masculinity, though, they were most concerned about the issue of identity politics. Repeatedly, gay appellants to the alt-right bemoaned the LGBTQ+ community’s insistence on organizing around labels, particularly frustrated that they could not voice perspectives queer masculinity that did not align with popular perspectives. For instance, a commenter on the Reddit poll complained that he could not talk to many other queer people because “they are obsessed with identity politics and are completely unable to have a conversation without frothing at [the] gums and trying to scratch [my] eyes out if [I] disagree with them or have a different opinion” (ParticularFun5407, 2024). When gay men voiced frustrations like this, specific comments stood out against the general pushback by queer people. Several accounts advocated for people who felt alienated by the community to abandon more moderate spaces on Reddit like r/AskGayBros or r/LGBT, asserting that other virtual meeting places like 4chan, 8chan, or Truth Social would better serve their interests.

As gay men move to virtual spaces with greater alt-right sentiment, they organize around like-minded individuals informed by homosocial bonding. This new in-group of gay men on alt-right platforms leads appellants to perceive a greater capability to prove their legitimacy to the alt-right community. They specifically differentiated between the group they had formed and the queer community they left. Many employ the word “fag” as it is used by the alt-right to describe the LGBTQ+ identity. Rather than a sexual label, “fag” refers to men who forsake their masculinity for femininity and degeneracy. Since the gay in-group rejected the LGBTQ+ identity, they also rejected the queer lifestyle associated with being a “fag.” Their identity as homosexuals is unchangeable, meaning “you can’t prevent [homosexuals] from being gay but you can prevent [them] from being a fag” (Q+Wa7zqy, 2020). Homosexuality does not prevent someone from being a man, but queer identity politics encouraged by feminist victimization does. Gay men who want to be hegemonically

¹² Hypersexuality refers to an excessive engagement with sex or sexual aesthetics.

masculine therefore must reject the “queer lifestyle” effeminacy and depravity. They find other men who hold similar beliefs, and their bond around the idea of true manhood creates an in-group of gay men who identify with alt-right masculinity. Armed with a hypermasculine appeal solidified by their homosocial bond, gay men argue they have separated themselves from the stigma of degeneracy attached to queerness.

Reasserting Masculinity over Sexuality

The third theme I identified involved gay rejections of sexuality-centric identities. Even if gay men separate themselves from queer degeneracy, they have to prove that their appeal to the alt-right is legitimate. Saying you are gay but not a fag is not convincing enough, as the alt-right can say that “you are just a pervert refusing self discipline in favor of your nasty addiction” (HIVktsWE, 2020). Gay men who engage with the third theme therefore propose that considering sexuality at all is a misstep. By exerting their hypermasculinity, gay appellants attempt to demonstrate that political sexual identity has nothing to do with sex. Any attempt to argue it does come from people fooled by feminist identity politics.

When gay men reject sexuality as their primary identity, they argue that the alt-right misunderstands how masculine homosexuals understand their sexuality. For instance, many users on 4chan attempted to establish that gayness and manhood had a common goal in elevating alt-right masculinity. Though being gay meant being attracted to masculinity, it was not in the interest of destroying it. Instead, gay men wanted to “preserve and idolize it and protect it from the Women who want to crush it and keep it in a box under the bed” (hKraeXoI, 2019). These replies emphasized the “power” behind homosexual relationships. Typically posted alongside images of Greek and Roman statues, appellants argued that they could engage in these relationships because they were a culmination of an appreciation of masculine aesthetics and help create a community of men dedicated entirely to protecting masculine values. If a reply were to accept this line of reasoning, many gay men would then push them to question why being gay was anything of importance to the alt-right mission. By arguing that they were “masculinists” or “anti-feminists” first and homosexuals second, they highlighted their dedication to masculinity. When the alt-right would disagree and try to reject homosexuality, responses would accuse them of having definitions of manhood that feminists and the “genderqueer menace” had tainted. Hypermasculinity and hypermasculine appreciation by gay men become a rejection of feminine subjugation, demonstrating their total fealty to the masculinist movement.

For these gay men, the alt-right needed to transcend the feminist bounds of masculinity. At its extreme, they adopt a stance reminiscent of Jack Donovan’s old work: Alt-right circles should valorize men who love men as the ultimate practitioners of masculine appreciation. According to them, gay men have no desire to engage with masculinity for procreation, unlike women. Instead, they adore masculinity purely for its own sake. Likewise, they argue that gay men can supersede the “maleness” of their straight counterparts since they never have to denigrate their practices to anyone

feminine. All drives, including sexual, are therefore directed towards the practice of embracing “maleness.” Central to this perspective is the declaration that femininity has tainted the rest of the LGBTQ+ community. Unless you are engaging in masculine practices, any men– and especially gay men– are no better than women.

Reconciliation through Hypermasculinity and Homosocial Bonding

The fourth theme I identify takes into account the previous three and combines them. The result is the argument that gay men reconcile their homosexuality with their masculinity by arguing that they complement each other. They exert their hypermasculinity in their male-only social units and explain that doing so valorizes masculinity over, or through their homosexuality. Specifically, 13 posts used this logic to make two arguments. One claims gay men could become a “based fag” and reject the degenerate aspects of homosexuality to be a better man (Higginbotham, 1994). The other challenges the view that gay men have to deny any part of their sexuality to align with the alt-right. Rather than combating homosexuality with hypermasculinity, some men claim that men who have sex with men (or “androphiles”)¹³ allow them to transcend the bounds of gayness as a way to behave.

Gay men who want to be seen as “based fags” want to reject the undesirable components of homosexuality. Moreover, they emphasize that doing so requires that they recognize parts of homosexuality that are deplorable. For example, gay men express a desire to cut off hypersexual degeneracy. One thread on 4chan featured a man who argued that his “faggotry” was intended to serve real men sexually. Within five minutes, responses piled in to reject this line of reasoning, especially from gay men. One user best verbalized the response, saying: “you’re the reason why fags are associated with diseases. You’re ruining it for those of us that have some self-respect” (Anonymous, 2014). Rather than subsume themselves to other men through sex, the gay alt-right argues that they reject feminine hypersexuality in their sexual relationships. Instead, they can form their relationships around the (alt-right) heterosexual ideal of a power dynamic between dominator and dominated. So long as the gay man is the penetrative partner, they engage in sex for the pure purpose of gaining pleasure through domination. In doing so, they demonstrate the “self-respect” that makes them men on the same level as heterosexual members of the alt-right.

On the other hand, gay men who claimed to transcend their homosexuality argued that their identity not only meets alt-right masculine standards– it opens them up to a unique form of manhood. More than just being “one of the good ones,” these men advocate that their sexuality has an implicit appreciation of masculine aesthetics. In one defense of gay inclusion, a user on 4chan argued that “fucking another man is the highest form of masculinity” (JJW9PGn3, 2019). Though they agree that feminism has corrupted the LGBTQ+ community, they assert it is not because homosexuality is degenerate. Instead, the intrusions by feminism have attempted to silence the

¹³ “Androphilic” is a term used to describe an attraction to masculinity. Jack Donovan has popularized the application of this term to men who are attracted to men.

masculinity-loving sect of gay men in favor of making the community victims. Proponents of gay inclusion frequently argue that gay men's adoration of masculinity is suppressed by those who reduce it to sexuality. In other words, being anti-gay is being anti-alt-right masculinity.

By refining homosexuality to something greater than base sexual attraction, gay men direct their implicit understanding of "true masculinity" and apply it to the alt-right mission. The poster that referenced the "genderqueer menace" was more pointedly arguing that the alt-right needed masculine gay men to combat it. Gay appeals do not just claim that they can be accepted by alt-right men: They say that they *are* alt-right men. Gay men have reconciled their sexuality with their gender by utilizing their experiences as queer people. In doing so, they rise above any need to interact with femininity. Because they have a built-in attraction to the idea of masculinity, appellants argue that they can love masculinity as a political ideal alongside their sexual desire for it. One interview revolved around this discussion of gay men being the ultimate defenders of masculinity. When asked about rejecting gay men from alt-right spaces, the interviewee called the claim that gay men were less of a man than their straight counterparts "another cope" used by people unwilling to engage with the points put forward by alt-right gay men (Interviewee A, personal communication, October 21, 2024). He explained that people on all sides of the political spectrum will demean his position because of his sexuality, but what they are doing is avoiding the arguments he puts forward about issues of masculinity. Rather than acknowledge that he has a valid point about proper gender roles and valorizing masculinity, people who attack his sexuality do not want to admit that a gay man can inhabit such a masculine space. Because gay men have reconciled their sexuality and gender, all groups, especially the alt-right, should meaningfully engage with gay men's arguments about how to be an alt-right man. When other members of alt-right virtual communities attack the reconciliation appeal as a deluded attempt to rationalize degenerate behavior, gay men argue that it is a means of avoiding the real problem. They reject such a position because it still centralizes discussions of sex, tying men only to their sexual habits. Instead, they argue that the alt-right should recognize the gay men within their movement as the ultimate androphilic warriors. These men do not just want to have sex with other men— they have fully recognized the triumph of masculinity over femininity and valued it over all else. By cutting off women entirely, they do the same with femininity, dedicating themselves entirely to the defense of the nation. They have transcended the bounds that come from centering homosexuality as an identity.

Whether gay men choose to transcend the homosexual label or overcome it, they do so by engaging with the above four themes. Gay appellants differentiate themselves from the rest of the LGBTQ+ community that, in their view, has become corrupted by feminism and feminization. In their separation, they engage in hypermasculine homosocial bonding to create a masculine identity that supersedes their queer one. By reconciling the two, gay men advocate that the alt-right should engage with them as men who are gay rather than gays who are men. Where gay men appear in the alt-right, one is sure to find these appeals, though whether they are received well is another story. Not only does the alt-right attempt to understand the argument put forth by gay men, but it must

also grapple with the idea of “alt-right masculinity” implicit in the above arguments. The following section narrates the ways in which the alt-right chooses to endorse or reject gay men’s idea of masculinity, highlighting that the majority of men in the alt-right do not acknowledge the importance of homosocial bonding in hegemonic masculinity.

The Alt-Right’s “Innate Masculinity”

When gay men use the above four appeals, they disrupt the alt-right’s tendency to associate gay men with femininity and degeneracy. If masculine alt-right gay men exist, they challenge the definition of queerness and masculinity created by the alt-right. Whether heterosexual alt-right men choose to accept or reject gay inclusion, their arguments insist that masculinity is an innate quality. Proponents of gay inclusion claim that alt-right gay masculinity is fundamentally different from the “fag” masculinity that the rest of the queer community embodies. Detractors assert that there is no relevant difference between the two, and that queer degeneracy defines gay masculinity. Though these perspectives diverge when it comes to accepting gay men, they agree that masculinity is an inherent trait that homosexuality alters. In this section, I overview the arguments used by both camps and recognize how their language refers to masculinity as a natural trait rather than a learned one.

Those who encourage the alt-right to include some gay men tend to highlight the differences between good and bad expressions of queer masculinity. There is a notable presence of people in the alt-right who, although they will not go out of their way to defend gay men, will shut down arguments that denigrate far-right gay men. Especially on Twitter, there is a tendency to reject homophobia as a meaningful attack on those who support the alt-right agenda. Despite making fun of gay people and refusing to endorse a gay candidate for president, one Twitter user repeatedly comes to the defense of gay men within far-right spaces. He argued in the comments of a post by gay anti-Muslim advocate Scott Presler that Presler’s presence in conservative and alt-right spaces was not antithetical: “his sexuality is not his personality” (Daigle, 2023). He continued to say that men like Presler recognize the “less-than” status of homosexuality and refuse to capitulate to degenerate masculinity, so the alt-right should support men like him. For this user and several others in this study, gay men are welcome in their communities even if their sexuality made their masculinity less potent than that of heterosexuals.

The core of gay acceptance by the alt-right relies on a differentiation between being gay and being a “fag.” In doing so, they recognize that gay men who appeal to the alt-right are indeed different from the rest of the LGBTQ+ community. These men, unlike fags, respect masculinity and deserve recognition as valid members of the alt-right. Of course, this perspective is not monolithic—in fact, most posts around “gay vs. fag” from cishet men attacked other cishet men who conflated the two. The language utilized is particularly reflective of incel culture. For example, a 4chan user

claimed that “hatred of gays comes from low-status men who are struggling for status [and sexual partners]” (mG7DCuB+, 2020). Whether they are labeled virgins, incels, betas, or otherwise, these “low-status men” mistakenly attack all gay men as representative of the femininity-polluting “fags.” The reality, they claim, is that there are two variations of innate homosexual masculinity. One, “fag” masculinity, is barely a masculinity at all, characterized by hypersexuality and femininity. Gay masculinity is lesser than straight masculinity but still aims to uphold masculine ideals. Proponents of gay inclusion argue that gay men have a choice between these two masculinities, and those that reject “fag” masculinity are welcome proponents of alt-right masculinity.

Even if there is a part of the alt-right that buys into the idea of gay men transcending masculinity, they still communicate a struggle to separate these men from the eroticism of stereotypical homosexuality. These concerns are not new: the alt-right generally voiced these concerns around the inclusion of Milo Yiannopoulos, who was a vocally gay white nationalist that used effeminacy to gain popularity (Palmeri, 2017). However, discussions around the subject have increased with the similar influx of accusations that many online figures in the alt-right are secretly gay. Particularly on Reddit, posters accused well-known troll Nick Fuentes of being gay after interacting with a “bisexual catboy” (vsItWRic, 2020).¹⁴ As the conversation entered alt-right circles and some users proposed that the movement distance themselves from Fuentes, many members of 4chan had reflections of their own. For example, one user claims: “this is funny coming from wignats whose whole milieu is filled with homosexuals... The official wignat position on homosexuality is that faggots are natural aristocrats and ‘homophobia’ is pleb-tier” (cIi8E57Q, 2020). The term “wignat” here explains a division within the alt-right based on aesthetics. A portmanteau of wigger and nationalist, the term refers to those who hyperindulge in neo-Nazi or masculinist aesthetics rather than focusing on reserved intellectualism. The alt-right throws this slur around a lot when people on 4chan discuss far-right gay men, particularly more visible ones like Jack Donovan, Milo Yiannopoulos, and James O’Meara. Referring to men in the alt-right as “wignats” reflects a wider concern that “there’s a sodomite problem in the far right” (atTiOQjL, 2022). Though the alt-right recognizes that gay men do exist within their ranks, there is a distaste for those who engage with masculine aesthetics so fiercely that it undermines the political ambitions of the movement. In essence, they worry that gay men engage with alt-right content too genuinely at the risk of appearing to invest only in the imagery of the community, being inauthentic when it comes to actual convictions.

Detractors of gay inclusion highlight the fear of false sincerity, arguing that gay masculinity inherently sexualizes all men, and are therefore unable to separate aesthetic appreciation from sexual attraction. From a detractor’s perspective, gay men have an inherently incorrect view of manhood, a product of their lustful homosexuality. For instance, some in the alt-right claim that gay men only appear masculine to serve their narcissism. They co-opt the aesthetic of the alt-right man due to

¹⁴ Trolls are those on the Internet that antagonize others by posting inflammatory content.

excessive care for appearance, thus disrespecting true alt-right masculinity. Several posts pointed to a concern that gay men claim masculinity only insofar as it serves their appearance (“Vanity about looks is very feminine. Its disgusting when males are infatuated with their looks”) (pAJC7jKw, 2024) or attempting to join the alt-right in-group (“>nooooo guys please don’t hate us, gays cool, gays not degenerate, can i please be a nazi too?”) (HmD7LQMs, 2020).¹⁵ These posts emphasized a belief that some gay men are enamored with the alt-right and want to get closer to the men they find attractive. In doing so, they believe that ironic engagement with male sexuality through memes like “Are Traps Gay?” is a genuine call to action. Several posts attack Jack Donovan (in his capacity as a representation of gay men) and his attempt to appear authentic. Of these posts, three expressed incredulosity at other alt-right men when they chose to amplify Donovan’s philosophy. To them, it was evident that gay men had no experience with masculinity. The only reason a gay man like Donovan would say what he says is to “justify his degeneracy by hating on women, using historical revisionism and appealing to low iq virgins” (zF+B9IOI, 2020). He sexualizes the masculine ideals of the alt-right, seeking to get attention to satisfy his degeneracy. For those who are against gay inclusion, gay masculinity inherently sexualizes manhood. Gay men do not possess the innate qualities of an alt-right man required to be welcome in the alt-right movement because of their inability to see masculinity as something other than sexual.

How the Alt-Right Demonstrates “Innate” Masculinity

Whether the alt-right chooses to accept or reject gay men, they argue that they do so based on innate masculinity. Those who support gay inclusion emphasize that gay men who choose to reject “fag” masculinity possess the inherent qualities of an alt-right man, albeit less than their straight counterparts. Detractors highlight the view that gay and straight masculinity are fundamentally different, where gay men are unable to move past their attraction to men and only have an appreciation for the masculine aesthetic. Even if gay men engage in all four *themes* I noted above, the alt-right appears to argue that they will only include those who are fundamentally enough of a man. However, implicit in the alt-right’s position is that men prove their masculinity through *demonstration*. Proponents of gay inclusion require that gay men show how they are not “fags” and anti-gay men in the alt-right argue that straight men are capable of becoming someone that practices “fag” masculinity. The following section demonstrates that the alt-right’s idea of “innate masculinity” is compatible with gay appeals to the alt-right that highlight masculine demonstration.

Proponents, when arguing that gay men can choose between gay masculinity and “fag” masculinity, evaluate their choice based on how they present masculinity. If gay men did not

¹⁵ 4chan users tend to summarize their interpretation of a previous comment with the “>” symbol followed by green text. In this case, a user responded to an attempted outreach by a bisexual man who claimed to overcome his sexuality.

demonstrate their masculinity, the alt-right would not know which men to accept. Several posts recognize that certain behaviors make someone a “fag” instead of a gay man and frequently highlight certain behaviors as indicative of either camp. On Reddit, one advocate for gay inclusion complained that gay men get a bad reputation because “some gay dudes get very flamboyant and girly about [being gay]” (SeNorSpiceyBoi, 2024). Other comments in this thread highlighted similar feelings—while being gay is masculine in itself, choosing to present yourself femininely or “flamboyantly” was proof that you were a “fag” instead of a masculine gay man. Like the language used by other proponents, this perspective assumes that gay men have a choice between two innate ways of being homosexual. However, this thread emphasized that displays of traditional effeminacy are what lead commenters to conclude that someone is a “fag” instead of a gay man. Men like Donovan, on the other hand, represent a demonstrated celebration of masculinity and tradition. In a thread about Donovan’s compatibility with the alt-right, one user summarized his understanding of valid gay behavior as “be a man, do man shit, who [cares] who you fuck” (YkhyPyFF, 2024). Because Donovan engaged in masculine activities—this user highlighted how Donovan does jiu-jitsu and “can fight”—he separates himself from feminine degeneracy. To choose between gay and “fag” masculinity, according to proponents of gay inclusion, is to choose between masculine and feminine activities.

For those that detest gay inclusion, their arguments frequently emphasize the danger that straight men will become “fags.” They claim that there are innate characteristics that differentiate between straight and gay men, and that gay inclusion in the alt-right encourages straight men to behave like gay men and thus become like them. On a thread titled “Can you remember when you started worshipping the appearance and size of other men?” the original poster accused members of /pol/¹⁶ of being so brainwashed by pornography that they have become “fags” (kh3THKTy, 2021). Instead of maintaining masculinity, they have subjugated themselves to it. While the post was controversial, it highlighted a key concern for those against gay inclusion. Allowing “fag” masculine behaviors to exist in the alt-right risked encouraging straight people to choose to “act gay.” Several responses highlighted that a traditionally masculine man would never post gay erotica and talk about wanting to have sex with men as much as those on 4chan do. Even as a joke, these expressions of attraction to men demonstrated emasculation. While detractors refer to gay and straight masculinities as “innate,” their arguments imply that they are that way in theory. In reality, the alt-right evaluates men on how well they demonstrate their adherence to either masculinity.

Though they argue that gay men are innately incapable of achieving alt-right masculinity, members of the alt-right frequently insinuate that they determine who is and isn’t a man. My analysis of the themes of gay appeal and the alt-right concern around demonstrating innate qualities suggests that there is a disconnect between what the alt-right presents as its view of masculinity and how it works in practice. Gay men seem to be aware of how the alt-right’s definition of masculinity relies on gender demonstration and weaponizes it to argue for their inclusion: If the alt-right only cares about

¹⁶ /pol/ is short for Politically Incorrect, and refers to the board on 4chan used for political discussion

performing gender, gay men should be welcome so long as they are hypermasculine. The alt-right, however, maintains that any masculine attempts to join by gay men are extensions of degeneracy. In doing so, they imply that masculinity is a mentality rather than a presentation. Within my sample, gay responses never engaged with the issue of mindset. Instead, they focus on the claim that alt-right talking points around “being a man” or rejecting feminism evaluate whether or not people are masculine by how they demonstrate their gender. When alt-right men “act gay,” they argue, they still prove their masculinity. One interviewee reasoned: “I play things up to instigate, but I believe the core argument” (Interviewee B, personal communication, October 18, 2024). He claimed that ironic engagement with homosexuality carried the implicit assumption that you did appreciate other men as a demonstration of masculinity. Powerful physique and sexual domination are ways in which men demonstrate their masculinity, and even if they exaggerate them, the core of homosocial bonding gives the actions meaning. As such, gay men argue they do not prove themselves by talking about intentions. Doing so invites a degenerate mixing of appreciation and attraction. Actions prove that gay men apply their knowledge of masculine attraction and defeminize it by turning it into admiration. Therefore, the alt-right’s changing definition of hegemonic masculinity now focuses on demonstrating masculinity. Masculinity is not innate: It must be proven to other men to exist. Assumed gender roles determine how one should act, but proper dedication to masculinity requires action.

Conclusion

This study engaged in a virtual ethnography to elaborate on the relationship between gay men in the alt-right, seeking to explain how the two find themselves in agreement despite appearing fundamentally incompatible. Through an analysis of several digital spaces inhabited by members of the alt-right and interviews with self-proclaimed gay men who endorsed alt-right ideas, I was able to highlight four themes that gay men practiced in their appeals: (1) motivation to join the alt-right due to anti-feminist attitudes and hypermasculine ideals; (2) feelings of alienation from the greater queer community and the need to create a “gay-but-not-queer” community; (3) arguments for the alt-right to see the homosocial group as men that happen to be homosexuals rather than homosexuals that happen to be men; and (4) using hypermasculinity and homosocial bonding to reconcile their masculinity and homosexuality, incorporating the latter to improve their understanding of the former. The fourth appeal highlighted the core argument of gay men: that people prove masculinity through demonstration rather than identity. Though the alt-right tends to frame its response around whether or not someone innately has gay or straight masculinity, their practice of evaluating gay appeals highlights that they focus on how men portray their gender.

In analyzing how gay men and the alt-right engage with masculinity, this study indicates that the alt-right is not necessarily against men having sex with men. It is instead against the subversion

of hegemonic masculinity. As the alt-right continues to pursue a demonstrative version of masculinity, members who become popular in the mainstream carry these ideals with them as they spread their dogma. For instance, Andrew Tate, a podcaster and former kickboxer, has crafted a brand around alt-right decadence. He, alongside pickup artists, incels, masculinists, and other alt-right men, have adopted demonstrations of masculinity as the means of being a man. When Tate gives advice on his podcast, he encourages men to behave masculinely, rather than asserting their manhood based on feelings (Haslop et al., 2024). As gay appellants to the alt-right argue, he encourages men to be hypermasculine with each other, bonding over a shared masculine identity. He verbalizes what the greater alt-right implicitly argues, telling his followers that being a man means actualizing the masculine ideal. His popularity amongst the alt-right is symbolic of an acceptance of homosocial bonding in hegemonic masculinity and a call to action for those seeking to understand how to address masculinity as a political force. In that way, the gay differentiation between “fag” and alt-right masculinity mirrors that which Tate proposes exists between “betas” and “alphas.” The “fag” and the “beta” both relegate themselves to feminine complacency, while the alt-right man and “alpha” actively pursue masculinity to demonstrate their dominance. How the alt-right chooses to define good and bad manhood reflects their ideas on how men prove themselves, and gay men’s appeals to the alt-right highlight that doing so is inherently demonstrative. To be a man is to pursue masculinity, to engage with it to the fullest, and to do so with other men. Alt-right men now contend with how that definition includes or excludes gay men.

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