

MEDIA FRAMING AND HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY: COMPARING BREITBART'S
COVERAGE OF CLINTON AND TRUMP IN THE 2016 PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION IN
THE CONTEXT OF A SHIFTING AMERICAN HEGEMONIC MASCULINITY

by

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(Under the Direction of John Soloski)

ABSTRACT

This study traces out a shift in American hegemonic masculinity from representing the values of the conservative ideology to representing the views of the alt-right. It does so through a detailed media framing analysis of *Breitbart's* 2016 presidential campaign coverage. Using the theory of hegemonic masculinity as popularized by Raewyn Connell, this study concludes that *Breitbart's* coverage exhibits frames of hegemonic masculinity through its comparison of presidential candidates Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton. The study identifies several recurring frames throughout *Breitbart's* coverage and proposes that a victimhood mentality is central to a new brand of hegemonic masculinity – alt-right hegemonic masculinity.

INDEX TERMS: Hegemonic masculinity, Media framing, Breitbart, Alt-Right, Mass media,
Political discourse, Masculinity

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DEDICATION

For Zachary Sins – my best friend, my biggest fan, and the reason that I didn't give up.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	v
CHAPTER	
1 INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW.....	1
Introduction.....	1
Review of Literature.....	2
2 METHODOLOGY	22
3 TYPES AND THEMES OF BREITBART’S STORIES.....	29
4 FRAMES IN BREITBART’S STORIES.....	42
Master Frame One: Bodies that Win, Bodies that Lose – Metaphors of Physicality and Crafting Trump as a Masculine Exemplar.....	42
Master Frame Two: Locker Room Talk – The <i>Access Hollywood</i> Scandal and Preserving Gender Hierarchy.....	53
Master Frame Three: “The System is Rigged” – Male Victimization and a Shift in Hegemonic Masculinity.....	63
5 CONCLUSION.....	76
REFERENCES.....	84

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The 2016 presidential election campaign was called one of the most unusual campaigns in American history (Kurtzleben, 2016; Rothenburg, 2016). For the first time, a woman, Hillary Clinton, became the nominee of a major party (Dann, 2016). Though Clinton's victory as the Democratic nominee was unprecedented, Donald Trump's Republican primary nomination was equally stunning. Trump was not representative of the typical Republican presidential candidate (Joseph, 2016; Sreenivasan, 2016). Even with his secular and often inflammatory rhetoric, he still managed to claim the conservative vote—one that is usually reserved for candidates who reflect traditional, Christian values (Fay, 2012).

Trump was hailed by those on the right as the “anti-establishment candidate,” while Clinton was constantly battling the label of “the establishment candidate” (Page & Heath, 2016; Rhodan, 2016). Due to his offensive statements and polarizing rhetoric, mainstream media sources largely dismissed the legitimacy of Trump's candidacy (Goodwin, 2016). Critiques of Clinton's campaign centered on her trustworthiness rather than a lack of legitimacy, (Chan, 2016). Ideologically based news sources, such as *Breitbart*, however, were writing a different narrative than the mainstream media (Pinkerton, 2016).

Rooted in the theory of hegemonic masculinity, this study seeks to compare *Breitbart's* framing of Trump and Clinton in the 2016 presidential race to identify a potential shift in hegemonic masculinity from reflecting the values of conservative hegemonic masculinity to

adopting the values of the alt-right. The media play a key role in the construction of hegemonic masculinity and, especially in the 2016 election, the alternative media, *Breitbart* in particular, acted as a platform for the dissemination of alt-right values. This study aims to examine if *Breitbart*'s alternative narrative reflected themes generally associated with hegemonic masculinity. A comparison between coverage of Clinton and Trump at key moments during the presidential race is the best way to examine this relationship. *Breitbart*'s framing of the 2016 presidential campaign could represent a broader change in the nature of American hegemonic masculinity.

The study proceeds by reviewing literature about hegemonic masculinity, the conservative ideology's relationship to hegemonic masculinity, values of the alt-right, and the reason that *Breitbart* was selected as a site to examine a potential shift in hegemonic masculinity. The concept of media framing is introduced as a method of studying hegemonic masculinity through the media, and a review of the study's methodology follows. A thorough analysis of the sample of *Breitbart* articles establishes several main frames repeated throughout *Breitbart*'s coverage and foregrounds a discussion of a shifting hegemonic masculinity. Finally, the conclusion section summarizes the analysis and brings back into focus the theoretical questions the study attempts to grapple with.

Review of Literature

Hegemonic Masculinity

The study of masculinity emerged in the second half of the 20th century in conjunction with a growing body of feminist research (Barrett, 1996). One of the prevailing theories of masculinity, developed by Kessler et al., is the theory of hegemonic masculinity (Kessler, 1985). The most basic definition of hegemonic masculinity is "the pattern of practice that allowed

men's dominance over women to continue," (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Hegemonic masculinity is constructed using a wide scope under which other subordinating forms of masculinity fall (Connell, 1987).

In order to understand hegemonic masculinity, it is important to first understand the concept of hegemony. According to Barrett, "the term 'hegemony' originates with Gramsci's notion of class relations and refers to the dynamic process by which groups create and sustain power, how 'normal' definitions and taken-for-granted expressions come to define situations" (Barrett, 1966). Hegemony is concerned with maintaining existing power structures and suppressing opposition to these power structures (Barrett, 1966). Thus, the overarching goal of hegemonic masculinity is to maintain male dominance by creating both a physical and ideological world which serves the interests of the prevailing masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). This is achieved not through the use of brute force, but through the "organization of private life and cultural processes" (Connell, 1987).

Unlike other theories of masculinity, hegemonic masculinity cannot be confined to a particular place and time and cannot be separated from its historical significance (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Because the concept of hegemonic masculinity can apply to virtually any population where male dominance exists, it falls on the specific demographic, or "region" to define what construction of masculinity best enforces hegemonic principles. According to Connell and Messerschmidt, hegemonic masculinity "embodied the currently most honored way of being a man, it required all other men to position themselves in relation to it, and it ideologically legitimated the global subordination of women to men," (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

Hegemonic masculinity is constructed at several different location levels (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). At the local level, masculinity is constructed through culturally specific values and everyday practices (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). The next level described by Connell and Messerschmidt, the regional level, is perhaps the most pertinent for this study. The authors describe the regional level as being synonymous to a societal-wide level, or a national level (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). At the regional level, masculinity is modeled through collective conversation about masculine exemplars which are “exalted by churches, narrated by mass media, or celebrated by the state,” (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). And finally, masculinity is situated in a global context. Global notions of masculinity can influence regional and local constructions of masculinity and, oftentimes, certain models of masculinity reoccur in different contexts globally (Kimmel 2005, Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Because this project is concerned with national politics, it will fall under the umbrella of regional, societal-level constructions of masculinity.

Although the specific values of hegemonic masculinity are not universal due to being constructed at local, regional, and national levels, there are a few uniting themes which shape the theory of hegemonic masculinity as a whole. The first of these themes is heterosexuality (Connell, 1987). Hegemonic masculinity is closely related to the institution of marriage, and is therefore heterosexual in nature (Connell, 1987). Homosexuality is seen as a subordinated masculinity which is the antithesis of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1987). Hegemonic masculinity lends itself to homophobia, which is often associated through attacks on homosexuality in both physical and ideological terms (Morin & Garfinkle, 1978).

Another theme is gender hierarchy. Hegemonic masculinity is created in relation to women and cannot be studied only by looking at men. In order for hegemonic masculinity to

continue to reproduce itself over time, women must adhere to a very specific set of norms which Connell calls “emphasized femininity,” (Connell, 1987). Emphasized femininity is marked by female compliance and the inability for women to hold institutionalized power positions over men and over one another (Connell, 1987). A final theme is the need for an exemplar of masculinity. According to Donaldson, “to be culturally exalted, the pattern of masculinity must have exemplars who are celebrated as heroes,” (Donaldson, 1993). These “heroes” differ based upon the values of masculinity in a particular culture (Donaldson, 1993). Although these exemplars embody the ideals of masculinity, they are not representative of the men who idolize them and are often constructed out of myth (Donaldson, 1993).

Representations of the male body as strong and powerful are central to traditional hegemonic masculinity. Because of this, the idolization of sports and male sports stars is essential in constructing exemplars of hegemonic masculinity. According to Connell and Messerschmidt;

Commercial sports are a focus of media representations of masculinity, and the developing field of sports sociology also found significant use for the concept of hegemonic masculinity. It was deployed in understanding the popularity of body contact confrontational sports – which function as an endlessly renewed symbol of masculinity – and in understanding the violence and homophobia frequently found in sporting milieus (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

Male sports stars are often exemplars of hegemonic masculinity because they represent the pinnacle of manhood – physical strength (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). It is this physical strength and capability that sets the hegemonic exemplar apart from women and other, weaker

men. Though revered male sports stars are fallible, it is their construction as an unattainable standard of masculine physical perfection that props them up as exemplars.

Conservative Politics and Hegemonic Masculinity

Hegemonic masculinity is constantly changing to best suit the culturally situated “currently most honored way of being a man” (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). According to Hanke, “hegemonic masculinity refers to the social ascendancy of a particular version or model of masculinity that, operating on the terrain of ‘common sense’ and conventional morality, defines ‘what it means to be a man.’” (Hanke, 1990). Because of this, hegemonic masculinity cannot exist apart from a certain social and cultural context, and various types of hegemonic masculinities emerge to suit the most honored manhood of the time. The guiding values of hegemonic masculinity, as outlined by Connell, are closely connected with conservative politics (Willer et al., 2013). A study conducted by Willer et al. concluded that men who identify as political conservatives felt that “societal changes disadvantaged their gender” and were more likely to pride themselves in their masculinity (Willer et al., 2013). Conservative politics has long been associated with an interest in preserving traditional gender roles and a negative attitude towards sexuality (Christopher & Mull, 2006). This evidence suggests that the values of conservative politics, in particular, the views held by men who identify as conservatives, is a form of hegemonic masculinity. This particular form of hegemonic masculinity will be referred to as “conservative hegemonic masculinity” and refers to a national (or regional, as Connell terms it) hegemonic masculinity that exists in the United States.

The conservative ideology has traditionally been comprised of mainly white, upper-class, religious men, though this characterization has been recently changing (Pew, 2016). The 2016 presidential election saw the slippage of some of these demographic traits, suggesting a shift in

conservative hegemonic masculinity. According to Pew, most men (53 percent) and most white Americans (58 percent) voted for Trump, the conservative candidate in 2016 (Pew, 2016).

However, Trump was also most popular with rural white Americans and Americans who did not have college degree, going against the grain of the traditional conservative voter (Pew, 2016).

Historically, though, the conservative ideology has embodied a traditional family structure in which the family unit is headed by a strong patriarch and supported by a subservient woman (Levinson, 1955).

Conservative hegemonic masculinity is undeniably hegemonic as it reinforces the power structures in the American political process which elevate conservative white men to positions of power. The values of conservative hegemonic masculinity can all be found under the umbrella of what Jost et al. calls “system-justification,” (Jost et al., 2008). According to Jost et al. conservatism is a system-justifying ideology. System justification, then, suggests that “people are motivated to perceive existing social and political arrangements as fair, legitimate, and justifiable, even sometimes at the expense of personal and group interests and esteem” (Jost et al. 2004). It seems only natural that conservative hegemonic masculinity would praise a system that almost exclusively favors white men.

Jost et al. lists several values that are paramount in conservative hegemonic masculinity (Jost. et al., 2008). These include conformity, traditional family values, and capitalism (Jost. et al., 2008). When broken down, each of these values corresponds to a fundamental theme of hegemonic masculinity at large. Conformity, which can be better described as homogeny, shows that conservative hegemonic masculinity has a disdain for anything that is perceived as “different” and therefore threatening to the established order (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

This conformity allows conservative hegemonic masculinity to justify oppression and prejudice towards homosexuals, which is one of the essential themes of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1987). Similarly, traditional family values can be translated into the theme of gender hierarchy. Conservative hegemonic masculinity often uses religion to justify the oppression of women and the separation of gender roles which allow men to control all institutionalized power while leaving women to tend to domestic affairs (Morgan, 1987). This strict adherence to a gender hierarchy allows men to continue to dominate women (Connell, 1987).

Finally, conservative hegemonic masculinity values capitalism, an institutional structure that, according to McCright and Dunlap, has historically served conservative men well (McCright & Dunlap, 2013). According to McCright and Dunlap, “conservative white males have disproportionately occupied positions of power within our economic system, controlling stocks and flows of various forms of capital and benefiting from ample amounts of prestige, status, and esteem,” (McCright & Dunlap, 2013). Because the capitalist system favors those who have more resources and wealth, exemplars of conservative hegemonic masculinity are often rich men who have succeeded in gaining a capitalist advantage over the rest of the population (McCright & Dunlap, 2013; Connell, 1987). This represents the final theme in hegemonic masculinity – the need for masculine exemplars.

The Alt-Right

In the past few years, the American conservative ideology has given birth to a radical new political movement known as the Alternative Right, or the “alt-right.” The Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) defines the alt-right as “a set of far-right ideologies, groups and individuals whose core belief is that ‘white identity’ is under attack by multicultural forces using ‘political correctness’ and ‘social justice’ to undermine white people and ‘their’ civilization,” (Southern

Poverty Law Center, n.d.). Unlike conservatives who are usually upper-class, white males, members of the alt-right are working class, less educated white males who use the internet as their main avenue for communication and as an outlet for their views (Southern Poverty Law Center, n.d.). Emerging from the dredges of historically “marginalized” groups such as the Ku Klux Klan and Neo Nazism, the alt-right has internalized the view that its members are victimized by a larger “system” that is rigged against them (Michael, 2016). According to George Hawley;

The alt-right can scarcely be called an organized movement. It has no formal institutions or a leadership caste issuing orders to loyal followers. There is no alt-right equivalent of *The Communist Manifesto*. Different people who describe themselves as part of the alt-right want different things. Using the loosest definition, we could say the alt-right includes anyone with right-wing sensibilities that rejects the mainstream conservative movement. But there are certain common, perhaps universal attitudes within the alt-right. The alt-right is fundamentally concerned with race. At its core, the alt-right is a white-nationalist movement. (Hawley, 2017)

The term “alt-right” was coined in 2008 by Richard Bertrand Spencer, a self-proclaimed white nationalist who heads the National Policy Institute and created AlternativeRight.com (Southern Poverty Law Center, n.d.). According to Spencer, the alt-right rejects conservatism and believes that conservatives have become more left than right. Spencer writes the “Republican elite (the bowtie brigade, religious leaders, and ‘conservative intellectuals’) are also to the left of Republicans. Indeed, the Republican elite functions to dampen or deflect populist energies—to make sure things don’t ‘get out of hand,’” (Spencer, 2016). The alt-right claims to be anti-establishment and believes that the political forces currently in play exist to repress their

radical beliefs. This is expressed by Liddell who writes “the old establishment (a new one will be along shortly) are desperate to hang on to power by negating the alt-right in the same way that they negated old-style White Nationalism” (Liddell, 2016).

The alt-right began gaining traction and virtual mobilization through websites such as 4chan, 8chan, and Reddit where internet “trolls” could write anonymous posts, memes, and images that presented, racist, Islamophobic, Xenophobic, and sexist ideas (Michael, 2016). According to an article on *Salon*, “Unlike old-school white nationalist movements, the alt-right has endeavored to create a self-sustaining counterculture, which includes a distinct vernacular, memes, symbols and a number of blogs and alternative media outlets” (Michael, 2016). Donald Trump’s presidential campaign in 2016 has been credited as providing a channel for alt-right extremists to coalesce from the far-reaching corners of the internet, and into the more tangible realm of American politics (Michael, 2016).

Beyond racism and white nationalism, the alt-right is also united through beliefs about men’s rights. Some suggest that the concept of men’s rights is a “gateway drug,” or stepping stone into the alt-right, because men’s activism is intimately connected with alt-right principles (Futrelle, 2017). Men’s rights activism takes on a variety of lives in the internet. One branch of the men’s right’s movement, known as the “Red Pill” philosophy, is “founded on the general belief that women have it better than men” and that its “men not women who have been socially disenfranchised.” (Love, 2013).

A post on the original Red Pill forum on Reddit is particularly illuminating as to the stance of men’s right’s supporters on their beliefs about women. One Red Pill post states that “Feminists claim they want equality but what they really want is power without responsibility. They desire both male and female privilege consolidated into one, thus upsetting the gender

balance” (Reddit, N.D.). Later in the post, this concept of men’s societal disadvantage is articulated in the statement, “Society will always have a safety net for women, white knights will charge in, the state will provide and etc., as a man you have no such luxury, your propensity and ability to gain power is much higher than a woman's but your ability to hit rock bottom is far more pronounced too” (Reddit, N.D.). While the Red Pill may represent a particularly extreme brand of men’s right’s activism, it reveals an ideological belief that men have become victims are being continually marginalized by society.

Though sexism and men’s right’s activism are only two facets of the tenants of the alt-right, they are pervasive throughout alt-right literature. It is this facet of the alt-right that is most closely connected with the values of hegemonic masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity has long been concerned with maintaining a sexual hierarchy in which women are socially and systemically subordinated to men (Connell, 1987). However, the addition of a victim mentality into the core characterization of the alt-right man is one that has not been present in previous iterations of hegemonic masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity has traditionally served to maintain the physical and emotional strength and dominance of men and all subordinating masculinities are weak by comparison (Donaldson, 1993). By integrating a narrative of men as victims of social oppression, hegemonic masculinity shifts towards a form that allows alt-right men benefit from the social and political capital that comes with being characterized as a victim (Freidersdorf, 2012).

A Potential Alt-Right Hegemonic Masculinity

The fracturing of the conservative ideology and the birth of the alt-right suggests that conservative hegemonic masculinity could be undergoing a shift that would incorporate the views of the alt-right into the current regime of national hegemonic masculinity. Currently, there

are limited scholarly works that discuss the alt-right in detail and no scholarly work exists which draws a connection between the alt-right and hegemonic masculinity. However, internet forums and blogs provide a rich account of these values from those who identify as alt-right, and many of the themes and topics discussed on these forums suggest a connection between the alt-right and an emerging strain of hegemonic masculinity. Southern Poverty Law Center identified websites such as Reddit and 4chan as sites for the dissemination of alt-right views, and alternative-right.blogspot.com was created by supporters of the alt-right (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2016). From these internet sources the following values of the alt-right can be connected to hegemonic masculinity: a rejection of egalitarianism, a desire to return to America's "roots," hero-worshipping, and male victimization. It is these values that will be the central focus of this thesis.

The alt-right is fervently opposed to egalitarianism because it is seen as oppressive to the interests of white males (SPLC). According to Bokhari and Yiannopoulos, to the alt-right, "egalitarianism flew in the face of every piece of research on hereditary intelligence," (Bokhari & Yiannopoulos, 2016). Hermansson, a reporter for the *New York Times*, affirms this notion by saying the "alt-right has, at its core, the explicit rejection of equality and the pursuit of identity and status for white men who feel aggravated" (Hermansson, 2017). The alt-right believes that with equality, the privileged position that white men enjoy in society will no longer matter and thus they will have to share their resources and status with everyone. Members of the alt-right often use "scientific" data and studies to support their assertions that not all people are created equal (Bokhari & Yiannopoulos, 2016).

Alt-right masculinity leans towards white-supremacy and is opposed to social movements such as "Black Lives Matter" which they view as hostile to whites (Welton, 2015).

The alt-right is also hostile towards immigrants. According to the Southern Poverty Law Center quoting a column from an alt-right news source called the *National Policy Institute*, “immigration is a kind of proxy war – and maybe a last stand – for White Americans who are undergoing a painful recognition that, unless dramatic action is taken, our grandchildren will live in a country that is alien and hostile” (Southern Poverty Law Center, n.d.). The alt-right began fervently supporting Trump after he came out with his platform on immigration – which was to build a wall between Mexico and the United States.

Another value of the alt-right which is connected to hegemonic masculinity is the desire to return to America’s roots. Emblazoning the front page of alt-right website alternative-right.blogspot.com is an image of revolutionary war soldiers charging forward in unison. This image is a perfect representation of the alt-right’s desire to get back to founding values of America. One of the hallmarks of the alt-right is longing for a past America in which traditional values (that favored white males) were still the unquestionable norm of the day. However, the alt-right believes that the “system” no longer wants to support this America (Liddell, 2016). Liddell describes this phenomenon by saying “the point that emerges from all this is that American greatness, while wonderful for a conceptual 1950s America of milk shakes, long cars, drive-ins, and barbecues, is not necessarily ideal for the rest of the world,” (Liddell, 2016).

Another value of the alt-right is hero worshiping. In order for the alt-right to be validated, it must have public figures who will fearlessly represent its values and goals known to the public. As Liddell says, “the one thing our Time wants most is a hero,” (Liddell, 2016). Because the alt-right started to come to forefront of American politics in conjunction with the 2016 Presidential election, Donald Trump became the figurehead for this movement. As Spencer puts it, “Before

Trump, the alt-right could be criticized for being a “head without a body... now we are a whole man,” (Spencer, 2016).

One concept prevalent in alt-right literature that seems to represent a potential shift in hegemonic masculinity is the concept of male victimhood. Previous conceptions of hegemonic masculinity depict masculine exemplars as “tough and stoic,” unwilling to admit weakness (Donaldson, 1993, 647). Based on this description, the idea that males are beginning to assume a posture of victimhood may seem to run contrary to hegemonic masculinity. However, according to Connell and Messerschmidt:

Hegemonic masculinities therefore came into existence in specific circumstances and were open to historical change. More precisely, there could be a struggle for hegemony, and older forms of masculinity might be displaced by new ones. (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005, 6)

This quote demonstrates that it is the work of hegemonic masculinity to constantly renew itself in the face of challenges that may threaten its standing as a power structure. Thus, the incorporation of a victim mentality into hegemonic masculinity represents a natural progression and a shift from an older form of hegemonic masculinity to a newer one.

There is evidence in alt-right literature that suggests that men believe that their status as a man makes them a target for discrimination, therefore making them victims. According to an article in *The Atlantic*, members of the alt-right are “more likely to think men, whites, Republicans, and the alt-right themselves [are] discriminated against, while minorities and women [are] not” (Khazan, 2017). The turn in hegemonic masculinity towards victimhood is likely rooted in the belief that those who are at a societal disadvantage – such as minority members and women – have social capital resulting from their victim status (Friedersdorf, 2012).

Thus, as traditionally disadvantaged people groups gain more social and political influence, power flows away from the hegemony. It is then the project of hegemonic masculinity to appropriate a victimhood mentality into its core principles to regain that power and maintain dominance.

Re-Branding Conservative Hegemonic Masculinity

The values of the alt-right are almost universally more extreme than those represented in conservative hegemonic masculinity. The alt-right does, however, have core tenants embedded in its agenda which reflect the guiding values of hegemonic masculinity. By rejecting egalitarianism, the alt-right is essentially asserting its dominance over all other forms of humanity including racial minorities, the queer community, and women. Conservative hegemonic masculinity also capitalizes on conformity in order to assert white male dominance (Jost et al., 2004). While the alt-right expresses that it wants to break from conservatism, it simultaneously wants to revive conservative norms which favor heterosexual white men by getting back to America's roots (Spencer, 2016; Liddell, 2016).

And finally, the alt-right conforms to hegemonic masculinity by looking to an exemplar to model its masculine values (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Although the alt-right operates under the guise of being anti-establishment, almost all of its goals fall in line with the theory of system-justification as outlined by Jost et al. (Jost et al., 2008). The study conducted by Jost et al. concerned American politics and the resurgence of political division based on ideology. According to Jost et al., "political conservatives are motivated, at least in part, by the desire to maintain the societal status quo, resist activists attempts to change it, and rationalize existing social and economic inequality in society." Though the alt-right claims to be radical, the underlying logic behind its vitriolic stances is to preserve the American hegemonic norms that

favor white males. However, the alt-right has begun to see that it is possible for hegemony to serve a class that is not entirely made of white males (Barrett, 1966). When the balance of power began to lean away from the ideals of conservative hegemonic masculinity, the alt-right emerged as a response, claiming that equality meant that the death of white male privilege (Spencer, 2016).

Although conservative hegemonic masculinity and the alt-right share many of the same intrinsic values, they clearly have some fundamental differences. The rise of the alt-right could signal a new brand of hegemonic masculinity. This shift manifests itself not within the inherent values of conservative hegemonic masculinity, but within the branding of these values. The alt-right has made it its duty to be radical where it felt that conservatives were complacent. The alt-right does not drastically change the goals of conservative hegemonic masculinity, but rather desires to execute them in a way that will enact social change (Deanna, 2016).

This re-branding of conservative hegemonic masculinity necessitates an extremist discourse that is not concerned with political correctness or equality, but rather seeks to take back the privileged position of white males that the alt-right believes has been lost (Deanna, 2016). According to Deanna, the alt-right has gained the perspective that in order to be successful, they must adopt an activist strategy of political discourse (Deanna, 2016). Deanna writes, “to defeat them requires mobilizing those constituencies that are excluded from the current political and social structure, and that means mobilizing the conservative base to fight—*for once*—in their own defense,” (Deanna, 2016). Based on the attitudes and opinions of the leaders of the alt-right movement, this shift in discourse will likely be most noticeable in a decisively secular rhetoric that is uncharacteristic of the conservative hegemonic masculinity, in emboldened speech that rejects political correctness, and in a constant subversion of Clinton to

the dominance of Trump (Spencer, 2016). The shift towards a new brand of hegemonic masculinity – alt-right hegemonic masculinity – will be evident in the characterization of males, and Trump specifically, as being victims of a broken and rigged system.

Why Breitbart?

Studying the alt-right in conjunction with *Breitbart* news makes sense, because *Breitbart* is credited with helping to popularize the alt-right movement. The Southern Poverty Law Center asserts that *Breitbart* has “undergone a noticeable shift towards embracing ideas on the extremist fringe of the conservative right” (Piggott, 2016) *Breitbart* has published several stories outlining the tenants and rationale of the alt-right and continues to write works in-line with white-nationalism (Piggott, 2016).

Breitbart is a news website with a firm conservative ideology (Friedersdorf, 2012). *Breitbart* has been described as “the Huffington Post” of the far-right and, although it is not considered a major news outlet, is considered a potent voice in political discourse (Rainey, 2012). It is modeled after mainstream news coverage, using sources and data in its reporting (Grynbaum & Herrman, 2016). It is this structure that gives *Breitbart* some legitimacy among mainstream news outlets because it claims to report fact. *Breitbart*’s dichotomy between being ideologically motivated and structurally consistent with larger media outlets makes it a good object of study for frame analysis.

Breitbart was created in 2008. The website is named after its founder Andrew Breitbart, a conservative political commentator (Friedersdorf, 2012). Since its inception, *Breitbart* has branded itself as a far-right publication. The original intent of the publication was to act as a platform for the views of its outspoken founder, Breitbart. Staunchly to the right of the political spectrum, Breitbart was known for claiming that larger media sources had a liberal bias and

Breitbart identified with populist and Tea-Party views (Mark, 2016). According to Shapiro, who was mentored by Breitbart, “Andrew’s whole animating focus was ‘I don’t like bullies in the political sphere and I’ll fight the bullies’” (Bromwich, 2016).

Despite its political leanings, *Breitbart* was recognized by more established media outlets as a legitimate news source for its coverage of breaking news events. For example, *Breitbart* was the first news source to report on the Anthony Weiner scandal (Mark, 2016). The site has been called “divisive,” but has “gained prominence by breaking news about a series of scandals involving liberal politicians, bureaucrats and organizations, and relentlessly pushing those stories” (Bromwich, 2016).

In 2012, Andrew Breitbart passed away due to heart failure. Steve Bannon became the executive chairman of *Breitbart* news in 2012 (Mark, 2016). Supporters of Breitbart and his agenda believed that with Breitbart died his original intent for the publication. Under Bannon, the site took an increasingly “nationalist tone” which was “a shift that disgusted establishment Republicans and even some *Breitbart* staffers” (Mark, 2016). Though *Breitbart* had already gained notoriety in right-wing circles, the presidential election of 2016 brought *Breitbart* into the forefront of the media circuit (Grynbaum & Herrman, 2016). Throughout the campaign, the outlet had a strong presence on social media that rivaled outlets like *Fox News*, *Yahoo*, and the *Washington Post* (Grynbaum & Herrman, 2016). According to a *New York Times* article, “it is the site’s willingness to embrace viewpoints considered far outside the bounds of respectable political discourse that is the very source of its success,” (Grynbaum & Herrman, 2016). It was Bannon’s influence that ultimately lead to the shift in *Breitbart*’s coverage that propelled it to notoriety and simultaneously spurred concern for the extremism of its discourse.

Breitbart's pop in notoriety due to the 2016 election coverage also came with a shift in the founding values of *Breitbart*. Many former *Breitbart* staff members began to complain that Bannon “had turned a website founded on anti-authoritarian grounds into a de facto propaganda outlet for Mr. Trump” (Grynbaum & Herrman, 2016). In March 2016, five *Breitbart* staff members resigned due to an incident involving *Breitbart* reporter Michelle Fields (Abbruzzese, 2016). Fields claimed that Trump’s campaign manager, Corey Lewandowski, had grabbed and yanked her arm during a Trump campaign rally (Abbruzzese, 2016). Trump himself flat-out denied the incident, and *Breitbart* editor Joel Pollack “ordered staffers to stop defending Fields” over the incident in an attempt to keep the publication consistent with the message and goals of the Trump campaign (Gray, 2016).

According to a *Washington Post* article, this incident was not the only time that *Breitbart* went out of its way to support Trump. According to the article, *Breitbart* was unhappy that many polls showed that Trump was losing, so it “commissioned its own national poll ‘to get around the mainstream media filter’” (Blake, 2016). The article also draws attention to a *Breitbart* article headlined “Fact Check: Were Obama and Hillary the Founders of ISIS? You Bet.” The headline was in reference to a statement made by Trump that suggested that Obama and Clinton had loyalties to ISIS. Though, according to the *Washington Post* article, Trump redacted these statements, calling them “sarcastic,” *Breitbart* wrote an entire article trying to prove that Clinton and Obama were the founders of ISIS, which stated “‘Donald Trump is literally correct.’ *Breitbart* concluded, ‘Obama and Hillary created ISIS’” (Blake, 2016). These incidents are telling of a pattern of coverage which exalts and protects Trump. For this reason, it makes sense why *Breitbart* is known as being “party-line Trump Propaganda” (Grynbaum & Herrman, 2016).

Despite *Breitbart*'s identity evolution over its lifetime, it has enjoyed steady readership, and is one of the most popular websites in the United States According to Alexa's web database. *Breitbart* ranks as the 53 most popular website in the United States and the 262 most popular website in the world (Alexa, n.d.). The majority of users reach the site from Google, Drudge Report, Facebook, Fox News, and Reddit (Alexa, n.d.). The average user is a male, with some college education (Alexa, n.d.). *Breitbart* is owned by CEO Larry Solov, Andrew *Breitbart*'s widow, Susie Breitbart, and by "Republican megadonor family" the Mercers (Gold, 2017). *Breitbart* CEO Solov has remained remarkably quiet about the internal structure of *Breitbart* stating that he wants to "disclose as little as possible about the financial and ownership structure" of the company (Gold, 2017). Rumors have circulated that Trump himself was financially involved in backing the site, though those rumors have been denied by both Trump and *Breitbart* leadership (Gold, 2017).

Breitbart's reporting represents a fundamental break from the conservative ideology and has gained traction as a platform for the alt-right. By analyzing *Breitbart*'s 2016 election coverage, this study hopes to identify a shift in the framing of conservative hegemonic masculinity to incorporate the views and attitudes of the alt-right, in order to potentially identify a new brand of hegemonic masculinity – alt-right hegemonic masculinity. In light of this theoretical framework, the study aims to explore the following research questions:

RQ1: What recurring frames shape *Breitbart*'s coverage of the 2016 presidential campaign?

RQ2a: Does *Breitbart*'s coverage of the 2016 election exhibit characteristics associated with hegemonic masculinity?

RQ2b: If it does exhibit hegemonic masculinity, how are the guiding values of hegemonic masculinity – heterosexuality, gender hierarchy, and exaltation of masculine exemplars – preserved or altered through *Breitbart*'s coverage?

RQ3: In what way does *Breitbart*'s coverage suggest a shift away from a hegemonic masculinity that reflects conservative values to a hegemonic masculinity that reflects the values of the alt-right?

RQ4: What are the potential effects of *Breitbart*'s framing of the 2016 presidential campaign on those who receive these frames?

CHAPTER 2

METHODOLOGY

Validity of Frame Analysis

In order to see if there has been a shift in conservative hegemonic masculinity to incorporate alt-right values and rhetoric, this study will conduct a frame analysis of *Breitbart's* coverage of the 2016 presidential election. Hegemonic masculinity is, in part, constructed and narrated by the media (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Hegemonic masculinity gains its power from being integrated into institutions, and media coverage that reinforces hegemonic masculinity therefore constructs it (Connell, 1987). According to Hanke, “the concept of hegemonic masculinity may be useful for analyzing how masculinity is represented and constructed in the media” (Hanke, 1990). Media frame analysis can provide insights into how social structures such as hegemonic masculinity change over time based on the way they are publicly portrayed. Reese et al. defines framing as “the way events and issues are organized and made sense of, especially by the media, media professionals, and their audiences” (Reese et al., 2001).

Issues in Framing Methodology

Despite being a prolific research technique for media studies, there is no specific, agreed upon method for conducting frame analysis (Downs, 2002). There are few consistencies between framing studies, and the framing technique crosses paradigms (Downs, 2002). Media scholars have applied framing studies to both effects-based research and to critical-cultural studies making it difficult to apply one blanket method to all framing studies (Matthes, 2009). However,

the concept of what constitutes a media frame is generally accepted among scholars (Beck, 1998). Though there is not a set definition of a media frame, Fiske's definition of "code," a "system of signs, whose rules and conventions are shared amongst members of a culture, and which is used to generate and circulate meanings in and for that culture," is helpful in understanding media frames (Fiske, 1987).

In order to gauge the methods that are commonly used in framing studies, Matthes conducted a content analysis of media framing studies that appeared in the top communications journals from 1990 to 2005 (Matthes, 2009). Matthes identified several key distinctions between framing studies that affected their methodology. One of these distinctions was whether the framing study was text-based or numbers-based (Matthes, 2009). Framing studies that were considered text-based fell under the critical paradigm of media research and were not concerned with using content analysis to quantify the amount of times frames repeated themselves, but instead described frames in-depth (Matthes, 2009). Consequently, these framing studies had a much smaller sample size than the quantitative studies (Matthes, 2009). These types of framing studies show how "patterns of keywords, stock phrases, sources, and themes work to describe, interpret, and evaluate reality for the public," (Tucker, 1998).

Media Framing and Effects

For media framing analysis to have legitimacy as a method of studying media texts, it must assume the way media messages are framed has some sort of effect on those who consume the messages. According to Entman, frames have effects due to their salience (Entman, 1993). Entman writes, "frames highlight some bits of information about an item that is the subject of a communication, thereby elevating them in salience... [salience] means making a piece of information more noticeable, meaningful, or memorable to audiences. An increase in salience

enhances the probability that receivers will perceive the information, discern meaning and thus process it and store it in their memory” (Entman, 1993). In other words, frames accentuate elements and package information in a way that encourages audiences to perceive the information in a particular way.

Scholars have found success in proving that media frames have an effect through experimental research. One such study, conducted by Kahneman and Tversky the same question but with two different frames. The first question was:

Imagine that the U.S. is preparing for the outbreak of an unusual Asian disease, which is expected to kill 600 people. Two alternative programs to combat the disease have been proposed. Assume that the exact scientific estimates of the consequences of the programs are as follows: If Program A is adopted, 200 people will be saved. (72%) If Program B is adopted, there is a one-third probability that 600 people will be saved and a two-thirds probability that no people will be saved. (28%) Which of the two programs would you favor? (Kahneman & Tversky, 1984).

Participants overwhelmingly selected Program A. However, when the question was reversed and framed in terms of how many deaths would be caused, participants responses changed. In the second question, participants were asked to choose between Program C in which “400 people will die,” or Program D which had “a one-third probability that no one will die, and a two-thirds probability that 600 people will die (Kahneman & Tversky, 1984).” Seventy-eight percent of participants chose Program D over Program C. This experiment shows that the framing of a problem “has a common effect on large portions of the receiving audience, though it is not likely to have a universal effect on all” (Entman, 1993).

Though it is clear that media frames have an effect on those who consume them, as Entman states, these effects cannot be deemed universal and therefore the effects of frames will vary from recipient to recipient. The meaning of a media frame as intended by the creator represents only one possible way of perceiving the frame, though evidence suggests that this original meaning tends to dominate other interpretations (Porrovecchio & Condit, 2016). The degree to which a frame is interpolated into the receiver's cultural and social understanding of an issue is difficult to measure. However, the fact remains that the way issues are framed has effects on the receivers of those messages.

This potential to influence through framing might explain why politicians and media outlets have such carefully tailored frames that recur across platforms and publications. According to Entman, "framing in this light plays a major role in the exertion of political power, and the frame in a news text is really the imprint of power – it registers the identity of actors or interests that competed to dominate the text" (Entman, 1993).

In keeping with the critical paradigm of media research, the methodology for this study does not delve into quantitative content analysis but looks deeply at a number of articles in order to identify if *Breitbart* represents hegemonic masculinity in its framing and if the frames suggest that there has been a shift from conservative hegemonic masculinity to alt-right hegemonic masculinity. As previously identified, hegemonic masculinity is rooted in several guiding values. Gender hierarchy, or the "inability of women to hold institutionalized power positions over men," and the need for an exemplar of hegemonic masculinity are of particular concern to this study (Connell, 1987).

Selection Rationale

The most logical way to compare the coverage of Trump and Clinton during the presidential campaign is to look at *Breitbart*'s coverage of the three major presidential debates. Focusing on debate coverage allowed the most direct comparisons to be drawn between the candidates. Google advanced search was used as a sampling tool for selecting articles. In order to narrow down stories, a preliminary, site-specific search was conducted for each of the three presidential debates, yielding only results from www.Breitbart.com. This site-specific, advanced Google search turned up hundreds of results from *Breitbart* for each presidential debate. To narrow down the search results further, an advanced Google search tool that filters out stories which don't contain specific words or phrases was used. For the first debate, the specific phrase that was included in each result was "first debate." The term "first debate" was then set to appear only in the text of the articles rather than in just the headline or some other element of the website. The same search parameters were used for the second and third debates and the key search terms were "second debate" and "third debate."

Even with these specific search parameters, each debate search turned up over 500 search results. The next step in narrowing down the results was to create a custom date range for each debate. To ensure that the peak coverage of each debate was captured, a date range extending a week from the day of each debate was set. For example, the date range of the first debate was from September 26, 2016 (the day of the debate), to October 3, 2016. A specific date range was selected for the other two debates – the second debate date range was from October 9, 2016 to October 16, 2016 and the third debate range was from October 19, 2016 to October 26, 2016. Once all the search parameters were applied to each of the debates, the debates turned up the following amount of search results:

First Debate: 12 search results

Second Debate: 15 search results

Third Debate: 7 search results

The result pool was made up of 34 articles. After conducting a preliminary analysis on these 34 articles it became clear that there were several events which were discussed in detail during the presidential debates that needed to be included in the sample. The two events selected were Clinton's fall at a 9/11 memorial and the leaked tape of Trump making lewd comments about women on *Access Hollywood*. These events both occurred between the debates and sparked rich discussion about gender norms relating to physicality and sexist speech. Not only were these events pertinent to debate discussion, but they also involved close comparison of Clinton and Trump.

The same advanced Google search formula from the sampling of the debate stories was used to sample *Breitbart* articles about Clinton's 9/11 fall and the *Access Hollywood* tape. First, the keywords were entered into Google advanced search. For Clinton's 9/11 incident, the words "Clinton," "memorial," and "fall" were used. For articles on Trump's *Access Hollywood* tape, the term "*Access Hollywood*" was used. Then, as with the debate stories, a custom time parameter was set in order to return results from within a week of the day each event occurred.

These search parameters turned up the following number of articles for each event:

Clinton's Fall: 12

Access Hollywood Tape: 16

The total sample size of articles used for the study was 62. Out of these 62, only 48 proved to be pertinent to the analysis, as the other 14 stories either only mentioned the debate or event once in

the story (meaning that the rest of the content was unrelated to the study), or they were polls or videos that had no text beyond a caption.

Framing analysis lends itself to parsing through sources, quotes, adjectives, and any other textual elements which could potentially work to construct the hegemonic frame. Because hegemonic masculinity is rooted in history and changes with the present cultural narrative, it is important to study the way it is framed over a specific period (Connell, 1987). For this reason, arranging the events and analysis in chronological order will be especially important. Studying *Breitbart's* debate coverage and events that happened during the debate season allowed for an examination of how *Breitbart's* framing of Clinton and Trump evolved as the campaign intensified.

CHAPTER 3

TYPES AND THEMES OF BRIETBART STORIES

According to Tucker, critical framing studies must assess how “patterns of keywords, stock phrases, sources, and themes work to describe, interpret, and evaluate reality for the public,” (Tucker, 1998). There were several story archetypes that re-appeared continually throughout *Breitbart*’s coverage. These story types each followed a certain formula, and through them, it was clear to see certain narratives in *Breitbart*’s coverage that were built throughout the arch of each type of story. The analysis of these story archetypes allows preliminary insight into how *Breitbart* crafts and controls a specific production of hegemonic masculinity.

Election Coverage Live Update

One type of story that reoccurred throughout *Breitbart*’s coverage was a compilation of “Live updates” noted throughout the course of each debate. Each of these stories had the same formula for the title. The titles would start with “***live updates***” and then “Trump vs. Clinton (or Hillary)” then “Round One (or Two or Three).” In order to read the live entries in chronological order, one must scroll to the bottom of the story. Each entry is listed with the time, i.e., 8:30 p.m., and then has a short headline with some sort of text, image, or social media post which supports the headline. Each of the stories has the byline of “*Breitbart* News” which meant it was a collaborative effort among the *Breitbart* reporters.

The entries that appear in the live updates serve a variety of purposes. Ranging from pre-debate social media posts by the candidates, poll samplings, and *Breitbart* opinions, the live update stories represented a broad range of themes. As *Breitbart* often favors sports jargon in its

reporting, it is fitting to describe the live coverage of the presidential debates as pre-game, in-game, and post-game coverage. For each debate, the *Breitbart* live entries start a few hours before the debates start, and this pre-game coverage acts as the fodder and basis for the commentary on the debate for the rest of the night. Current “standings” of the candidates are assessed through a variety of polls, social media posts are analyzed and the *Breitbart* team weighs in on the issues it sees with the candidates going into the debate.

In the first debate live update story, an entry at 9:07 p.m. read “The mainstream media are attempting their best pre-game spin about how much Trump lies in order to help Clinton. They conveniently ignore the fact that Clinton is viewed, with good reason, as the more dishonest candidate in every national and state poll.” (Breitbart News, 2016a). This opinion came alongside the update that a *Politico* reporter suggested running a “real-time fact-checking chyron” under the candidates for the debate. This statement expresses *Breitbart*’s stance on the candidates going into the debate, and the assumptions made in this statement remain consistent throughout their coverage of the first debate. In the second debate live, pre-game coverage, the first entry calls Hillary Clinton a “deeply flawed candidate who cannot connect well with voters” (Breitbart News, 2016b). And finally, the first entry in the third debate live updates says “That will present Trump with a golden opportunity to finally make the case for his candidacy to millions of potentially undecided voters. The only question is whether Trump can be as disciplined as Jerry Tarkanian’s UNLV teams were on defense or whether he’ll be the same Trump that seemed to wing the first two debates and saw his poll numbers plummet as a result” (Breitbart News, 2016c). These statements made in the pre-game debate coverage set the stage for how the rest of each debate is presented, evaluated, and commented on.

Breitbart's in-game coverage of these debates picks up where the pre-game left off, using the same themes discussed in pre-game to evaluate the debate in real time. For example, the 9:08 p.m. entry in the first debate summarizes and quotes Trump's opening remarks, and in brackets says "[Very good opening from Trump]" The brackets used in the in-game coverage demarcate the value judgments and opinions of the *Breitbart* staff. The second in-game debate coverage follows this same formula. The candidates' answers are summarized and assigned value judgments by *Breitbart's* staff. Interestingly, the *Breitbart* staff repeatedly criticizes Trump for his lack of preparedness and for allowing Clinton to repeatedly get the upper hand, almost as if they are yelling at him from the sidelines. The theme of Clinton as a "deeply flawed candidate" appears many times during the in-game coverage of the second debate, with *Breitbart* staff urging Trump to exploit these flaws to perform better at the debate. Once again in brackets, *Breitbart* suggests that "[Now would be a good time for Trump to point out Clinton's wikileaks emails about open borders and her need for public/private positions...]" (Breitbart News, 2016b). The formula continues for the third debate, in which the in-game coverage again features summaries of the candidates' responses as well as judgments on those responses. The sports metaphor set up in the pre-game coverage of the third debate is resurrected in a bracketed statement which says "[Because of Trump's weird pivots throughout the night, Clinton has been able to run the four-corners offense to run out the clock.]" (Breitbart News, 2016c).

The post-game coverage of the live debate stories invariably end with a discussion of who won the debate. Once again, social media posts from various well-known voices on the right and left are displayed and commented on. For the first debate, the post-game discussion decided that Trump didn't win, but he didn't necessarily lose. The entry at 10:52, in bold print, read **"Trump could have won the election tonight. He didn't. Huge opportunity lost. But he**

didn't lose it either. Race still tied after tonight," (Breitbart News, 2016a). The live updates from start to finish of the first race showed favor and support for Trump, while continually questioning the authenticity of Clinton. Though this is hardly surprising, it does show that there is a formula of coherence and a tailored message within what appears to be many fragments. The post-game coverage of the second-debate follows suit. Though there is no explicit entry, based on several Twitter posts declaring Trump's performance enough to justify a victory, *Breitbart* implies that Trump won the second debate. This, once again, is in keeping with *Breitbart's* narrative throughout the second debate live coverage of Trump as the victor. And finally, in the last debate post-game coverage, *Breitbart's* selection of Tweets was evidence that Trump won the last debate. *Breitbart* used Mike Pence's tweet which said "Congrats to my running mate on a big win at tonight's final presidential debate! @realdonaldtrump won the debate tonight hands down! #MAGA" (Breitbart News, 2016c).

Though the each of the live update stories from the debate had the appearance of spontaneity, reading deeper into the framing of each story revealed a rigid formula that allowed the debate coverage to follow a carefully crafted narrative. Step one: set the scene in the pre-game by positioning Trump as needing to overcome and defeat "deeply flawed" Clinton. Step two: summarize the candidates' answers during the in-game coverage and (not so) subtly make value judgments on each candidates' position, inevitably leading to the conclusion that Trump needs to be aware of Clinton's crooked tactics in order to come out on top. Step three: decide who wins, which to some extent is always Trump. This formula is heavily reliant on sports-match logic, in which victory is the goal, and each "team" must exploit the other's weakness. As there is nothing more fundamentally rooted in hegemonic masculinity than American sports, this choice to constantly bring in sports metaphors and game-day-esque commentary in no accident

(Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). What is perhaps more surprising is that Trump is positioned as the underdog, while Clinton is positioned as the ruthless incumbent.

Post-Debate Stories

In the aftermath of each presidential debate, *Breitbart* publishes another type of story: post-debate analysis. All of the post-debate analysis stories were authored by Joel Pollack, Senior-Editor-at-Large of *Breitbart* News. Likely because of their single authorship, these stories have a similar tones and themes, and are also written formulaically. For each debate, there is one main analysis piece and several other related analysis stories, all of which recap who *Breitbart* believes won the presidential debate, and why it is significant for the Trump campaign specifically. The headlines are telling of the narrative woven through the three main stories: “Analysis: why Donald Trump will win the next two debates,” “Donald Trump wins second debate, media says it doesn’t matter,” and “Donald Trump wins third debate – finally, a fair fight.”

Each story starts out with a paragraph in larger text than the rest of the story which declares a winner for each debate. In the analysis story from the first debate, Pollack declares that “as predicted” Clinton won the first debate but did not “knock Trump out of the race” (Pollak, 2016a) The second debate analysis story states in the first paragraph that Trump won the second debate but lamented that “media commentators denied Trump the outright win, or said it would not matter” (Pollak, 2016b). And finally, the third debate analysis said that “the night belonged to the Republican challenger, who stuck to a repeated theme: that Clinton is to blame for the very problems she wishes to fix” (Pollak, 2016c). As the headlines of each story suggest, these statements are part of a predetermined narrative of Trump coming up from behind in the polls and in media predictions and emerging as the victor.

The body of the three main debate analysis stories varies somewhat in format. The analysis from the first debate is broken up into a list of five reasons why Trump will win the upcoming debates. The second debate analysis followed a more traditional journalistic format, starting off with a quote from *CNN*'s Jake Tapper on why the second debate was a "wash." The third debate analysis story read more like an opinion column with no sources or quotes. Though the formats varied from story to story, the frames and values in the stories repeated themselves. Portraying Trump as an underdog and Clinton as the stale, old regime candidate appeared again in this set of stories just as it did in the live coverage. In the first debate analysis, two of the five reasons that Pollack believes Trump will win the next two debates are because of his status as an underdog. According to Pollack, Trump will be the victor because he had lower "expectations" on him coming into the debate by not being the media's favored candidate, and he also will have a "bonus for improvement," by showing that he can grow stronger from debate to debate (Pollak, 2016d)

Analysis of the second debate reveals that Pollack believes Trump did indeed get points for improvement and won "under incredible pressure." The undertone of this story is that Trump, facing three opponents (Clinton and both moderators), performed better than Clinton even from a position of disadvantage. The final debate analysis seems to claim that Clinton and Trump were on equally footing as moderate Chris Wallace set the candidates up for a fair fight. Still, however, it rests on the portrayal of Trump as an underdog when it said "the challenger won on points, and showed improvement over the three debates," and that Trump was "calm but aggressive, showing the fighting spirit that lifted him past the Republican field."

Another theme that showed up in the debate analysis stories was presenting the debates as unfair or rigged. Since this was also a defining theme of Trump's candidacy, the articles

repeatedly painted the picture of the odds being stacked against Trump. For instance, in the first two debate analyses, the moderators were blamed for Trump's inability to reach his performative potential. *Breitbart* claimed that the moderators favored Clinton, causing Trump to get asked more tough questions. The theme of Trump being at a disadvantage is similar to the underdog theme previously explained, however, it has the added advantage of allowing blame to be placed on a broken or rigged system rather than on Trump's lack of preparedness etc. As was the case throughout the campaign, the media were a scapegoat for Trump's shortcomings. The second debate analysis made it clear that the media were an enemy to Trump, refusing to grant him what *Breitbart* believed to be a deserved win (Pollak, 2016b)

A final theme that appeared in the analysis stories of the debate was portraying Clinton as old, weak, and stale, while presenting Trump as fresh, new, and virile. In the first debate analysis story, Clinton's health problems were brought up. Pollack said that her health problems should have made the debate "difficult to endure" and "all she has to do is stand up straight for 90 minutes and she would win" (Pollak, 2016a). In contrast, Pollack said that Trump will come out "aggressively" in the "Vegas Fight Night" debate. The second debate analysis story paints a similar narrative. This article details how Trump effectively pressed Clinton on her "weakest points" while he himself "stood his ground and maintained his cool," (Pollak, 2016b). The final debate story said that Clinton's lines were "old," but that Trump "showcased his strengths," but was once again "aggressive" (Pollak, 2016c). The sharp contrast between *Breitbart's* portrayal of Clinton and Trump's physical stamina, and strength of personality is telling of the type of hegemonic masculinity these articles present.

Expert Opinions

Breitbart relies on “expert opinions” to create stories that contribute to their political narrative. The expert opinion stories usually come in two forms. One type takes quotes from political or media figures and creates a story based on the remarks, and another puts into story form radio interviews that *Breitbart* has done with political pundits or authors. The use of these expert opinions reinforces the values that *Breitbart* has embedded into its debate coverage, and the use of outside opinions rather than just *Breitbart* staff gives the illusion of adding legitimacy. *Breitbart*’s use of sources and expert opinions is one of the ways in which they more closely mirror a mainstream news publication than an alternative news source.

The first type of expert opinion usually comes from a member of Trump’s campaign. This type of expert opinion story usually features a short intro saying that *Breitbart* got an “exclusive” interview with the expert, and then transitions into a big block quote from the expert. For instance, Kellyanne Conway, Trump’s campaign manager, weighed in on the second debate, saying that Trump won handily and left Clinton “indignant and rattled” (Boyle, 2016). She also said that “Clinton represents a failed, rigged system that benefits the powerful and the wealthy” (Boyle, 2016). After the large block quote, *Breitbart* staff write a few paragraphs agreeing with the source and breaking down what this means for the Trump campaign.

The second type of expert opinion story is essentially a transcription of interviews that *Breitbart*’s SiriusXM radio host Alex Marlow does with political pundits or other political figures. These stories are different from the first type of expert opinion story because while they are coordinated with the topics and timing of the debates, they do not deal directly with debate coverage. Instead, they are issue-based and usually speak specifically to a certain topic. One of these stories features Ed Klein, author of the book *Guilty as Sin: Uncovering New Evidence of*

Corruption and How Hillary Clinton and the Democrats Derailed the FBI Investigation. The particular issue he was discussing was Trump's *Access Hollywood* tape, which had been released in the week leading up to the second presidential debate. Klein said of the tape, "Yeah, it was crude. Yeah, it was vulgar. But you know, in my many, many years on this planet, I've heard from many men in public office a lot worse than what he said on that tape. And men do speak that way. He is right. It *is* locker talk" (Hayward, 2016). This helps to reinforce *Breitbart's* narrative on the topic, which is that Trump's "Locker Room Talk" was not so unacceptable after all.

Though *Breitbart* usually chooses to feature experts that agree with its platform, on occasion, an expert is featured on the opposing side, which allows *Breitbart* to make an argument against what that expert had to say. One instance of this was a story about *CBS* news anchor Bob Schieffer expressing "outrage" that Trump had brought women who had allegedly had some sort of relationship with Bill Clinton into the second debate. According to *Breitbart*, "The 'relationships' that the women had with Bill Clinton allegedly included rape and violent sexual assault" (Pollak, 2016e). This strategic use of expert opinions was used by *Breitbart* to normalize Trump's sexual assault allegations by claiming that this happens on both sides of the political spectrum. Thus, even though Schieffer's remarks were contrary to the Trump campaign, they were put into service by *Breitbart* in order to minimize the impact of Trump's actions.

Breaking News Event Coverage

Breitbart's breaking news coverage functions differently than its debate coverage. Clinton's fall and the *Access Hollywood* scandal are examples of breaking news events. The structure of the breaking news coverage were covered by looking at how Clinton's fall was covered in *Breitbart*. Several themes emerged throughout both the structure and the language of

the articles. One of which is the use of external sources to legitimate *Breitbart*'s position of being weighted in Trump's favor. In comparison to the articles analyzed from *Breitbart*'s debate coverage, these articles relied much more heavily on outside sources than *Breitbart*'s staff opinions. Using quotes from sources such as *Politico* and even the Associated Press, these publications lent more legitimacy to *Breitbart*'s position that Clinton was lying about her health condition, and that she would be physically incapable of running for president.

Breitbart's coverage of the three presidential debates compared to its coverage of Clinton's fall had differences necessitated by how distinct the events were from each other. Most of these differences stemmed from the form of the articles rather than the latent themes in each. In order to make sense of the differences and similarities of the two types of events covered by *Breitbart*, the study focuses on the coverage of the two types as a point of difference, and the underlying themes of each as a point of similarity. It also analyzes how this fits into the broader theme of hegemonic masculinity.

The coverage of *Breitbart*'s debate stories included much more opinion-based reporting than did the coverage of Clinton's health scare. This is perhaps because Clinton's fall would have been considered a breaking news event, whereas the debates were planned. The closest relationship in the coverage of the two types of events was that the original, breaking story for Clinton's fall on *Breitbart* had a similar format to the "live update" debate stories. Both of those story types featured voices from many sources and were continuously updated throughout the day. *Breitbart*'s breaking story for Clinton's fall started with a portion of a story reported by the Associated Press, widely accepted as an unbiased source – but began to pull in quotes that were consistent with the narrative aims of *Breitbart*. This served to give *Breitbart* credibility, while also allowing the publication to quickly draw in support for its position. The live debate coverage

functioned in a similar way, though the debate coverage stories usually started with an anecdote written specifically by the *Breitbart* staff member.

The coverage of Trump's *Access Hollywood* scandal followed a very similar trajectory to coverage of Clinton's fall. The initial articles published about the *Access Hollywood* scandal were sparse, direct, and featured very little inflection of opinions by the *Breitbart* staff. After the *Access Hollywood* event was no longer considered "breaking news," the dynamic of the coverage completely shifted to allow for the *Breitbart* staff to state their opinions and craft the narrative that best suited the ethos of the site.

Overall, the main differences between the coverage of the debates and breaking news was that the debate coverage featured more of *Breitbart*'s "voice" as it used less quotes and more opinion-based material. On the other hand, the breaking news coverage relied on expert opinions, social media reactions, and most of all, reporting from other sources. Despite these differences in the style of coverage of the two events, what remained the same were the underlying themes in the coverage.

Major Hegemonic Themes in Breitbart's Stories

Though *Breitbart* has several distinct storylines that are recycled during election coverage, the themes, leanings, and overall messages are consistent from story to story, regardless of story type. The consistent message that is portrayed is that Trump is dominant over Clinton in every way, while Clinton is feeble and untrustworthy. However, another theme that begins to take shape is the idea that Trump has been disadvantaged by the "system" and that he is a victim of injustice. These messages are consistent with the defining characteristics of hegemonic masculinity or "the pattern of practice that allows men's dominance over women to continue" (Connell, 1987).

By looking back at the defining principles of hegemonic masculinity, it is clear to see how the values portrayed in *Breitbart*'s three debate story types line up with the theory. According to Connell, these characteristics of hegemonic masculinity include heteronormativity, gender hierarchy, and hero-worshipping. Of these three values, gender hierarchy and hero-worshipping are most clearly seen in the debate news stories. First, the principle of gender hierarchy is subtly embedded in the text in every attempt to subordinate Clinton to Trump. By using words and phrases that describe Clinton as weak, old, and untrustworthy, *Breitbart* is able to place her on a lower tier than Trump. Her health is under scrutiny, and even being able to stand for 90 minutes straight is mocked as an accomplishment by *Breitbart* staff. Constantly referring to her political tactics as "old" implies that she has literally and figuratively lost the youthfulness that would have made her appealing in any capacity. Those these criticisms might be cloaked as concerns about her political capabilities, it is clear that *Breitbart* views Clinton in a subordinated position of power to Trump.

Perhaps even more compelling than *Breitbart*'s subordination of Clinton to Trump is the level to which Trump is revered and exalted by *Breitbart*. Trump is consistently referred to as a "champion" and a "victor" who always comes out "on top." This treatment of Trump is evidence of hero worship, a characteristic of hegemonic masculinity. According to Connell, sports heroes are often exalted as exemplars of hegemonic masculinity. It is not surprising, then, that many of the debate stories had allusions to sports, and even metaphorically referred to Trump in the same terms as one would a professional athlete. Based on Trump's description in *Breitbart*'s coverage he falls in line with the theoretical conception of an exemplar of hegemonic masculinity.

Though the themes which uphold the traditional understanding of hegemonic masculinity are easy to pick out through the various story archetypes, the theme of Trump as a victim

underlies much of the coverage of both the debates and the key events that were studied. Trump being painted as a victim is evidence of a shift in the values of hegemonic masculinity. This victim mentality falls in line with hegemonic masculinity's pattern of changing and adapting its values in the face of challenges (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). In this case, the fundamental change being made to hegemonic masculinity is the abandonment of system justification which is one of the defining principles of conservative hegemonic masculinity. According to Jost et al., conservatism is a system-justifying ideology and conservatives tend to have "the desire to maintain the societal status quo, resist activist attempts to change it, and rationalize existing social and economic inequality in society" (Jost et al., 2004). The alt-right's break with viewing the existing political system as fair means that marginalized members of society have begun to benefit from the current political system, disrupting the established hegemonic masculine power hierarchy. Thus, the concept of male victimhood, or specifically, Trump as a victim, marks a shift towards alt-right masculinity and away from conservative masculinity.

CHAPTER 4

FRAMES IN BRIETBART'S STORIES

There are three master frames which identify *Breitbart's* portrayal of hegemonic masculinity. The three master frames are (1) the use of metaphors about the candidates' physicality to construct Trump as an exemplar for hegemonic masculinity, (2) the minimizing of sexism in order to preserve a gender hierarchy, and (3) the integration of a victimhood mentality into representations of alt-right hegemonic masculinity. Each master frame is interrogated to see if it represents a re-branding of conservative hegemonic masculinity to incorporate the values of the alt-right. The frame of male victimhood adds considerable insights to the theory of hegemonic masculinity and signifies a definite shift in hegemonic masculinity away from conservative values and towards alt-right values.

Master Frame One: Bodies that Win, Bodies that Lose – Metaphors of Physicality and Crafting Trump as a Masculine Exemplar

A potent theme throughout *Breitbart's* coverage was comparisons of Clinton and Trump's physical bodies, both through metaphor and through concrete references to the candidates' physiques. These allusions to physicality in various forms echo the importance of corporeal bodies to the theory of hegemonic masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005.) The best way to break down how *Breitbart* integrates physicality into its 2016 election coverage is by separating instances where *Breitbart* discusses the candidate's bodies in literal terms and in metaphorical terms. *Breitbart* constructs Trump as an exemplar for alt-right hegemonic

masculinity through these representations of the candidates' bodies, and the inherent superiority given to Trump's body over Clinton's.

Clinton's 9/11 Stumble

On 9/11, 2016, Hillary Clinton stumbled and was helped by two aids get into a van after a day of attending a 9/11 memorial service. The issue garnered significant media attention, and *Breitbart* was one of the news sources that avidly covered the event. This event is significant in *Breitbart's* election coverage because it deals with the issue of Clinton's physicality, literal "weakness," and opens up attack on her "fitness" to act as president of the United States. By analyzing thirteen *Breitbart* articles published within a week of the event, several themes emerge in *Breitbart's* coverage of Clinton's stumble. The first is calling her honesty into question for withholding health information from the public, the second is an attack on her physicality, and the third is a comparison between her health and Trump's.

One of *Breitbart's* "stumble" coverage tactics was to dub Clinton as dishonest. Based on *Breitbart's* coverage, Clinton's health scare was confirmation of a deeper health issue, which *Breitbart* staff claimed that Clinton previously called a "conspiracy" (Pollak, 2016f). *Breitbart* also reported that "Clinton's campaign is purposefully keeping reporters in the dark" about the state of her health (Breitbart News, 2016d). Along with constructing a narrative that Clinton herself had knowingly deceived the public in regards to her health, *Breitbart* provided several examples of Clinton supporters who had to change their tune about Clinton's health. The lead of one of the articles says "Chris Cillizza, an author at the *Washington Post's* 'The Fix' blog, abruptly changed course and admitted [emphasis in original] that concerns about Hillary Clinton's health are 'a real issue in the presidential campaign' — after spending much of the week criticizing this narrative as a 'conspiracy theory'" (Dulis, 2016).

Similarly, *Breitbart* staff brought up an appearance Clinton made on *Jimmy Kimmel* where Kimmel made light of the rumors about Clinton's health by having her "open a pickle jar" on air to show that she was in good health (Pollak, 2016f). Later in the article, Kimmel was quoted saying "You know, these conspiracy theories about Hillary Clinton's health would be a lot harder to believe if they didn't actually come true" (Pollak, 2016f) By continually reinforcing that Clinton wasn't truthful about the state of her health, *Breitbart* staff is able to continue the narrative that Clinton is untrustworthy. Also, by using quotes of those who support Clinton stating that the conspiracy surrounding Clinton's health is true, Clinton's own support base is undermined, metaphorically showing how she is buckling at the knees where her support system is concerned.

Beyond criticizing Clinton's hesitancy to be forthcoming about her health records, *Breitbart* also called into question the accuracy of Clinton's pneumonia diagnosis. Using "expert" opinions from a conservative doctor, Jane Orient, and *Breitbart*'s editor-at-large's father, Dr. Raymond Pollak, *Breitbart* implies that Clinton's diagnosis could be even more severe than pneumonia. Orient is quoted saying "I don't think this pneumonia begins to explain the terrible cough that she's had for months on end," and also said that it is not common for people with pneumonia to faint (Swoyer, 2016). Dr. Dan Kassiech was also quoted saying "This is not normal.... I believe [it] to be a more serious underlying health problem" (Swoyer, 2016). These assertions that Clinton's pneumonia diagnosis is not true are another attempt at undercutting her legitimacy crafting the narrative of her dishonesty. It also shows that Clinton cannot be trusted to speak for herself, even on matters concerning her own body.

Instead, Clinton's husband, Bill Clinton, is given more credence on issues regarding Hillary's body than she, herself, is. *Breitbart* focused in on an interview Bill Clinton did with

CBS when he supposedly “slipped” and revealed that Hillary has had several other fainting episodes over the course of her life. The quote *Breitbart* used said “frequently — well not frequently, rarely, but on more than one occasion — over the last many, many years, the same sort of thing has happened to her when she got severely dehydrated” (Rodriguez, 2016). Bill Clinton was also quoted saying that “she is almost certainly in better health than her opponent” (Spiering, 2016b). The few phrases that Bill Clinton said about Hillary’s health were taken more seriously than statements Clinton herself made about her own health. By making the choice to include Bill Clinton’s commentary on his wife’s health, *Breitbart* is subtly suggesting that the only way to make Clinton’s story about her health legitimate is to filter it through her husband first.

Along with the narrative of Clinton being dishonest about her health is a larger discussion by *Breitbart* about her fitness to be the president – both physically and metaphorically. Throughout the coverage of the event, *Breitbart* continually uses quotes from other outlets in order to show that others have concerns about Clinton’s fitness for the presidency. One such quote from *Politico* reported “Clinton scare shakes up the race: Physical weakness caught on camera turns health conspiracy into a legitimate campaign concern” (Breitbart News, 2016d). The term “physical weakness” is particularly telling of the image that *Breitbart* wished to paint of Clinton. “Dilbert” comic strip author, Scott Adams, is quoted on *Breitbart* saying that Clinton “just became unelectable” (Breitbart News, 2016d). Adams goes on to say “when a would-be Commander-in-Chief withers – literally – in front of our most emotional reminder of an attack on the homeland, we feel unsafe. And safety is our first priority” (Breitbart News, 2016d). The implication here is that, due to Clinton’s physical condition, she is not fit to protect the United States from security threats. *Breitbart*’s careful curation of quotes on Clinton’s health scare

construct her as a diminished and fragile woman who would not be able to be seen as a “protector” by her country should she become president.

In the wake of Clinton’s health scare, *Breitbart* published an article showing that Trump released his medical records. Clinton had been criticized by *Breitbart* and other outlets for not releasing her medical records earlier, thus Trump’s move of releasing his medical records served to reinforce the narrative that he was truthful and forthcoming while Clinton was deceitful. In the article published by *Breitbart*, Trump is referred to as being in “excellent health” (Swoyer, 2016b). *Breitbart* quoted a press release from the Trump campaign which stated that Trump “has the stamina to endure — uninterrupted — the rigors of a punishing and unprecedented presidential campaign and, more importantly, the singularly demanding job of President of the United States” (Swoyer, 2016b). This carefully crafted statement takes a jab at Clinton’s perceived inability to physically deal with the stress and challenges of a presidency.

Though it published the medical records of the exam performed by Trump’s longtime doctor, *Breitbart* staff decided to reach out to a Florida-based doctor, Dr. Dan Kassiech, to review Trump’s medical evaluation in more detail. Dr. Kassiech did his review exclusively for *Breitbart*. He said that there was nothing concerning on Trump’s health records, and he believes that Trump is in “very good health” (Swoyer, 2016b). The choice by *Breitbart* to reinforce the existing information on Trump’s health status was a clear statement of its position on the issue. The comparison of *Breitbart*’s coverage of Clinton and Trump’s health shows a clear tendency to exalt Trump for being physically dominant over his opponent, while subtly enforcing that Clinton is too frail to be president.

The breaking news coverage of Clinton’s fall relied heavily on outside sources to reinforce and legitimate *Breitbart*’s specific choices of quotes and opinions from other news

sources revealed more about their position than did their own original words. By highlighting examples of when Clinton supporters such as Kimmel and Cizilla doubled back on their original belief that Clinton's health was not an issue, they were able to support the frame that Clinton is a liar. Through their selective coverage of Trump's glowing health records, they not only enforce the frame that Trump is more trustworthy than Clinton, but they also show that *Breitbart* believes that Trump is physically superior to Clinton. *Breitbart*'s use of traditional journalistic practices such as using quotes and referring to outside sources is used to mask what is a carefully crafted narrative of Trump being elevated, in all respects, above Clinton. Though this should not be surprising given that *Breitbart* is an ideologically-based publication, it is one of the clearest presences of *Breitbart*'s conscious framing of its articles.

Metaphors of Physicality in Debate Coverage

Though *Breitbart* moves away from discussing the literal physical fitness of each candidate in coverage of the debates, the coverage is ripe with sports metaphors and descriptions of Trump in terms that one would use to describe an athlete which establish narratives about the candidates' actual bodies. These metaphors inevitably portray the same conclusion as did the discussion of each candidate's physical body – Trump is physically dominant over Clinton, and this physical dominance leads him to victory. By using sports metaphors particularly, *Breitbart* calls upon established norms within hegemonic masculinity that dictate that sports stars are the pinnacle of manhood.

One article, written by Joel Pollak, is filled with illusions to Trump's physical dominance over his opponent. The story opens by saying "Donald Trump bounced back in the last presidential debate, hammering Democratic rival Hillary Clinton" (Pollak, 2016g) The term "hammering" brings violent and domineering imagery to mind, firmly establishing that Trump

has bested his opponent in physical terms. The article goes on to say “under a mountain of pressure, and facing two hostile moderators, Trump pounded Clinton on the issues.” Once again, “pounded” here functions similarly to “hammered.”

Pollak goes on to state that Clinton was “visibly rattled as she spoke with reporters on her campaign plane – the surest sign she knew she lost.” The comparison here between the descriptions of Trump and Clinton is extremely imbalanced. On one hand, Trump is portrayed as having absolutely dominated the last debate and his opponent, while Clinton on the other hand is painted as shaken and overpowered by Trump. These characterizations of the candidates pop up subtly throughout the story, with statements like “[Trump] fought Clinton to a draw,” and mention of “Trump’s strong showing” holding particular weight (Pollak, 2016g). There is a corporeal element to the story that draws out one of the key themes of hegemonic masculinity – men as being physically superior to women.

Another article which draws upon Trump’s metaphorical strength is a summary and transcription of a *Fox News* interview with Sebastian Gorka, *Breitbart* national security editor, and former White House National Security Council member Gillian Turner. The majority of the article is largely quotes from Gorka and Turner, however the quotes were clearly carefully selected. Gorka and Turner were on *Fox* discussing “how the presidential candidates would handle terrorism”

In one of the first lines in the article “Gorka said voters were looking for “meat on the bone” of an anti-terrorism strategy.” The article goes on to quote Gorka saying that “[Trump] wants to be a president that *wins* [sic] the war” (Hayward, 2016b). The use of the term “meat on the bone” is once again an illusion to the physical bodies of the candidates. Trump is portrayed as being stronger and larger and is characterized as a winner. Surprisingly, Turner is quoted

supporting Clinton's plan to deal with terrorism, which she says is clearly outlined on Clinton's website. Turner says "It's not for everybody. A lot of critics don't think it's viable. But to her credit, you can log on to her website and read it and decide for yourself. I think Donald Trump's got to step up and do that, too" (Hayward, 2016b). Though this praise is rare to find in a *Breitbart* article, Turner is the only one quoted saying anything positive about Clinton. Gorka, on the other hand, was all in for Trump. It is no mistake that Turner, a woman, was the only voice of advocacy for Clinton in this story.

The theme of Trump as being a winner is more fully fleshed out in this quote by Gorka: "I think Donald's proven his temperament towards the threat, that this is a guy who wants to win. And that's what he's famous for, right? He's a winner" (Hayward, 2016b). This grandiose personification of Trump as a winner falls in line with the hero-worshipping or finding an exemplar for hegemonic masculinity. Though this article did not technically contain input from the authors of *Breitbart*, it mirrored the themes and content of *Breitbart*'s opinion-based articles.

Though mentions of physicality in *Breitbart*'s debate coverage are mostly metaphorical in nature, one in particular brought discussion of Trump's physical prowess to center stage. This occurred during the second debate when Trump was captured standing uncomfortably close behind Clinton in almost every televised shot. *Breitbart* author Ed Klein referenced Trump's "looming presence" in the town hall debate as being one of the elements that lead to what Klein believed was a Trump win in the second debate. Klein said:

There was this other thing that the *New York Post* captured on the front page of its paper today, which is his looming presence onstage while she was talking. He never sat down, as far as I can remember. He was pacing like a caged lion most of the time and while she was talking he was standing behind her, powerfully bigger and stronger than she,

visually. I think that had an impact, too. It wasn't bullying. It wasn't like a man bullying a woman, quote-unquote. It was a simple visual of who has, as Pence would say, the broad shoulders, the power, the strength to lead this country, at a time when we need to shake things up, from the bottom up (Hayward, 2016a).

There are a few important things to unpack from this quote. First, Klein's illusion to Trump as being a lion is heavily symbolic. Not only does this paint him as fierce and formidable, but it also enforced a predator-prey narrative. Clinton is, of course, the prey. Klein also called Trump "powerfully bigger and stronger" than Clinton, and that he had "the strength to lead this country." The implication here is that Trump's physical stature translates into his fitness to be the president, while Clinton's weakness shows the weakness that she would likely have in office. Finally, Klein is sure to denote that Trump's invasion of Clinton's space during the debate "wasn't bullying. It wasn't like a man bullying a woman..." (Hayward, 2016a). This once again shows Klein's attempts to assert that Trump is not a sexist or a bully. By doing this, Klein shows an awareness that sexist behaviors should be coded as wrong but does not allow for the possibility that Trump might engage in these behaviors.

An article written by Pollak enumerates the reasons that Trump will win the second and third presidential debates. One reason that Trump will win the subsequent debates, according to Pollak, is because it takes place in Las Vegas, a location where Trump has "the home field advantage." This paragraph is ripe with sports metaphors. Pollak says that "no one knows a Fight Night like the Donald: he will come out aggressively, regardless of where he stands in the polls by then" (Pollak, 2016d). Illusions to Trump as being aggressive and having the home-field advantage play into the hegemonic masculinity theme of Trump as an athlete.

In Pollak's post-game coverage of the third debate Trump's dominance over Clinton, is portrayed in terms that truly make the event sound like a sporting match. Pollak says, "With — finally! — a fair fight at hand, Trump showcased his strengths. He was, as one campaign source told *Breitbart* News shortly before the event, calm but aggressive, showing the fighting spirit that lifted him past the Republican field (though perhaps interrupting too often)" (Pollak, 2016c). The imagery in this quote is quite clear – it portrays Trump in hyper-masculine terms as being strong and being a fighter. In contrast, Clinton is portrayed in much more feminine terms as Pollak praises her for standing her ground "on style" and having a "flair for the details." Ultimately, however, in a "slugfest," a word that Pollak uses to describe the debate, strength is key. The article is less than subtle in its characterization of Trump as physically and metaphorically stronger than Clinton.

Finally, one of the clearest instances of Trump being compared to an athlete comes when Pollak is discussing the outcome of the second debate. Trump's impending performance is described in the article in terms that would be used to describe a boxer. Pollak says "[Trump] will have to throw uppercuts, hoping for a knockout, while Clinton dodges and deflects" (Pollak, 2016h). The imagery here is easily accessible and shows that Trump is thought of as being physically superior to Clinton. Clinton on the other hand, will have to protect herself from Trump's strength and physical dominance.

Trump's Construction as a Masculine Exemplar

The physical bodies of the candidates were discussed in both literal and figural terms across both the breaking news stories about Clinton's fall and in the debate stories. In the debate stories, the terminology used discussed Trump as a figural athlete, and Clinton as an aging and frail woman, despite the fact that at 71, Trump is nearly two years older than Clinton. Perhaps

the theme of Trump's physical prowess over Clinton stemmed from Clinton's 9/11 fall. Her concrete physical problems were transformed into a figural narrative in which all of her actions, not just her physical ones, were deemed as feeble and weak. Thus, in comparison, Trump seems impressively virile and more physically fit to be the president. The theme of physical dominance relates back to the larger themes of hegemonic masculinity. Men are praised for their athletic ability, and those who are more physically dominant are held up as exemplars.

Because hegemonic masculinity is so intimately tied to the corporeal structure of the male body, it only makes sense that Trump would be propped up as a hegemonic exemplar based on a certain characterization of his physicality (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). What is interesting, however, is that Trump himself is not an athlete or even an ideal physical specimen (despite what his medical records would like us to believe). Though it could be argued that he is physically stronger than his opponent, this alone is not enough for him to be upheld as a hegemonic exemplar of masculinity. This is why discussing his body in metaphorical terms is so important. By referring to Trump in terms that are commonly associated with sports stars, and even sometimes referring to him in animalistic terms, his metaphorical construction transcends the capabilities of his physical body. Just as masculine exemplars represent an unattainable ideal, the construction of Trump as physically dominant in every way pushes back against the reality of his corporeal presence, and he is unattainable even to himself.

Breitbart's coverage of the physical bodies of each candidate in both physical and metaphorical terms does not challenge commonly held conceptions of hegemonic masculinity. It posits that Trump is physically superior to Clinton, and it props Trump up as an unattainable exemplar of masculinity. Though the discussion of Trump's body in metaphorical terms represents a break with traditional hegemonic masculinity which focuses on actual sports stars, it

does not fundamentally alter the concept of worshipping a man for his physical prowess. Trump's exemplification in *Breitbart's* coverage is an example of hero-worshipping, the re-branded, alt-right version of an exemplar of hegemonic masculinity.

Master Frame Two: Locker Room Talk –*Access Hollywood* and Preserving Gender Hierarchy

A common thread that is shared between conservative hegemonic masculinity and alt-right hegemonic masculinity is the desire to maintain a strict gender hierarchy in which women are subordinated to men. However, the way that sexism is portrayed in the alt-right is more openly lewd and vitriolic than it is in conservative hegemonic masculinity. In fact, “many alt-rightists revel in openly vilifying women in ways Christian rightists have generally avoided” (Lyons, 2017). Though it does not rely on conceptions of the traditional, Christian family, sexism is pervasive in alt-right literature. It is most clearly seen in a rejection of egalitarianism between the physical and mental capabilities of men and women. According to an article on the *Guardian*, “Christian rightists base their gender ideology on their interpretation of the Bible and obedience to God’s law. Some alt-rightists take a similar approach, but more commonly base their arguments on evolutionary psychology – or on what’s needed to defend and promote the white race” (Lyons, 2017).

This re-branded alt-right sexism is central to *Breitbart's* 2016 election coverage and is most clearly seen in mentions of Trump’s *Access Hollywood* scandal. *Breitbart's* coverage of the scandal aims to assimilate lewdly sexist remarks into the hegemonic norm. The coverage does this by trying to claim that Trump is not a sexist for his *Access Hollywood* remarks, by creating a

narrative that many other men engage in similar behaviors to Trump, and by repackaging sexist speech as “locker room talk.”

Breitbart’s Coverage of Access Hollywood

A persistent theme throughout *Breitbart’s* 2016 debate coverage were attempts to distance Trump from allegations of him being sexist. Nowhere in the debate cycle was this more evident than in the wake of the *Access Hollywood* tape scandal. On October 7, 2016, two days before the second presidential debate, the *Washington Post* published a video showing Trump and TV host Billy Bush trading “lascivious comments about women in general and actress Arianne Zucker” (Breitbart News, 2016e). The incident turned into a national controversy that forced Trump and his campaign to deal with the fallout that ensued.

Though some of this controversy was discussed in *Breitbart’s* coverage of the second presidential debate, in order to understand the full breadth of *Breitbart’s* discussion around the *Access Hollywood* tape, it is necessary to look at its live and follow-up coverage of the event. *Breitbart’s* coverage of this event, both the event’s direct coverage and mentions of it through debate coverage, reveal an overarching frame in relation to hegemonic masculinity; the willingness to acknowledge sexism as a concept with negative implications, but the active distancing of Trump from any allegations of sexism.

The first article that *Breitbart* wrote about the *Access Hollywood* scandal was hours after the *Washington Post* uploaded the video. The article was written by *Breitbart* news staff, and simply pulled a few quotes from the video. The only original content written by the *Breitbart* staff was the lead:

David A. Fahrenthold of the *Washington Post* reveals a hot mic moment with Donald Trump and *Access Hollywood* anchor Billy Bush where the two trade lascivious comments about women in general and actress Arianne Zucker (Breitbart News, 2016e). Here, the *Breitbart* staff does not shy away from noting that the comments made by Trump and Bush were “lascivious” or lewd. Beyond this, however, *Breitbart* does not make a value judgment on whether the tape was right or wrong.

The rest of the article essentially pulls the most controversial of Trump’s statements from the tape. Included in *Breitbart*’s sampling of quotes was:

“I’ve got to use some Tic Tacs, just in case I start kissing her,” Trump says. “You know I’m automatically attracted to beautiful — I just start kissing them. It’s like a magnet. Just kiss. I don’t even wait....And when you’re a star, they let you do it....You can do anything....Grab them by the p—y....You can do anything” (Breitbart News, 2016e).

The last paragraph of the article was a quote from an apology statement made by Trump. The quote said;

This was locker-room banter, a private conversation that took place many years ago. Bill Clinton has said far worse to me on the golf course — not even close... I apologize if anyone was offended (Breitbart News, 2016e).

The sparse article stayed true to a breaking-news style. It included few opinionated statements from the *Breitbart* staff, and it gave a short recap of the *Access Hollywood* video. For a highly-opinionated news source, this calculated choice to resist taking Trump’s position on the issue is notable in and of itself. Though the article calls the conversation between Trump and Bush “lascivious,” the term does not directly implicate Trump. The choice to include Trump’s

apology at the end of the article also points to *Breitbart* supporting the narrative that Trump's words could be reduced to mere "locker room talk."

After *Breitbart* published its initial news article on the *Access Hollywood* tape, a clearer narrative began to take shape in which *Breitbart* repeatedly minimized the impact of Trump's words and actively distanced Trump from the label of "sexist." In an article written by Neil McCabe, the *Access Hollywood* scandal was touted as an attack on Trump by Paul Ryan and other Republican leaders who did not support Trump. The article was built around a radio interview with Jerry Falwell Jr., president of the Christian college Liberty University, who said that the tape "was planned, I think it was timed, I think it might have even been a conspiracy among establishment Republicans who have known about it for weeks and who tried to time it to do the maximum damage to Donald Trump, and I just... I just think it just backfired on them" (McCabe, 2016).

Falwell had been an avid supporter of Trump throughout his campaign, thus the immediate choice to deflect blame from Trump's own words and actions onto the Republican party at large make sense. The article supports Falwell's comments and generally deflects blame from Trump and onto the Republican party. One of the most interesting and telling quotes in the article occurs when McCabe is giving a brief recap of the *Access Hollywood* scandal:

"NBC was the owner of the *Access Hollywood* tape that The *Washington Post* released Friday revealing the GOP nominee using direct and foul language in reference to courtship and the way women interact with celebrities" (McCabe, 2016). NBC releasing the tape was further proof to Trump supporters that the mainstream media was out to get Trump.

By tactfully crafting this quote, the writer minimizes the impact of Trump's language. Instead of calling Trump out for lewd speech, the author calls Trump's words "direct" and his

language “foul.” By using the word “courtship” to describe Trump’s implications of sexual assault, the author de-escalates Trump’s intentions to the point where sexual impropriety is simply out of the question. And finally, the author places the blame on the women who “interact with celebrities” by positioning them as the initiators of these interactions. The underlying assumptions of this sentence shape the way that *Breitbart* treats the *Access Hollywood* issue for the remainder of its coverage; by distancing Trump from the weight of his sexist comments, normalizing the comments into the scheme of acceptable male-female interactions, and placing the blame for the reception of these comments on everyone but Trump himself.

Though *Breitbart* initially called Trump’s comments “lascivious,” the narrative quickly changed – and subsequent stories about the issue water down the severity and offensiveness of Trump’s *Access Hollywood* statements. Nested in an article written by Daniel Nussbaum is perhaps the most placated version of what transpired in the *Access Hollywood* tape. Though the majority of the article centers on comments actor Tom Hanks made about Trump during an awards show in Rome, Italy, the author does offer a synopsis of the *Access Hollywood* scandal:

While promoting his upcoming film *Inferno* in Italy earlier this week, Hanks blasted Trump over his appearance in an 11-year-old leaked *Access Hollywood* behind-the-scenes tape in which he jokes about women (Nussbaum, 2016).

This statement is a clear indication that *Breitbart* has doubled back on describing Trump’s *Access Hollywood* comments negative. Making “jokes” about women and making “lascivious” comments about women are two vastly different things. By reducing Trump’s sexist comments to merely “jokes,” the author undermines and de-legitimizes anyone who was hurt or offended by these comments. Finally, the choice to state that the tape was eleven years old also works to distance Trump from the weight of his actions. The underlying goal in Nussbaum’s

summary of the *Access Hollywood* scandal is to minimize the issue in order to leave Trump's reputation unscathed.

Part of the effort by *Breitbart* to distance Trump from the gravity of his lewd *Access Hollywood* tape statements was to compare his actions to the actions of other prominent male figures. Trump himself in his apology statement drew Bill Clinton into the conversation by saying "Bill Clinton has said far worse to me on the golf course. Not even close" (Kew, 2016). One such instance occurred after Billy Bush, who participated with Trump in making disrespectful comments towards women on the *Access Hollywood* tape, was suspended from the *Today Show* following the incident. The *Today Show*'s executive producer, Noah Oppenheim, was targeted by *Breitbart* following Bush's suspension. *Breitbart* author Ben Kew wrote an article in which he quotes a newspaper column that Oppenheim had written for the *Harvard Crimson* in 1998 as a student at Harvard. As the *Breitbart* article quotes, Oppenheim admits in his column that he objectifies women:

In the column, Oppenheim admitted: 'I objectify women.' He went on to explain his preference for posters of 'scantily-clad women,' and mocked campus outrage at an undergraduate woman who had posed topless for Playboy... Oppenheim was unrepentant, even goading feminists and fellow students: 'And while some empowered young females are undoubtedly disgusted by my taste in interior decor, I am not at all repentant. Like most heterosexual men, the sight of a big-busted blonde tickles my fancy' (Kew, 2016).

According to *Breitbart*, Oppenheim's column states that he objectified women because he thought it was "natural" and "unavoidable." Oppenheim's column shows that he is implicated in the same problematic behavior for which he suspended Billy Bush. Though *Breitbart* author

Kew does call for Oppenheim's suspension, he describes Oppenheim's behavior in a way that diminishes the severity of engaging in sexist speech. Kew writes, "Judging by Oppenheim's standards of punishing those who have engaged in sexually provocative conversations in the distant past, he might also need to consider suspending himself" (Kew, 2016). This strategic statement works to minimize the severity of both Oppenheim's and Bush's actions.

Kew calls the conversations "sexually provocative" rather than calling them sexist, offensive, or lewd. This softens the blow for Oppenheim's actions, which, of course can be directly compared to Trump's and Bush's statements on the *Access Hollywood* tape. Also, by saying that Oppenheim's actions were "in the distant past," Kew is making the argument that they are irrelevant. This is the same logic through which *Breitbart* distances Trump from his *Access Hollywood* statements. By de-escalating the seriousness of Oppenheim's past sexist remarks and insisting that they exist only in the "distant past," Kew essentially relieves both Oppenheim and Bush from any blame. This article is just one piece in a larger narrative constructed by *Breitbart* writers in which sexism is acknowledged, but de-legitimized, giving the space for defining the sexist actions of males as insignificant.

Another article, written by Joel Pollak, repeats the theme in *Breitbart*'s election coverage of the pursuit to normalize sexism and sexual harassment of women by deflecting criticism of Trump's sexual misconduct onto his opponents. Here, Pollak focuses on *CBS* anchor Bob Schieffer's "expressed outrage Sunday that Republican nominee Donald Trump focused attention on the women who accused former president Bill Clinton of rape and assault" (Pollak, 2016e). Pollak criticizes Schieffer for saying that the women had "relationships" with Clinton rather than identifying that the women were victims of sexual assault.

In stark comparison, according to the author, “the debate moderators accused Donald Trump of ‘sexual assault’ for jokes he made in 2005 about groping women.” Trump’s comments were reduced to mere “jokes,” and Pollak makes no mention of other allegations of rape and sexual assault that have been leveraged against Trump. This article shows that *Breitbart* is attempting to normalize Trump’s behaviors and combat the notions that he is sexist or dangerous towards women. Instead, *Breitbart* asserts that Trump’s actions are not that bad when interwoven into a larger narrative of violence and oppression of women.

An argument used to minimize the impact of Trump’s sexist speech is to claim that it is “just words.” In an expert-opinion style story published on *Breitbart*, former co-chairman of Trump’s campaign, Sam Clovis, brings up the *Access Hollywood* tapes and tries to downplay the importance of the comments in the scheme of the election. He says “the comments aren’t what we’re after. What we’re after is the substance of who’s going to lead this country. And that’s what we ought to be focused on because the alternative of having Hillary Clinton as President of the United States is just too terrible to contemplate” (Hayward, 2016c). Clovis is essentially saying that the comments do not factor into the “substance” of who Trump is. This attempt to separate Trump’s comments from the reality of what they represent becomes a prominent tactic in *Breitbart*’s coverage during the second debate. *Breitbart*’s framing of Trump’s *Access Hollywood* comments seems to discredit the fact that words can be damaging.

Part of the concerted effort to minimize Trump’s sexist behaviors was to make his actions look mild in comparison to the actions of other men. One such article fell under the expert-opinion story archetype, and, therefore, relies heavily on quotes from expert Ed Klein, “author of the new book *Guilty as Sin: Uncovering New Evidence of Corruption and How Hillary Clinton and the Democrats Derailed the FBI Investigation*” (Hayward, 2016a). The article’s author, John

Hayward, frames the article as Klein giving his take on the second presidential debate. However, it soon becomes clear that the focus of the interview, which was adapted from a *Breitbart* radio interview, was on Klein's evaluation of the *Access Hollywood* tapes. Klein leads by saying:

I'm a little bit of an outlier on this issue, of this tape and what he said... Yeah, it was crude. Yeah, it was vulgar. But you know, in my many, many years on this planet, I've heard from many men in public office a lot worse than what he said on that tape. And men do speak that way. He is right. It *is* locker talk (Hayward, 2016a).

Klein's quote is one of the most salient examples in *Breitbart* coverage of the attempts to minimize the damage done by Trump's words by claiming that they exist within a scheme of normalized male behaviors. By claiming Trump's words are just "locker room talk," the author is able to detach Trump's behaviors from the tangible world and therefore make them seem less real.

Klein goes on to say that the "feminization of our culture" has led to Trump's comments being viewed as unacceptable. He says:

What's happened in this country, however, is that this kind of talk that's gone on for centuries, I would go so far as to say, is no longer politically correct because of the feminization of our culture. And the fact that men who talk this way are somehow completely discredited, even though it is a centuries-old kind of banter, and boisterousness, and, quite frankly, boasting of prowess that quite frankly isn't true (Hayward, 2016a).

Though Klein's quote becomes somewhat confusing towards the end, it is clear that he believes that Trump's comments are completely normal and justified, especially for males. The problem instead is society's shift towards feminization. Though it may seem irresponsible to claim that

Klein's comments represent *Breitbart* as a whole, the organization's choice to publish this interview twice, once on the radio and once in print, is a reflection of its views.

Klein tries to further prove that Trump's *Access Hollywood* comments weren't that bad, so to speak, by saying "the very people, including many, many Republicans, who got on their high horse, their self-righteous high horses about this, are the same guys who turn on pornography when they are traveling in Marriott hotels, and who often sleep with their secretaries on Capitol Hill, and do many more, worse things than Donald Trump has done in his life" (Hayward, 2016a). This statement solidifies that Klein is trying to actively normalize Trump's comments, and consequently, sexism and oppression towards women. In addition, all of the people referenced in Klein's interview are males. This shows that Klein believes that males alone are sufficient to speak for what is and is not acceptable behavior towards women, while women themselves are not given a voice.

Sexism: Rebranded but Not Changed

Breitbart's narrative about Trump's *Access Hollywood* scandal represents a vitriolic take on sexist rhetoric, however it is not entirely unpredictable. At the core of *Breitbart's* coverage of this event is desire to preserve gender hierarchy and allow men to continue dominating women, which is one of the defining principles of hegemonic masculinity (Connell, 1987). However, in a time where alt-right narratives are coming to the forefront of conservative politics, it makes sense that sexism would be re-branded in a way that suits the prevailing masculinity of the time; alt-right hegemonic masculinity. After all, it is the work of hegemony to normalize and subsume countercultures, including the alt-right, in order to maintain the dominance of the established order; white men (Barrett, 1996).

Master Frame Three: “The System is Rigged” – Male Victimization and a Shift in Hegemonic Masculinity

Up to this point in the analysis of *Breitbart*’s 2016 election coverage, though the framing of issues such as the candidates’ physicality and sexist speech have been re-branded from conservative masculinity, the underlying themes of these frames have stayed true to the defining principles of hegemonic masculinity. However, one of the most potent frames that has undergirded much of *Breitbart*’s election coverage is the framing of Trump, and men more generally, as victims. Though a victimhood mentality has not been identified in previous literature as a value of hegemonic masculinity, the portrayal of men as victims fits seamlessly into the goal of hegemonic masculinity, which is to maintain a physical and ideological world in which men are dominant over women. However, it does represent a shift away from the conservative mentality of system justification and moves towards an alt-right logic that victimhood means power.

The idea of male victimhood portrays men as having societal disadvantage, and therefore assumes a position of being on a lower tier in the hierarchy of power. Hegemonic masculinity hinges on its representations of men as infallible and invincible, therefore a portrayal of masculinity that admits to a weakness or flaw in manhood signifies that a new version of hegemonic masculinity has usurped conservative hegemonic masculinity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Alt-right hegemonic masculinity rejects system justification and instead claims that the established order is stacked against men. Through *Breitbart*’s coverage, the theme of victimization is played out through explicit mentions of Trump being disadvantaged by the system and through narratives of Trump being an underdog.

Perceptions of Trump's Systemic Disadvantages

The narrative of Trump as being systemically disadvantaged is most clearly seen through debate-coverage articles. Because debates are structured to give candidates equal time and opportunities to convey their platform, debates are a particularly interesting site to study the framing of the concept of fairness. One such article, written by Joel Pollack, claimed the second debate as a victory for Donald Trump. However, the headline of the story suggests that Trump's victory was not properly recognized. The headline reads; "Donald Trump Wins Second Debate, Media Says It Doesn't Matter." The theme here is that the system is "rigged" against Trump – Pollak portrays the media as having discredited Trump's win. The article starts off with Pollak pulling quotes from two of *CNN*'s anchors. Pollak states that "Jake Tapper, for one, said that tt [sic] the debate was a 'wash'" and "Gloria Borger, said: 'He may have done enough to stop the bleeding. I'm not sure any minds were changed at this debate tonight'" and finally, "Mike Smerconish declared Trump the winner 'on points': 'I think the night belongs to Donald Trump,' he said (Pollak, 2016b). But Smerconish added that Trump had fallen short, regardless: 'Did he grow the tent? I can't see that there was any outreach.'" These quotes serve to solidify Pollak's point that Trump was discredited in his victory.

The quote that was the most telling of this theme is in the third paragraph. Pollack wrote: Trump beat Clinton despite facing a three-on-one press from his opponent and from the moderators, who were at least as biased as they had been in any of the previous debates. *CNN*'s Anderson Cooper fired repeated follow-ups at Trump while leaving Clinton largely alone. But he, at least, brought up tough questions for Clinton on occasion. ABC News' Martha Raddatz actively debated Trump at times, and silenced the audience when it cheered for Trump — though not for Clinton (Pollak, 2016b).

This quote paints a picture of Trump being opposed at nearly every point on his path. By saying Trump faced a “three-on-one press,” the story emphasizes that Trump literally has the odds stacked against him. On the contrary, Clinton is portrayed as having a cushion of protection around her supplied by the media and the debate moderators. In this way, she enjoys privilege while Trump does not. This narrative allows Trump to look systemically disadvantaged and even marginalized by external forces.

First debate moderator Lester Holt was often cited as the source of much of the unfairness that Trump faced in the debates. One article, written by Pollak, complains that Holt asked 15 questions exclusively of Trump, while only asking two questions exclusively of Clinton. Pollak states that this information was gleaned through “close analysis” of the transcript, however no source for the analysis is offered in the story (Pollak, 2016k). A few lines into the article, Pollak states that “Holt, a newcomer to presidential debate moderation, faced intense pressure from the Clinton campaign and the mainstream media to be tough on Trump. Some explicitly called for Holt to fact-check Trump — the implication being that Trump is more ignorant or dishonest” (Pollak, 2016k). This closely fits with the theme that the system is rigged against Trump. Even Holt himself is excused as having been implicated in a system that excludes Trump. Later in the article, Pollak once again brings up the idea that Holt implied Trump was “sexist” by saying that Clinton did not have a “presidential look.” The acknowledgment of sexism as a concept is recoded into being a concept created by the left to oppress the likes of Trump.

In another debate article, Pollak criticizes Holt again for “erroneously fact-checking” Trump, while leaving Clinton alone (Pollak, 2016j). The battle over the fairness of fact checking Trump specifically was one that emerged in several stories about the presidential debates. (This

is connected to a larger issue of *Breitbart* constantly deferring to Trump as the holder of truth.) *Breitbart* is not shy about assigning Clinton to the role of the untrustworthy liar while maintaining that Trump says it like it is. The constant battle over proving that Trump is telling the truth and that Clinton is lying establishes a sort of reality in which Trump can never be wrong.

Holt was criticized again in a separate story written by Pollak about the first debate. The prevailing theme of this story is those on the Right, and Trump specifically, are victims of a system that is rigged against them. This sentiment is apparent in one of the opening lines of the story which said “Holt lived up to the expectations of his peers. But he lived down to the worst expectations of conservatives, who routinely see Republican candidates treated unfairly by debate moderators” (Pollak, 2016j).

One complaint the author had was that Trump was interrogated about not releasing his tax returns, while Clinton was not asked about Benghazi or her email scandals. The next complaint was that Holt brought up that Trump had been a part of the Obama birther conspiracy but did not bring up Clinton’s “past record of racist statements, including her ‘super-predator’ remarks as First Lady, or her explicit appeal to ‘white Americans’ in her 2008 primary campaign against Obama” (Pollak, 2016j). The third complaint was that Holt came to Clinton’s aid and “bolstered” her statements about stop-and-frisk laws. Finally, the fifth complaint is that Trump was targeted as a supporter of the Iraq war, while Clinton was not. Each complaint follows a similar pattern; Trump is called out for doing something questionable, and Pollak brings up how Clinton’s comparable actions were not addressed. This works to reinforce the theme that Trump is disadvantaged in the debate setting.

In yet another article written by Pollak, Holt is criticized for being biased against Trump:

Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump dropped the first debate of the 2016 presidential cycle to his Democratic rival. That was partly because the moderator, *NBC News*'s Lester Holt, turned in one of the most biased performances in the history of presidential debates. But it was also because Trump failed to talk about many of his strongest issues, and he failed to bring up some of Hillary Clinton's weaknesses when he had the chance (Pollak, 2016i).

From the outset, this paragraph reveals several key themes about *Breitbart* coverage as it relates to hegemonic masculinity. First, Pollack admits that Trump was defeated in the first debate, but attributes this defeat to an unfair moderator. The paragraph then goes on to say, essentially, that Trump didn't lose due to his own weaknesses, but rather that he lost because he didn't play up his strengths and draw out Clinton's weaknesses. This paragraph establishes a narrative that protects Trump from being viewed as a loser or as being weak. Instead, the theme of Trump as a victim of a rigged system appears, as well as the theme of Trump as being stronger than his weak opponent, Clinton.

While Holt was criticized for being unfair, third debate moderator Chris Wallace was identified by *Breitbart* as the only fair moderator in the 2016 presidential debates. This characterization of Wallace as fair is seen in Pollak's summary of the third debate. The main thrust of the story is the idea that the third debate was "finally" a fair fight. Up to this point in *Breitbart*'s coverage, a defining cadence has been how the odds are stacked against Trump, and how he is the victim of a rigged system. Though this article highlights that the third debate was fair, implicit in that suggestion is the overarching theme of unfairness previously explored in the coverage. Pollak identified Wallace as the source of this fairness:

Wallace, in an understated way, was the star of the night: he was the only fair-minded moderator of the entire presidential series, who posed tough questions to both candidates and scolded the audience when it favored one side or the other. He also pressed Clinton on her conflicts of interest at the Clinton Foundation, refusing to allow her to wriggle away from the question by talking about the good work her charity does (Pollk, 2016c).

Though the debate stories set the tone for Trump's characterization as being systematically disadvantaged, several expert-opinion stories supported the assertion that the system was rigged against Trump. One such article summarized statements made by Trump's campaign manager Kellyanne Conway. Conway was quoted saying:

Donald Trump brushed back his critics and came to play in this second debate against an indignant and rattled Hillary Clinton. He challenged her on her emails, her unremarkable record in the U.S. Senate, and her unsuccessful record as Secretary of State. She was defensive yet not adequately defending. Trump reminded people of a few simple facts: she represents a failed, rigged system that benefits the powerful and wealthy; policies that will make Americans less wealthy and ISIS more emboldened; a knack for lying that jumped to a whole new level on Sunday. (Boyle, 2016)

The main themes that come into play in this coverage is Trump as being dominant over Clinton and Clinton's inability to hold her own, and that the "system" is "rigged" against people like Trump. Ironically, Conway states that Clinton represents a system that benefits "the powerful and wealthy." Trump, of course, is very much in the category of powerful and wealthy, yet the narrative that is perpetuated through Conway and *Breitbart* is that Trump represents "the every man," and that his "movement" is grassroots. Though this is not the truth, it has been adopted into the mentality of both the Trump campaign and in *Breitbart*'s coverage of the campaign.

Another expert-opinion story, featuring Sam Clovis, connected Trump's systemic disadvantages to the struggles of the Republican party as a whole. Clovis summed up these sentiments by saying "No Republican is ever going to catch a break from a moderator, so we already have it stacked against us. I thought last night that was very, very troubling and difficult" (Hayward, 2016c). This reinforces the theme that Trump has a systemic disadvantage, and Clovis even asserts here that all Republicans have faced this sort of disadvantage. This plays into the broader theme of victimhood that has come to inhabit an alt-right hegemonic masculinity.

A final way that the frame of Trump as systematically disadvantaged plays out in *Breitbart's* coverage is by blaming the media for unfavorable representations of Trump. In one such article, writer Ezra Dulis claims that several news sites stopped taking online polls of who their readers thought would win the presidential race after Trump "touted his dominance of the polls after the first debate" (Dulis, 2016). The polls, Dulis pointed out, were unscientific, snap-polls. However, Trump still tweeted about his "victory" after the first debate using a roundup of the unscientific polls. After Trump was, in Dulis' opinion, "mocked" for using those polls, Dulis said that the snap polls had some validity. He said:

Everyone knows online polls don't reflect the electorate. But what they do reflect is the dedication and enthusiasm of a candidates' online supporters. Both candidates' fans have access to the same tools to game the polls — trolls, bots, etc. Pro-Clinton Super PAC Correct the Record has reportedly spent seven figures on online warfare. Yet Trump fans are still overwhelming the left in this facet of psy-ops, producing screenshot after screenshot of "polls" showing The Donald ahead (Dulis, 2016).

This paragraph is a good example of the theme of Trump pulling ahead despite the system working against him. The quote highlights Trump's supporters "enthusiasm," making Trump's campaign seem like a grassroots movement.

The article goes on to list every website that had Trump winning first debate snap-polls. The author branded the sites that did not put up snap-poll results for the second debate as "left-leaning." The organization of the article serves to further suggest that Trump is being systematically victimized by presenting several examples of his snap-poll victories coupled with the persistent mention of the news sites that did not continue with the snap-poll. Not only does this article claim that certain outlets did not want to see Trump win another snap-poll, but it also undermined the legitimacy of scientific polls in general. The final quote of the article makes this clear:

Most establishment news outlets are touting a "scientific" poll by *CNN* and ORC which says that 57 percent of debate watchers declared Clinton the victor on Sunday night. Left out of that top-line figure: 58 percent of their sample "said they were supporting Clinton **before** the debate [emphasis added by author]" (Dulis, 2016).

Another article, written by McHugh, chronicles an apparent attempt by mainstream media outlets to pin a rise in violent crime on Trump. The article begins fairly innocuously – it states that murders have risen by 10.8 percent from 2014 to 2015, and that violent crimes have risen 3.9 percent in that time. McHugh goes on to say, "media coverage emphasized the impact of the crime rise on the popularity of Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump" (McHugh, 2016). The article pulls three quotes from the *Washington Post* that indicate that Trump's rise in popularity was correlated with the rise in violent crime. One quote from the Post reads: "The long-awaited FBI report was released amid heightened scrutiny of violent crime in

the United States, propelled by an increase in homicides in a number of major cities and repeated comments from Republican presidential candidate Donald Trump...” (McHugh, 2016).

McHugh’s article continues by listing quotes from several sources all related to the FBI report. There seems to be few commonalities in coverage from source to source, with some sources defending Trump, and some simply mentioning his name. Though the rationale behind why McHugh chose to include each source and quote is not evident, it is clear that the author feels that Trump has been wrongly blamed for an increase in crime. This concept goes hand in hand with the theme of Trump as being victimized and systemically disadvantaged. Bringing in evidence in the form of quotes by the *Washington Post* helps to strengthen the claim that Trump is being targeted. However, it also shows a pattern of seeking out ways in which Trump can be constituted as a victim, despite his privileged position in society.

Trump as an Underdog

Characterization of Trump as an “underdog” marries the concepts of Trump as a victim with narratives of Trump as a sports star. It is through the narrative of the underdog that *Breitbart* is able to reconcile the fact that Trump is a flawed exemplar of hegemonic masculinity. Trump’s victim narrative, then, becomes an endearing story of a man fighting against the odds to end up back on top. This transferal of the negative theme of Trump as a victim into a palatable narrative of male perseverance is a strong example of hegemony at work – by painting “social institutions in ways that seem ‘natural,’ ‘ordinary,’ and normal” (Donaldson, 1993). The underdog narrative is most clear in Pollak’s analysis of the second debate when Pollak literally calls Trump an underdog. The final line of the article says “But Las Vegas is home turf for Trump, and a gambling city loves the underdog. Fight Night awaits” (Pollak, 2016g). There is a

lot packed into this short line, but what is abundantly clear is that Trump's underdog nature is actually to his advantage, and that he will emerge victorious in the final debate.

Another article written by Pollak enumerates the reasons why Trump will win the second and third presidential debates. One of the main reasons is that Trump has lower expectations placed on him since he is the underdog.

The candidate that beats expectations by the widest margin wins the debate. As I explained in previewing the first debate, Trump originally had far lower expectations. But Clinton's health problems, which theoretically should have made the debate more difficult for her to endure, helped her by lowering expectations to her benefit: all she had to do was to stand up straight for 90 minutes and she would win. Now that she has won Round 1, Trump is the underdog for the next two (Pollak, 2016d).

According to Pollak, Trump was set from the beginning to be the underdog due to the low expectations set for him. This logic establishes Trump as being disadvantaged. The only thing that gives him an edge is that Clinton lowered expectations due to her health issues. After all, "all she had to do was stand up straight for 90 minutes and she would win" (Pollak, 2016d). Clinton being portrayed as feeble and weak portrays the theme of physical inequality between Clinton and Trump that is prevalent through *Breitbart's* election coverage.

In the same article, Pollak once again bemoans Lester Holt's apparent favoritism of Clinton in the first debate, but states that the next two sets of moderators might not be as biased. The claim that Holt was biased reinforces the theme that Trump was a victim of systemic injustices. Third, Pollak says that Trump will win the next debate due to the Town Hall format. The paragraph says:

Trump is simply better than Clinton at facing real, live voters. While Clinton's campaign has carefully curated her interactions with the public, Trump has been mixing it up with rough crowds for more than a year. Moreover, it is clear from the first debate that Clinton is focused on attacking Trump, while he focuses on the bigger picture (when he is not defending himself). The town hall format will allow him to "go high when they go low," to paraphrase Michelle Obama (Pollak, 2016d).

This paragraph highlights some themes that are less readily seen in *Breitbart's* coverage. By calling Clinton's interactions with the public "carefully curated," the author is establishing a narrative that Clinton is disingenuous and unable to "mix it up with rough crowds" like Trump does. This characterization in particular calls back to values of hegemonic masculinity where men were praised for their athleticism and physical toughness. Clinton is not only painted as calculated, but she is also painted as being too delicate to intermingle with the masses.

Finally, Trump will win because he will get a "bonus for improvement." This enhances the theme that Trump is an underdog, and even with all of the odds stacked against him, he will win. This story, connected with the previous two stories written by Pollak, shows a cohesive narrative of Trump fighting aggressively even though he is the underdog. The themes in these stories, as well as the format they are presented in, consistently repeat themselves throughout *Breitbart's* debate coverage.

Another similar story establishes Trump's underdog narrative by asserting that Trump's loss in the first presidential debate was strategic. Pollak writes that Clinton won the first debate, "but without knocking Donald Trump out of the race" (Pollak, 2016d). The concession that Trump perhaps lost the first debate may seem uncharacteristic for *Breitbart's* coverage, however,

it works to reinforce the theme that Trump is an underdog and will rise-up from being behind to claim the victory.

A final story that works to establish Trump as an underdog goes outside of the debate coverage to take the pulse of how celebrities viewed Trump. This article is essentially a compilation of tweets by celebrities who spoke negatively of Trump's second debate performance or praised Clinton for her performance. There is very little written content by author Nussbaum, though the author's voice and stance can be heard in the lead of the story:

As they did during the first presidential debate, Hollywood's best and brightest weighed in early and often on social media during Sunday night's second showdown between Donald Trump and Hillary Clinton, offering up hot takes, fact checks and plenty of witty jokes (Nussbaum, 2016b).

The lead, dripping with sarcasm, set the tone for the article and the types of tweets that were selected. The basic theme that can be gleaned from this story is that Trump is an underdog, as he does not have the support of potent, liberal voices such as the celebrities listed. The choice to include zero positive tweets about Trump's performance was done to further enforce that Trump has a distinct disadvantage in the race.

Male Victimization as a Hallmark of Alt-Right Masculinity

Breitbart's 2016 election coverage reveals a pattern of characterizing Trump – and men in general – as being the victims of systemic injustices. A study conducted by Forscher and Kteily shows that the alt-right and white supremacist groups believe that they are victims of oppression and discrimination (Forscher & Kteily, 2018). In a survey taken of over 400 self-proclaimed alt-right males, “the alt-right participants were more likely to think men, whites, Republicans, and the alt-right themselves were discriminated against, while minorities and

women were not. This is in line with past research showing that white supremacists have a victimhood mentality in which they consider whites to be the real oppressed people of American society” (Khazan, 2017).

The integration of a victimhood mentality into a group that has always held a privileged position in society shows that hegemonic masculinity subsumes the tropes of victimhood to better serve the dominant class. In today’s society, victimhood is viewed by some as a currency, or a leverage to better the social standing of a certain class or group (Friedersdorf, 2015). Thus, it is no surprise that *Breitbart* chose to capitalize off of Trump’s outsider status in the political realm to make a statement that Trump, and alt-right men in general, are systematically disadvantaged, and are the true underdogs. However, it would be a mistake to think that this victim mentality is due to a weakness on the part of men. Rather, it is forced on them by an existing regime of hegemony which pushes men to regain power in any way they can. It is not the fault of an individual man that this victim mentality was adopted, it is the fault of a system bent on male dominance that forced a frame of victimhood onto men in order to profit from an economy of victimhood that has traditionally only served minorities and those without institutionalized power.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION

This study concludes by returning to the original research questions that were posed in Chapter One, the study's theoretical framework. By addressing these questions, the study will reflect upon the analysis of *Breitbart's* 2016 election coverage and how frames of hegemonic masculinity were produced.

RQ1: What recurring frames shape *Breitbart's* coverage of the 2016 presidential campaign?

Through careful analysis of the sample of *Breitbart* articles, there were several recurrent themes in the coverage. These themes assembled themselves under the umbrella of three larger frames, which are termed “master frames,” which were (1) metaphors and illusions to the physical bodies of the candidates, (2) minimization of sexism, and (3) the portrayal of Trump and men in general as victims. These frames were reinforced through every aspect of *Breitbart's* reporting – from opinion-based articles, to quotes from outside sources, to the way that the stories themselves were organized.

The first master frame, comparisons of the candidates' physicality through direct references to their bodies and through metaphorical comparison, was potent throughout *Breitbart's* coverage. It was made abundantly clear through *Breitbart's* coverage that Trump's actual body was more “fit” for the presidency than was Clinton's. While Clinton's “physical weakness” was touted in debate coverage and coverage of her 9/11 stumble, Trump was described as being in “excellent health” and having the “stamina” to endure the presidency (Breitbart News, 2016d; Swoyer, 2016b). *Breitbart's* metaphoric illusions to the candidates'

bodies described Trump and Clinton in similar terms. *Breitbart* often pitted Clinton and Trump against each other in metaphoric sporting matches in which Trump, by means of his strength and fighting spirit, always emerged the victor (Hayward, 2016a). Framing Trump as being physically dominant to Clinton in both a tangible and a metaphorical sense helped to create a reality in which the female body in general was constantly made lesser than the male body.

The second master frame found in the sample of *Breitbart* articles was a concerted effort to minimize the impacts of Trump's sexist behavior and to normalize sexism in general. Through *Breitbart's* coverage of the *Access Hollywood* scandal, the publication and its staff situated Trump's sexist comments in a broader history of men's "locker-room talk" and made it clear that Trump's behavior should be considered normal and even acceptable. Throughout the coverage of this event, *Breitbart* staff began to write and talk about the *Access Hollywood* scandal in increasingly more casual terms, starting by calling the tape "lascivious" to reducing the whole incident into Trump making "jokes about women" (Nussbaum, 2016). The implications of this frame are telling of *Breitbart's* stance about women in general and show that the staff of *Breitbart* assume that sexism is an unavoidable part of life and therefore men should not have to be punished for engaging in sexist behaviors. Instead, men and women are implicated in a history of sexism that justifies the continuance of behaviors and statements that objectify and oppress women.

The final master frame found in *Breitbart's* coverage was the framing of Trump as a victim. Throughout its coverage, *Breitbart* continually referred to debate moderators, the media, and other politicians as being unfair towards Trump. Trump was portrayed as an underdog and a *Breitbart* wove the narrative that Trump had to fight against all odds to become the victor. According to Khazan, members of the alt-right believe that white men have been victimized by

society “while minorities and women were not” (Khazan, 2017). In *Breitbart*’s coverage, Trump became the embodiment of this victimhood mentality, causing him to be framed as being disadvantaged and victimized throughout his entire candidacy. *Breitbart*’s adoption of a victim mentality to personify Trump and alt-right men more generally is a symptom of the belief that white men are losing ground to women and minorities and must therefore use the frame of victimhood as a social currency to maintain power and/ or to justify actions frowned on by society in general (Friedersdorf, 2015).

RQ2a: Does *Breitbart*’s coverage of the 2016 election exhibit characteristics associated with hegemonic masculinity?

RQ2b: If it does exhibit hegemonic masculinity, how are the guiding values of hegemonic masculinity – heterosexuality, gender hierarchy, and exaltation of masculine exemplars – preserved or altered through *Breitbart*’s coverage?

Breitbart articles examined in this study show that *Breitbart* displays themes and frames associated with hegemonic masculinity. Based on the most basic definition of hegemonic masculinity, which is “the pattern of practice that allow[s] men’s dominance over women to continue,” *Breitbart* fits the description as its framing continuously points to the fact that men are dominant over women. The sample of *Breitbart* articles also shows an adherence to the norms of hegemonic masculinity on a more nuanced level. *Breitbart*’s coverage exhibits the values of gender hierarchy and the exaltation of masculine exemplars, two of the guiding values of hegemonic masculinity.

The most pervasive of the tenants of hegemonic masculinity in *Breitbart*’s coverage was the theme of gender hierarchy. As previously discussed, *Breitbart*’s coverage works to assert the dominance of Trump over Clinton at almost every turn. It does this by creating a physical and

metaphorical world in which Clinton is mentally and physically weaker than Trump. It also does this by minimizing the impacts of sexism in general and by clinging to historical instances of men being sexist towards women without consequence. Gender hierarchy is also enforced through attempts to undermine Clinton's legitimacy as a political candidate. Connell states that gender hierarchy in hegemonic masculinity manifests itself in the "inability of women to hold institutionalized power positions over men" (Connell, 1987). This idea is especially poignant regarding *Breitbart's* coverage of the 2016 presidential election. It seems logical that themes of hegemonic masculinity would embed themselves in a text that covers the first ever female major party candidate for the U.S. presidency.

Hegemonic masculinity is always represented through unattainable exemplars of the prevailing masculinity (Connell, 1987). In the context of *Breitbart's* coverage of the 2016 presidential campaign, Trump represents that exemplar. Trump is consistently referred to in terms that would be used to describe a male sports star. Male sports stars and sports metaphors, according to Connell and Messerschmidt, "function as an endlessly renewed symbol of masculinity" (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005). Thus, Trump's characterization as "winner" and as a "fighter" props him up as an exemplar of hegemonic masculinity (Hayward, 2016b).

The guiding value of hegemonic masculinity that was largely unexplored in this study's sample of *Breitbart* articles was the interaction between heterosexuality as a dominant masculinity and homosexuality as a subordinated masculinity. One potential reason for this was that the sampling process for the study was designed to target events and key words that would put Clinton and Trump in direct comparison to each other. The narrative painted between Clinton and Trump was solely focused on the implications of gender roles and norms between men and women. Themes associated with homosexuality did not play a significant role in the relationship

between the two candidates. However, aspects of *Breitbart*'s coverage suggested that the dominant hegemonic masculinity was to be favored over any other form of masculinity, particularly gay masculinity. One example of this is the notion of "locker room talk" which assumes that in order to participate in these types of denigrating conversations about women, one must be heterosexual and must be considered "one of the guys." Despite the lack of attention to subordinated masculinities, *Breitbart*'s coverage shows strong links to the themes that are intimately connected with hegemonic masculinity, and thus it was an effective publication to study regarding a shifting hegemonic masculinity.

RQ3: In what way does *Breitbart*'s coverage suggest a shift away from a hegemonic masculinity that reflects conservative values to a hegemonic masculinity that reflects the values of the alt-right?

Though *Breitbart*'s coverage of the 2016 presidential campaign does not fundamentally alter the guiding values of hegemonic masculinity as a whole, it does show that there has been a shift away from conservative hegemonic masculinity and towards alt-right hegemonic masculinity. This shift can mainly be seen in the extreme nature of the framing used in *Breitbart*. The sources, quotes, and even headlines used by *Breitbart* exhibit a rhetoric that is reminiscent of language used by members of the alt-right on blogs and internet forums. A few quotes that serve as poignant examples of this are "[Trump] was pacing like a caged lion most of the time and while she was talking he was standing behind her, powerfully bigger and stronger than [Clinton]" and "What's happened in this country, however, is that this kind of talk that's gone on for centuries, I would go so far as to say, is no longer politically correct because of the feminization of our culture" (Hayward, 2016a). *Breitbart*'s adoption of the language and framing

of the alt-right show that it is the dominant national masculinity and indicates that hegemonic masculinity has shifted from being conservative to being alt-right.

The most powerful indication that conservative hegemonic masculinity has been transformed into alt-right hegemonic masculinity is *Breitbart's* integration of a victimhood narrative into their coverage of Trump. The mantle of victimhood has been taken up by members of the alt-right in an effort to resist cultural attempts to make America a more equitable place for people of all genders and races (Southern Poverty Law Center, n.d.). The frame of victimhood permeates every aspect of *Breitbart's* coverage of the 2016 presidential campaign, and paints Trump and men in general as victims of a broken political system which no longer wants to cater to their will. Although the theme of victimhood has not yet been explored in scholarly research on hegemonic masculinity, the idea of victimhood falls perfectly in line with the principles of hegemonic masculinity. Hegemonic masculinity is always and will always be concerned with maintaining the dominance of men over women and subordinated masculinities. Therefore, no other social group must be allowed to hold power of any kind over the dominant masculinity. In a time where minority members are finally receiving some form of justice and recognition for their historical oppression, the current hegemonic masculinity must evolve to assume the position of victims to regain its absolute social, cultural, and political control. Thus, alt-right masculinity masks itself in a guise of victimhood and outsider status in order to capitalize on the momentum of the oppressed.

RQ4: *What are the potential effects of Breitbart's framing of the 2016 presidential campaign on those who receive these frames?*

According to Entman, the way media frame a message “has a common effect on large portions of the receiving audience, though it is not likely to have a universal effect on all”

(Entman, 1993). Based on Entman's assertion, it is impossible to determine the exact cultural and personal effects that *Breitbart's* framing of the 2016 presidential campaign had on all of those who read it. However, exploring the potential effects of *Breitbart's* framing may open a broader discussion on the dangers of the alt-right and hegemonic masculinity at large. In order to discuss what these effects could be, this study adopts the assumption that *Breitbart's* coverage had a dominant reading which is understood by the majority of readers despite the probability that the majority of readers will resist accepting the dominant reading exactly as it is presented to them (Condit, 1987).

The dominant reading of *Breitbart's* narrative in its 2016 election coverage can be interpreted as follows; Trump is dominant over Clinton in every manner, including his physical prowess, his fitness to be the President, and his mental capacity. Trump should also not be blamed for his sexist behavior because he is simply acting in accordance with the history of his sex and his behaviors are normal and natural, at least, among "guys." And finally, Trump, and all alt-right men, are victims of an unfair "rigged system" that favors minorities and women. Whether or not these frames are readily accepted by the audience, the implications of these frames are of concern. It is the process of hegemony to normalize previously unaccepted ideas for the service of the established regime of power. The dissemination of alt-right values on a news outlet that claims to report fact show that the views of alt-right hegemonic masculinity have made their way into mainstream thought and are becoming more culturally accepted and less shocking.

The potential effect of *Breitbart's* integration of a victim narrative to describe alt-right men is that people-groups who have truly been oppressed and victimized will not have their voices heard, because alt-right hegemonic masculinity has diluted the concept of victimhood to

the point in which it serves no one. *Breitbart's* framing of Clinton and women in general also shows that sexism is still alive and well in American culture and it that it will continue to be difficult for a woman to gain support in holding an institutionalized power position over men. Finally, the viral spread of alt-right ideas through internet forums and subsequently more mainstream outlets shows the devastating effects that extremist groups on the web can have on defining what type of speech is acceptable and even encouraged.

Hegemony and, consequently, hegemonic masculinity work insidiously towards “subduing and co-opting dissenting voices through subtle dissemination of the dominant group’s perspective as universal and natural, to the point where the dominant beliefs and practices become an intractable component of common sense” (Litowitz, 2000). It is this imperceptibility that makes hegemonic structures so dangerous. However, the first step in resisting and overthrowing a hegemonic regime is to recognize and put a name to it. This is why studying the shifts in hegemonic masculinity is important – it allows members of society to identify the undertones and frames which situate hegemonic masculinity in order to expose and combat them. Although alt-right hegemonic masculinity poses a serious threat to the progress and tolerance of American society, it is a movement that is becoming continuously more recognizable and more combatted. The alt-right can no longer secretly pollute through underground internet forums, it must be brought into the light.

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