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From the Margins to the Center: Legitimation Strategies for Explicit and
Implicit Racist Discourse from an Alt-Right Case Study.

Partial fulfillment statement: A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of Masters of Science at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

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Look at me now.

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Abstract

FROM THE MARGINS TO THE CENTER: LEGITIMATION STRATEGIES FOR EXPLICIT AND IMPLICIT RACIST DISCOURSE FROM AN ALT-RIGHT CASE STUDY

By Lauren C. Garcia, M.S.

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Science at Virginia Commonwealth University.

Virginia Commonwealth University, 2020.

Major Director: Dr. Tressie McMillan Cottom, Associate Professor, Sociology

As the Western world was reeling from the stunning electoral victory of President Donald Trump, political scientist George Hawley (2017) wrote that his campaign “restored the radical right to the headlines and the public consciousness.” Despite a growing interest in understanding Trump’s election as part of the historical trajectory of white racial identity politics, we do not know much about how ideas deemed “radical right” become mainstream ideas. My study builds on extant research that implicates the emergence of the think tank industry by viewing one such right wing think tank as a racialized organization. My analysis focuses on the organizational strategies of The National Policy Institute (NPI), a white supremacist group that brands itself a “think tank.” Google searches for NPI spiked in 2016 (Figure 1) with their vocal support of Donald Trump and visible organizing in D.C. Using Williams’ (2018) theoretical framework of organizational legitimacy and Ray’s (2019) conceptualization of the racial organization, this research examines the extent to which the NPI and their journal, *The Occidental Quarterly*,

manage their legitimacy while also maintaining ideological loyalty to racial attitudes that are inconsistent with mainstream policy discussions. In a review of over 1,000 news mentions and Google scholar citations, as well as qualitative content analysis of selected reports and articles, this study finds the NPI employs several forms of legitimation strategies but not all of them equally. I also find that what I call citation gaming is an emerging legitimation strategy. Citation gaming involves a citational practice that leverages the infrastructure of Google Scholar and the mainstream culture of convenience citations. Together, these strategies create legitimacy for extremist ideologies that are then sanitized through new hybrid networks of white supremacist ideology that include mainstream news coverage, research organizations, and digital scholarly databases.

Keywords: legitimacy, organizational theory, racism, citation gaming

The 2016 U.S. presidential election renewed mainstream attention to “far-right” groups. The alt-right spiked in google searches and news mentions through 2016 and 2017. News outlets described the group as ill-defined, loosely formed, and disparate, implying that there was no real structure to them. At the same time, many were hailing Donald Trump as the first alt-right president. There was a fascinating discursive difference in how this group was spoken about: loose and disorganized, yet powerful enough to have ties to the White House. I used one alt-right group, the National Policy Institute, to examine how far-right, white identity groups mainstream their ideologies. My theoretical framework combines the literature on race talk with organizational legitimacy, particularly in research organizations. Ray (2019) proposes a theory of racialized organizations. He argues that organizations serve as mediators between institutions and individuals in order to reify the racial order and allocate and secure resources to and for whiteness. Bonilla-Silva (2006) asserts that despite talk of a post racial society, we’ve merely learned new stories and frames to be racist. He describes four frames I utilized in my study: abstract liberalism, naturalization, cultural racism and minimization of racism. Bonilla-Silva studied how individuals communicate racism. Because organizations communicate in different ways for different reasons, it was important to explore the literature on organizational legitimacy. I used Suchman’s (1995) typology of organizational legitimacy, along with Williams’ (2018) expansion of it in research organizations. Both Ray and Suchman argue that the depth and power of our most legitimate organizational structures requires the cover of cognitive legitimacy. Research organizations, often called think tanks, have this type of legitimacy. Think tanks and their leaders have a particular relationship with the media, are frequently cited as experts, and maintain the air of functioning as independent, unbiased research organizations. Digital

technology has made it easier to mimic the standards and aesthetics of these groups, and far-right actors have taken advantage of it.

The literature on race talk, legitimacy, racialized organizations and their use of digital technologies led me to my research question: What strategies are used to legitimize the racist ideologies of white identity groups in the digital age? In a review of over 1,000 news mentions and Google scholar citations, as well as qualitative content analysis of selected reports and articles, I found that the alt-right National Policy Institute and their journal *The Occidental Quarterly* employ several forms of legitimation strategies but not all of them equally. I also find that what I call citation gaming is an emerging legitimation strategy. Citation gaming involves a citational practice that leverages the infrastructure of Google Scholar and the mainstream culture of convenience citations. Together, these strategies create legitimacy for extremist ideologies that are then sanitized through new hybrid networks of white supremacist ideology that include mainstream news coverage, research organizations, and digital scholarly databases.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A Brief History of the Alt-Right

After the installation of Donald Trump as leader of the free world in 2016, scholars and journalists struggled to make sense of the new fringe group that was said to have brought him there: the alt-right. According to Lyons (2017), the alt-right emerged in opposition to a number of political ideologies: neoconservatism, multicultural liberalism, and “political correctness.” Paleoconservatives, ideological contemporaries of the “Old Right” of the early 20th century, share many foundational tenets with the alt-right (Lyons, 2017). Theirs is an anti-immigrant, anti-globalist, “America First” ideal for the country. These ideals were evident in the 1920s and

1930s, among Republicans and conservative Democrats. It was a backlash to Roosevelt's New Deal brand of liberalism, one that sought a more fair society through social welfare programs. Anti-communist rhetoric of the Cold War era held a diverse right-wing coalition together, but the ranks began to splinter with the collapse of the Soviet Union starting in the late 1980s (Berlet & Lyon, 2000). President Ronald Reagan ushered in a modern era of neoconservatism that George W. Bush continued. The Republican party transformed into one that looks familiar to contemporary readers: the party of international free trade, military interventionism, and colorblind ideology, an America where anyone could succeed if they worked hard. This "New Right" reality contrasted with the Old Right's vision for a nationalist, anti-global America, and the term "Republican In Name Only (RINO)" was born. A paleoconservative backlash arose that saw colorblind ideology and the multiculturalism brought in by support of immigration and international trade as a threat to the sovereignty of the nation. While the New Right wing of the party took control, the Old Right was still alive as evidenced by their alliance in support of Patrick Buchanan's campaigns in 1992 and 1996. Buchanan challenged George H. W. Bush for the nomination, juxtaposing his paleoconservative platform with Bush's neoconservative ideology. His campaign co-chair was fired in 1996 for his participation in white supremacist groups. Ron Paul continued to support Buchanan's campaign, eventually running for president himself on the same paleoconservative ideology. Although Paul characterizes his platform and ideology as libertarian, Tabachnick & Coccozzelli (2013) identify him as "the engine" of this neoconfederate movement.

While my focus is the 21st century U.S., right wing ideological movements are a global phenomenon. The European New Right (ENR) also provides an ideological basis for the

alt-right. In the same way paleoconservatives channeled the Old Right of the 20s and 30s in America, the ENR chose to channel fascist leaders from the 1920s and 1930s in Europe (Lyons, 2017). Ironically, the advancement of information technology through the 1980s and 1990s allowed for an increasingly global networked society, which in turn facilitated the development of a translocal identity of white supremacy. The internet spread the ideological roots of the ENR to the United States in the 1990s. As opposed as the movement is to globalism and multiculturalism, the alt-right and white supremacists in general have harnessed the power of the internet to appeal to a global audience and bond an international coalition of individuals who subscribe to their ideals. This research argues that white identity groups have utilized specific strategies, particularly through research organizations and digital media, in order to mask their racist rhetoric and advance their causes. One of these strategies is their race talk.

Race talk

There are several dominant theories of race and race talk. Omi and Winant (1994) defined racial formation as a “sociohistorical process by which racial categories are created, inhabited, transformed, and destroyed” (p. 55). Sociologists use racial formation theory to study racial discourse, racialization and acculturation, social movements and more. Racial projects, as explained by Omi and Winant (1994), are a negotiation and renegotiation of racial dynamics that seek to distribute resources along racial lines. They argue that these projects happen on the micro and macro level, are context-dependent and constantly evolving. In contrast, Feagin (2006) theorized that the United States is built upon a system of racialized oppression. Further, individuals and institutions operate within what Feagin (2009) calls a “white racial frame.” He argues that the material oppression of black and brown people must be rationalized by whites as

they are the dominant group, and that the white racial frame is a meaning system of racialized knowledge, emotions, interpretations, and images that uphold dominant beliefs. Bonilla-Silva (2006) explored the prevalence of the idea of a post-racial society after the Civil Rights Movement, and proposed the paradigm of colorblind ideology. He describes race as a social construct that leads to specific social realities. While ideas like race, class, and gender are constructed categories, these categories have real-life consequences and shape the reality of actors in our social system. These racial structures, and the material benefit they provide to the dominant race, are maintained by racial ideologies. To study how whites discursively reproduced these racial ideologies, Bonilla-Silva (2006) conducted interviews with college students about race and racism. He found that there are specific frames, stories, and styles with which white respondents made sense of and explained racial inequalities. The four frames of colorblind racism are abstract liberalism, naturalization, cultural racism, and minimization of racism. These frames shape what Bonilla-Silva describes as the new racism.

Abstract liberalism applies liberal political and economic ideology to issues of race. The ideal of meritocracy is an illustration of this frame. Historically, white Americans have had more opportunities to build generational wealth, whereas black and brown people faced generations of systemic oppression that excluded them from wealth building. By painting a picture of equal opportunity, implying that everyone starts on a level playing field and hard work and individual merits move us forward, whites can effectively ignore historical institutional biases by putting the impetus for social change on individuals. Studies have shown that people use this frame to talk about things like dating preferences (Feliciano, Robnett, & Komaie, 2009). In framing their choice of white mates as a market choice, individuals can avoid explicit racism. Naturalization

frames racial differences as inherently natural. Biological bases of intelligence, the idea that we should stay with our own kind, and the idea of natural preferences in romantic partners are examples of this frame. Cultural racism implies that a racial minority's culture is the reason for their low position in the social hierarchy. This type of colorblind racism uses a white racial frame, making white normative and problematizing all other groups. Minimization of racism frames issues of racism as no longer relevant. The idea that we are a post racial society after the election of President Obama fits this frame. Bonilla-Silva documented these four frames among college students, and they can all be seen at work in modern political discourse.

Like most of American society after the 1960s and 1970s, the neoconservative right-wing subscribes to colorblind ideology. This "racism without racists" is a symptom of neoliberal politics in general; this order, which both major U.S. political parties play a role in, can only function because of and in fact hinges upon the exploitation of racialized others, with black people categorically most vulnerable. Dunn (2016) describes this political reality, stating that "the neoliberal order is deeply invested in race-based exploitation. Indeed, as Angela Davis argues, there are many 'complex ways in which racism clandestinely structures prevailing institutions, practices, and ideologies'" (p. 272). As black and brown people advanced in modern society, specifically into the wage labor market, discrimination moved from overt to covert. While racism clearly pervades our political and economic systems, our society has made explicitly racist discourse deviant, and this permeates political discourse. Neoconservatives use "dog whistles" and rhetoric to promote race-forward tropes without having to say anything explicitly racist. General Social Survey (Smithe et al.) data shows that the percentage of Republicans who believe black people are more often in poverty because they lack the willpower

or motivation to pull themselves out of it has stayed steady at around 55% from 1996-2016, with a rise in 2010 to 60%. The belief that black people are less motivated than or lack the willpower levels of whites is obviously racist, but this racism is implicit. Applying abstract liberalism and cultural racism in this example, whites can maintain their unequal access to resources and opportunities and avoid considering structural issues. By using the frames and stories outlined by Bonilla-Silva (2006), politicians and individuals can express racist ideologies in a socially acceptable manner. While his study analyzed responses from individuals, organizations function differently as meso level actors between individuals (micro) and institutions (macro). Organizations must therefore use different strategies to legitimize racist ideologies.

Legitimacy

Organizations garner, maintain, and repair legitimacy in a number of ways. In classic sociological theory, Weber (1922) named three types of legitimate authority: traditional, rational-legal, and charismatic. Because this study focuses on how organizations foment racial hierarchies, I drew on the literature on organizational legitimacy. Suchman (1995) proposes that organizational legitimacy can be divided into three types: cognitive, moral, and pragmatic. Williams (2018) expounded on this theory and outlined three specific legitimization strategies: coherence in identity, coherence in process, and coherence in outcome. Organizations develop these strategies to maintain legitimacy, and these strategies unfold in a racial hierarchy. Most organizational literature takes on a white racial frame (Suchman, 1995; Ray, 2019; Feagin, 2009), so it is necessary to incorporate a theory of racialized organizations. Ray (2019) argues that organizations provide racial structures that facilitate racist ideology through rules and resources. Hence, organizational legitimization strategies serve to racialize organizations. The

media also plays a role in the legitimation of organizations. McDonald (2014) argues that the media reinforces legitimacy, and organizations like think tanks use media appearances to reinforce support among their base as well as represent specific aspects for public consumption that they may not otherwise reveal. This is why it is important to examine both in-group and out-group communication. Next, I will define these legitimacy typologies from the management literature, and explain how they are used in conjunction with colorblind racist discourse to legitimize organizations and their ideologies.

Typologies of legitimacy. Suchman's (1995) theoretical framework of organizational legitimacy is one of the most-cited works in the field. His typology of pragmatic, moral, and cognitive legitimacy has been applied to a number of political organizations. Pragmatic legitimacy is determined by the immediate target audience of the organization and is based on the individual determining what the consequences and benefits are of their support. He notes three distinctions in pragmatic legitimacy: exchange legitimacy, influence legitimacy, and dispositional legitimacy. Employing exchange legitimacy requires audience support for an organization in exchange for something of value. Influence legitimacy is similar, but instead of immediate exchange, the audience is supporting the organization to serve their larger interests. Dispositional legitimacy refers to the way an audience personifies an organization, believing the organization can carry individual traits like honesty, selflessness, or humility. This belief that an organization can have and share values protects the organization from missteps that might otherwise delegitimize them.

In contrast with the self-interest focus of pragmatic legitimacy, moral legitimacy appeals to the audience's perception of "the right thing to do." It is important to note that "morality" in

this context is entirely dependent on the audience members' worldview. For example, if an individual believes that Mexican people are rapists and drug traffickers, their morality would consider an organization that keeps out legal immigrants to be legitimate. The context of every form of legitimacy is audience-specific. Suchman identifies four forms of moral legitimacy: consequential, procedural, structural, and personal. Consequential legitimacy judges the organization by the morality of its output. Procedural legitimacy judges the organization by how it achieves its goals. Structural legitimacy judges the organization by its normative capacity to do specific types of work. Personal legitimacy, which Suchman labeled as rare but is increasingly relevant in a digital society, judges an organization by the charisma and perceived morality of its leaders.

Finally, cognitive legitimacy is a type of legitimacy sought when an organization needs passive support. Certain institutions must be seen and not heard in order to function. Suchman identified two variants of this legitimacy: comprehensibility and taken-for-grantedness. Organizations who use comprehensibility as a form of cognitive legitimacy paint the world as chaotic, with their organization providing needed stability and predictability. IBM's 2019 "Smart Loves Problems" advertising campaign employs comprehensibility. Through fast-paced video of people experiencing obstacles in their work and daily life from the bottom of a grocery bag falling out to a citywide power outage, IBM offers their technology as the singular solution for any problem you can face, across all industries and walks of life. Similarly, it could be argued that right-wing groups discursively create a problem - immigrants, the media, liberals - and pose conservative ideals and policies as solutions. The second variant, taken-for-granted legitimacy, that an organization has existed and will always exist, is what Suchman calls "the most subtle

and powerful source of legitimacy defined to date." (p. 583). It makes attacking the organization almost impossible. An example of this is the police. Within the past ten years the idea of abolishing branches of law enforcement in the U.S. has become more prominent, but is nowhere near mainstream. These state actors have achieved the rare and powerful form of cognitive legitimacy, in that we believe that they have always existed and that there are no alternatives to perform their role and function. These types of legitimacy were first applied to business management studies to help companies learn how to market their products and attract the right type of consumers. Social scientists found that this typology was useful for studying modern research hubs legitimate their organizations and their policy ideas. Williams (2018) applied Suchman's typology to these types of organizations.

Through a mixed-methods analysis using interviews and publications from research hubs across Britain and Australia, Williams (2018) provides an expansion of Suchman's typology of legitimacy and subsequent legitimation strategies. Williams uses Suchman's definition of legitimacy: when an audience views the actions of a company or organization as positive within socially constructed norms and values. In the specific context of research organizations related to policymaking, Williams notes several different stakeholders that organizations must lobby in order to gain and maintain legitimacy. Researchers can be academics, but they also must communicate their findings, find funding, and manage projects. Because a research organization plays multiple roles, funders, evaluators, state actors, and citizens must be satisfied while the organization considers and attends to its mission. These audiences require different communication, different outputs, and an emphasis on different values. As Williams frames it, "[Research organizations] must fulfill the expectations of specific social worlds, while retaining

the flexibility to inhabit multiple overlapping communities" (p. 54). The arena of cognitive legitimacy is important in these considerations. If the organization has a set of rules, guidelines, and overall structure, the organization can better negotiate its roles. And, communication can quickly and easily pivot depending on the pragmatic and moral needs of the audience, as well as respond to external factors that may affect the audience's perception.

Williams (2018) identifies three categories of coherence that align with Suchman's. An organization achieves cognitive legitimacy through coherence in identity, or the simultaneous negotiation of organizational and individual identity. This provides the organization distinctiveness. Research organizations achieve moral legitimacy through coherence in process, or the maintenance of independence, integrity, and transparency. This provides the organization credibility. They achieve pragmatic legitimacy through coherence in outcome, or the creation of the right products, audience, and impact. This provides the organization significance. These types of legitimacy and the resulting affordances they provide will be used in this research to analyze the case, the National Policy Institute (NPI). Because the NPI and other white identity groups have an explicitly racist mission, it is important to study them as racialized organizations.

Legitimacy in racialized organizations. Both Suchman (1995) and Ray (2019) argue that in early org theory, organizations were widely thought of as rational, race-neutral bureaucratic and subsequently technocratic entities that operate on efficiency. Both note that this is not the case, but Ray moves a step further to argue that organizations are sites of racialization that mediate macro and micro level interactions and reify the racial order. Racialized organizations are a middle ground that affect and are affected by the macro and micro level contexts and social processes of racialization. Similarly, Williams (2018) states that an organization's goal in using

rules and procedures is to gain, maintain, and repair legitimacy rather than efficiency. All three authors acknowledge the cyclical nature of organizational legitimacy, and that it requires multiple, simultaneous negotiations between organization, individual, and society. They also examine the ways in which racialized organizations use strategies to manage these negotiations.

Suchman identified a number of legitimation strategies based on his three broad types of legitimacy. Many racialized organizations, and in particular the white identity groups that are the focus of this study, use cognitive legitimation strategies to achieve mainstream legitimacy from those who are not their target audience. By communicating with specific rhetoric that appeals to the shared values of their target audience, these organizations prove their value and their integrity. In this way, their primary audience has been brought in through pragmatic and moral legitimacy. Once this target audience is secure in the legitimacy of the organization, the organization is able to mainstream their ideology and grow their constituency of supporters through different forms of cognitive legitimacy. They conform to models by mimicking standards; for example, the aesthetics of their white papers, websites and journals all use the rules, procedures, symbols and layouts of legitimate research organizations. They have formalized and professionalized their operations, gaining 501(c)3 and 501(c)4 status and using empiricism and citation practices to legitimize their views. Like the discursive practices of colorblind racism, cognitive legitimacy can serve to mask ideologies. Newer audience members become less aware of the driving values of the organization at first glance, and organizations are able to lightly radicalize individuals along the way. Ray (2019) acknowledges that the depth and power of our most legitimate organizational structures necessitates that society takes them for granted (p. 33), in line with Suchman's taken-for-grantedness variant of cognitive legitimacy.

Bonilla-Silva (2017) argues that the concept of biological superiority among whites has given way to a concept of cultural superiority. Mainstream, nonpartisan research organizations no longer operate from the view that black and dark-skinned minorities are biologically inferior, but they maintain the racial order through “Laissez-faire racism” (Bonilla-Silva, 2017, p. 7), implying a cultural inferiority based on liberal characteristics like work ethic, meritocracy, and equal opportunity. The white identity groups focused on in this study continue to make appeals to biological inferiority, and are able to pass these claims into mainstream arenas. Research organizations and the idea of empiricism in particular have the taken-for-grantedness that Suchman labels as the most powerful, unassailable form of legitimacy, and white identity organizations use this to their advantage.

The role of the audience is important in the legitimation process as it proffers resources. Resources not only help an organization towards its mission, but are a form of legitimacy themselves. An audience is more likely to resource an organization if it agrees with the organization’s message. Similarly, Suchman notes an important distinction between passive and active support. Some organizations do not require continued active support from a particular audience and prefer that the audience remains passive, thus requiring a lower threshold of legitimacy. Explaining the difference between an organization that wishes to do their work unnoticed and an organization that needs audience approval to thrive, Suchman argues that, "To avoid questioning, an organization need only make sense. To mobilize affirmative commitments, it must also have value, either substantively or as a crucial safeguard to impending nonsense" (p. 584). An organization makes sense in different ways to different audiences, and these boundaries are constantly being negotiated. Operating in a white racial frame, organizations must appeal to

the dominant group to gain legitimacy, and in that way they are racialized. A theory of racialized organizations can explain how organizations work to communicate their worth to a white audience as a means to secure the racial order. By demonstrating that an organization is in line with the audience's values at the outset, they can strengthen their audience's commitment to their cause. Communicating that an organization can benefit the individual is a form of pragmatic legitimacy.

Ray (2019) describes moral legitimacy in his example of anti-discrimination laws. Although these laws were not proven to alleviate inequality of any kind, the mere action of adopting them satisfied the court and the individuals' need for an organization they align with to "do the right thing," i.e. not discriminate. It does not matter if the outcome is achieved, only that the stakeholder perceives the organization to be acting morally in line with their norms and values. Additionally, he notes that the adoption of race-based or "colorblind" rules and procedures similar to other organizations within a field allows a racialized organization to continue to grow support and resources while maintaining the racial order. This is an example of Suchman's cognitive legitimacy, and of Williams' concept of coherence in identity. Research organizations and the individuals that comprise them are constantly negotiating their identities relative to each other and to other organizations in their fields. Bonilla-Silva summarizes the structural argument of Bobo and Kluegel by asserting that the purpose of a white racial frame is to protect whites' position at the top of the social hierarchy. Therefore, racism in some form must be legitimate to maintain the racial order. In discussing different types of explanations for changing attitudes towards Jim Crow era laws, Bonilla-Silva states that "Laissez-faire" racism is different from his theoretical framework of colorblindness in that it operationalizes racism as

individual, psychological hostility, rather than a structure that actors operate from. Suchman's dispositional legitimacy, that an organization can operate with individual values, reveals a connection between the micro-level analysis of Laissez-faire racism and the macro-level analysis of Bonilla-Silva's institutional analysis, further proving Ray's theory of organizations as integral, reinforcing meso-level actors in the racial order. While these legitimation strategies are used at the meso-level by organizations, institutions like the news media also play a role in legitimizing different groups and ideas. Think tanks have evolved throughout the years to work with and benefit from relationships with the media.

Think tanks as legitimating organizations. In the early 20th century, think tanks were places where academics and scholars could "think" through policy solutions to social problems. These research organizations were largely funded by grants from philanthropic foundations. In 1969, Congress passed the Tax Reform Act, a law that limited foundation funding to policy organizations. This drastically cut funding for several large think tanks. To avoid going under, conservative think tanks began to accept donations from corporations and individuals. Many liberal and progressive think tanks instead made their research less ideologically based and more centrist so they could continue to receive funding from foundations. This meant that as conservative think tanks grew, becoming advocacy groups instead of research hubs, liberal think tanks retreated, muting their politics to continue receiving funding. Similar to Ray (2019), McDonald (2014) argues there is little research that combines social movements theories with theories of organizational processes. Because conservative think tanks have become advocacy groups instead of research hubs, they operate more like a social movement than formal organizations. These think tanks, branded as research organizations with a firm rooting in our

cultural imagination as independent, have open access to the news media. Rather than advocacy groups who have a self-interest in the policy they promote, think tanks are seen as unbiased sources of knowledge (Rich, 2004). They have “experts” on hand for political commentary for the sole purpose of shaping the public view. Many of them have public relations teams and media specialists who promote their “reports” through different media networks. Because websites, logos, paper formats, and other demarcations of think tanks are readily available to anyone via the internet, it is easier to operate a think tank in the digital age. Think tank “experts” are rarely vetted in news media, and are taken seriously regardless of their history because of their appeal to “expert authority,” a form of cognitive legitimacy.

There are few studies on think tanks and their media presence. One study, performed by Fair and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR), analyzed the think tanks cited on NPR’s Morning Edition. Out of 144 think tanks quoted in six months of programming, there was a right-leaning bias. FAIR has also documented the 25 most frequently cited think tanks, and through 2009, the majority of these think tanks were conservative (McDonald, 2014). In her study of educational think tanks, McDonald (2014) found that the majority of think tanks are conservative, and that news mentions of think tanks leaned heavily towards conservatives. She found two ways these groups were discussed in the media: to report the findings of a recent publication, or to call in an “expert” to speak on a particular topic. She noted that these experts also author op-eds in legacy media. There are several aspects of legitimacy at work here. First, cognitive legitimization strategies allow advocacy think tanks to operate like research think tanks. Although advocacy think tanks rarely perform empirical studies, their “reports” are cited as if they do. The idea of the “expert” is a form of personal legitimacy. The think tank creates experts, and news mentions

promote them. Because these groups are overwhelmingly conservative, audiences are primed for specific ideologies. I argue that far-right organizations take advantage of this, specifically through digital mechanisms.

Digital technologies in right-wing racist discourse

White supremacists were early adopters of the internet, and their movement used digital tools throughout the late 1990s and early 2000s. While groups like the KKK have been described in neoliberal discourse as rednecks and hillbillies, a fringe group of ignorant, disaffected whites, the alt-right brought a new face to the movement. Today, these groups take advantage of the perception of white nationalists as uneducated and use formalized operations and aesthetics to cloak their ideologies. Daniels (2009) discusses these misconceptions, along with misconceptions about the internet as a place where there is no such thing as race and colorblind ideology prevails.

While many white supremacist organizations from the 1970s-1990s have not had a strong web presence, their individual leaders and their publications did make the transition from print to digital (Daniels, 2009). From sarcastic mocking to intellectual debate to violent vitriol, the alt-right employ a range of discursive tools depending on the medium and community they are speaking with (Lyons, 2017). Utilizing computer games, news sites, cloaked propaganda sites on historical events like the Holocaust and the Civil Rights Movement, and most recently, memes, alt-right leaders have thrived in the digital era among a number of demographics. The discursive properties of racialized memes, along with their ability to be shared virally, allows them to reify the structure of American white supremacy in a new way. Memes are unique in that their origin is often unknown. Unlike an article or report, they serve to advance specific stereotypes,

imaginings, and ideologies without any one individual or organization taking responsibility for them or their content. In this way, the alt-right is able to use explicitly racist language. It could be argued that this is their response to one of their main contentions with neoconservatives.

White supremacist racism among the alt-right is not only a backlash to a neoconservative movement, however. Their anti-black and anti-Jewish rhetoric is ubiquitous throughout each of the movement's historical iterations. The internet has been an integral part of that, and on purpose. David Duke explained the strategy in an essay on how the internet would be a tool to advance white supremacy entitled "The Coming White Revolution: Born on the Internet" (Daniels, 2009a, p. 96). Lyons (2017) detailed how the alt-right used social media hashtags to spread their message, and online harassment and abuse, typically called "trolling," to silence opponents on the left, as well as the right. The internet gives individuals the opportunity to create websites, comment on discussion forums, and communicate their opinions through text and visuals while remaining anonymous. Rather than a form of legitimacy that is more vertical in nature, with an authority mandating what is proper or accurate, the internet allows for a horizontal approach where these ideas are sitting in the abstract, simply existing, taken for granted. Digital media, regardless of a specific outlet's political leanings, creates discursive boundaries around groups, ideas, and organizations and shapes how we view a group as legitimate or illegitimate.

Internet spaces or sites used to advance the alt-right's message discursively can be sorted into three categories: cloaked propaganda sites, discussion forums or social media sites, and digital news sites. Daniels (2009b) detailed a number of cloaked sites, which she defines as, "those published by individuals or groups that conceal authorship or feign legitimacy in order to

deliberately disguise a hidden political agenda” (p. 661). In the same vein as colorblind rhetoric and discourse, these cloaked websites use language to obfuscate their true, racist intentions using cognitive legitimation strategies. These sites, utilized by a number of groups to promote varying political agendas, are especially nefarious when used for white supremacy. Daniels (2009b) describes sites that emerged after Hurricane Katrina that collected donations - a use of moral legitimacy - which were ultimately sent to a white supremacist in Missouri (p. 660) as well as a now-defunct site called the American Civil Rights Review. This site described slavery as a humane and idyllic life, and a social system where slaves were happy (p. 668). As Daniels notes, this rhetoric is not new, but when subsumed to language and aesthetics that mimic a legitimate organization, audiences have difficulty differentiating cloaked propaganda sites from legitimate sites with legitimate information. On some level, there is an understanding of cognitive legitimacy - that an audience will respond positively to shows of authority or empiricism. Perhaps the most important part of Daniels’ study is the focus on epistemology. She describes a “conservative knowledge-production network” (p. 675) that allows the right-wing to establish a reality uncoupled from facts. This hyperbolic discourse not grounded in evidence has created a base that cannot be reasoned with, and this base is further entrenched by their faith-based framework of political issues. This new epistemology forms the foundation for those who share their opinions on discussion sites.

4chan and Reddit, founded in 2003 and 2005, respectively, are different from other sites in that all of their content is user generated. This is similar to social media sites, although advertising on 4chan and Reddit is different than on Facebook and Twitter. 4chan and Reddit are largely discussion-based, and users do not have personal profiles or pictures like social media

sites. Images can be used in posts, but the threads are mostly text. Lyons (2017) described 4chan, 8chan and Reddit as the foundation of the alt-right starting in 2015. These discussion-based, unregulated sites allowed them to share taboo ideas anonymously and build their movement. 4chan.org/pol/, titled “Politically Incorrect,” is the main space internal discourse took shape among those who follow alt-right ideology. Terms like “red pill,” “cuck,” and “meninist” gained prominence in these discussions. This is another type of knowledge-production along the lines of what Daniels described. Memes created and shared on these sites became powerful discursive tools to explain the reasoning behind their ideology using many of the same controlling images Collins (2004) describes in her work. There are many race-based stereotypes of racialized others that get perpetuated through the stories we tell in media, art, and politics. An example is the concept of a “welfare queen.” This narrative of a black woman who has multiple children by different fathers in order to collect a check takes the focus off of a system that oppresses and instead blames the oppressed, portraying the individual as irresponsible and their marginalization as natural and just. Memes amplify these narratives and images because they are so easily and quickly transmitted. Social theorists have been particularly interested in describing the framework around these racialized images, refuting the idea that the internet is a race neutral space. Using websites as a level of analysis, McIlwain (2017) argued that space, used historically in the U.S. as a vehicle for racialization and White supremacy, is used online in nomenclature and interface despite arguments from researchers that describe the internet as race-neutral. 4chan and Reddit threads are specific, unique spaces for propagating explicitly racist ideology.

Perhaps the most expansive discursive tool among the alt-right is their news sites. Breitbart, American Renaissance, Richard Spencer’s Radix, and the Daily Stormer are the most

prominent among them. Breitbart has become a major player in American news, and is funded by major corporations like Amazon. Fox News, long considered a mainstream news station along the same lines as MSNBC and CNN, has been paired with Breitbart in media narratives (Rosenberg, 2017), giving both outlets an air of legitimacy based on their connection, regardless of the factual nature of their reporting. Millions of Americans get their news from these sites. In an era of “fake news,” just like with cloaked websites, it becomes difficult for a user to differentiate between fact and fiction. While Breitbart maintains the appearance of the prestige of a legacy news network, the Daily Stormer is not seen in the same light. Recently, a style guide was published by the Huffington Post (Feinberg, 2017) that shows how intentional and deliberate choices are made in the language and presentation of these articles for maximum effect. The most clarifying evidence comes in two references: first, a mention of how quoting mainstream media sources “allows us to co-opt the perceived authority of the mainstream media,” and second, a note about the tone of the site.

“[It] should be light. Most people are not comfortable with material that comes across as vitriolic, raging, non-ironic hatred. The unindoctrinated should not be able to tell if we are joking or not. [...] Generally, when using racial slurs, it should come across as half-joking - like a racist joke that everyone laughs at because they know it’s true. This follows the generally light tone of the site. It should not come across as genuine raging vitriol. That is a turnoff to the overwhelming majority of people.”

News services like the Daily Stormer serve as a middle ground between the empiricism based “research organizations” that disseminate knowledge from the top down and freely circulating memes which have no apparent authority. These news sites are able to use both the air of legitimacy that comes from being a publication and the rhetorical devices of humor to shroud their racism in truth. As evidenced by this style guide, alt-right organizations are aware of the

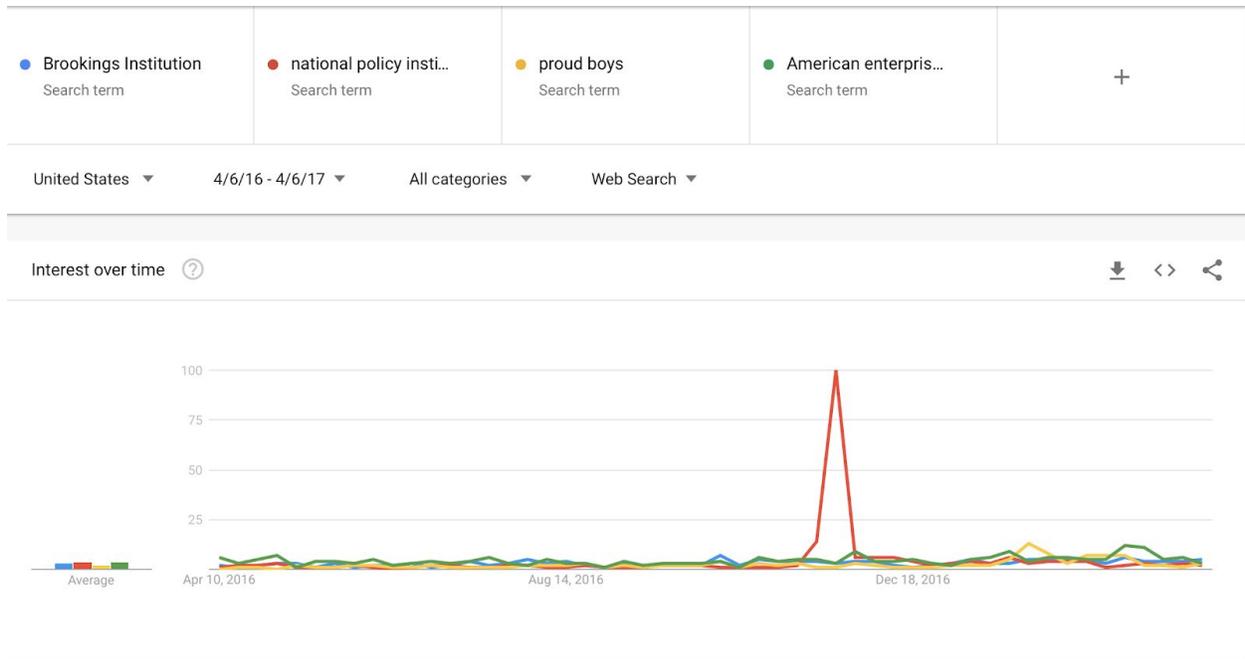
necessity of colorblind ideology in the U.S. racial discourse. These organizations seek to exploit colorblind rhetoric, toying with and teetering on the edge of racism so their ideas are not dismissed outright. These groups are aware that they cannot be explicitly racist if they want to appeal to a more mainstream audience, and they use humor to frame their ideology as rational and common sense. These are cogent examples of Bonilla-Silva's naturalization, abstract liberalism, and minimizing frames in action. By framing their racist ideologies as common sense, they effectively legitimize them. These groups appear to be cognizant, consciously or not, of moral and cognitive legitimation strategies and that being explicitly racist could damage their legitimacy. Daniels and Feagin (2011) discuss this idea of legitimacy, and how the internet changes how consumers view expertise. They assert that "the evaluation of expertise in this new online environment often has more to do with good graphic design than with the text-based content" (p. 8). We see evidence of this in the recent rise of advocacy think tanks, as well as groups like the Center for Immigration Studies who brand themselves as research groups but are really online propaganda outlets. Knowledge is both produced and consumed differently in a digital era, in a framework that treats the white experience as universal, and people can use it to their advantage to spread misinformation. While we know that there are several types of legitimation strategies employed by organizations, and that organizations work to maintain the resources allocated to whiteness in the racial order, there has been little research on the strategies of white identity groups and their legitimation processes in mainstream discourse. I propose that these groups, whose explicit racism is now considered immoral, utilize cognitive legitimacy to mask their ideology. Many of these groups operate under the radar, but one, the National Policy Institute, had an extreme spike in searches and news mentions from 2016-2018. I will use their

organization as a case study of how white supremacist ideology moves from the margins to the center.

Case Background: The National Policy Institute

The National Policy Institute is a group that defines itself as “an independent organization dedicated to the heritage, identity, and future of people of European descent in the United States and around the world.” They have been called a number of different words and phrases by journalists, researchers, and individuals on social media. They are classified as a 501(c)3 tax-exempt non profit organization. They briefly lost tax-exempt status in March 2017 after failing to submit tax returns for three consecutive years, but regained it in July 2018. While they claim to have been founded in 2005, there are tax records for the group beginning in 1982. Their founder is William Regnery II. Regnery is a multimillionaire from a lineage of multimillionaires. His family started Regnery Publishing, an organization that New York Times reporter Nicholas Confessore (2001) describes as a “a medium-sized, loosely linked network of conservative types, with few degrees of separation and similar political aims.” Regnery also founded the Charles Martel Society, another 501(c)3 organization, which publishes a pseudo-academic journal called *The Occidental Quarterly*, an online publication called *The Occidental Observer*, and a book publishing firm called *The Occidental Press*. I chose the National Policy Institute as a case study to examine how racist rhetoric is mainstreamed due to the extreme spike in their mention in the news media and Google searches as compared to similar white identity groups (proud boys) and legitimate think tanks (Brookings Institute, American Enterprise Institute). The nGram below shows this spike.

Figure 1. Google nGram, Search for Major Think Tanks, April 2016-April 2017



The leader of the NPI, Richard Spencer, is credited with coining the term “alternative right” and plays a central role in their knowledge production. The organization and Spencer were thrust into the forefront of political conversations during the lead up 2016 election and subsequent national gatherings of white identity groups. There are numerous news mentions of this group and reports from their website that can be downloaded and examined, making it a rich site for studying in-group and out-group communication, legitimization strategies, and how news media constructs discursive bounds.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Lecia Brooks of the Southern Poverty Law Center gave testimony to Congress in January 2020 on the danger of white identity groups and their role in domestic terrorism:

First, we are witnessing a surging white nationalist movement in the United States that is part of a larger, global movement linked by the idea that white people are being displaced, in part by migrants, in countries they believe should belong to them. This extremist movement represents a global terrorist threat and should be treated as such. Unfortunately, the words and actions of our president have energized and emboldened the white nationalist movement in the United States.

Second, this movement is rooted in a toxic, anti-democratic white supremacist ideology that is metastasizing on social media networks and other websites that traffic in hate. These networks are not only radicalizing people but are, in effect, incubating new terrorists – typically young white men who are motivated to act by what they call “white genocide.”

These groups present an existential threat to non-white individuals, and they utilize specific networks and methods to advance their message. As more white supremacist rhetoric and iconography comes to college campuses (Sisak, 2019) these groups are recruiting a new generation to their cause. This research explores the specific mechanisms of one case, the National Policy Institute. This organization was chosen as a case study due to its prevalence in mainstream news mentions, its unique position as a self-described “think tank” that professes white supremacist views, and the readily available data on their websites. Based on the literature, there are four ways I expect the NPI to legitimize their racist discourse. In accordance with the literature on the role of the news in organizational legitimacy (McDonald 2014), I expect news mentions to use sanitizing language regarding NPI. Based on the legitimacy literature, I hypothesize that the NPI will use cognitive legitimacy to obfuscate their racist rhetoric, since mainstream audiences consider claims of biological inferiority to be immoral. Finally, based on Bonilla-Silva’s four frames of colorblind race talk, I expect both the NPI to use implicitly racist language in their outward facing communications.

Research question: What strategies are used to legitimize the racist ideologies of the National Policy Institute?

Hypothesis 1: News media will use sanitizing language to describe the NPI in order to avoid the appearance of bias, which in turn constructs discursive boundaries around them.

Hypothesis 2: The NPI will primarily use cognitive legitimation strategies in their reports, using comprehensibility to frame themselves as the answer to social problems, and taken-for-grantedness to mimic the perceived authority of other think tanks.

Hypothesis 3: The NPI will use implicitly racist rhetoric in their reports, as their primary function is to recruit an audience.

Hypothesis 4: The Occidental Quarterly will use implicitly racist rhetoric in their articles, as their primary function is to permeate legitimate centers of knowledge production.

METHODS

This research uses Feagin, Orum & Sjoberg's (1991) broad definition of a case study: "an in-depth, multifaceted investigation, using qualitative research methods, of a single phenomenon" (p. 2). Considering Ray's (2019) theoretical framework, the National Policy Institute was chosen as an extreme example of a racialized organization. This organization has an explicitly racialized origin, and using it to examine covert and deliberate legitimation strategies can parse how an organization manages multiple audiences. Because legitimation strategies consist of an organization interacting with an audience, different types of in-group and out-group communication were analyzed. First, a search was performed for amicus briefs written by major right-wing institutions as outlined by McDonald (2014). Based on these searches, four major policy areas were chosen to continue searches for specific news mentions of the National Policy Institute: healthcare, immigration, education, and civil rights. I used WestLaw Legal and WestLaw News to search for these, as this database is my university's version of LexisNexis. WestLaw news results were documented of all National Policy Institute mentions from June 2009 - February 2019. Searches were then performed for National Policy Institute + each of the

four major policy areas and subcategories to determine the issues the group was mentioned in conjunction with. These searches were also performed with the journal published by the National Policy Institute, *The Occidental Quarterly*. Extensive memos were taken determining where the NPI and their reports were cited, when, and how often. All searches were conducted with a proxy in a private browser, to minimize algorithmic bias. While no individual searches with a neutral algorithm, this choice was made to find a baseline.

My goal with these news searches was to uncover how the news media was framing the NPI. I was also interested in how academia was framing the organization. In addition to WestLaw news searches, Google Scholar, PubMed, and Web of Science searches were performed for both the organization and its journal. From the results of these bibliography searches, the most cited reports were selected for content analysis. The three highest-downloaded reports were chosen from the National Policy Institute website for qualitative coding, as well as the three highest-cited articles from *The Occidental Quarterly*. The purpose of this content analysis was to compare the legitimation strategies among these articles and determine if there were differences and similarities based on the audience for each. A mix of deductive and inductive coding was used. Preliminary codes included the three types of legitimacy - cognitive, moral, and pragmatic - as well as implicit or explicit racism. Codes were added iteratively as themes emerged from the texts. In addition to coding the text of these reports, visual components of both the reports and the organization's websites were analyzed, with a brief content analysis of formatting, report and organization names, graphic design and citations.

Finally, in the discussion section, a simple network analysis was performed using Gephi to map how one TOQ article was cited. This analysis was performed to create a visual representation of the reach of this journal through Google Scholar.

RESULTS

WestLaw News Search

During the first phase of data collection, WestLaw News was searched for a variety of search terms. Of all terms and policy areas searched, the highest total search results were “*“National Policy Institute” & report*” (n=313), “*“National Policy Institute” & immigration*” (n=243), and “*“The Occidental Quarterly”*” (n =114). While the total results for these particular searches were high, the number of viable searches for “*“The Occidental Quarterly”*” were low, at only 18.42% . Viable results are any results that are specific to the organization this case study focuses on. The highest percentages of viability came from the terms “*(“national policy institute”) & report,*” “*(“national policy institute”) & immigration,*” and “*(“the occidental quarterly”) & immigration.*” In addition, of the four policy areas searched in conjunction with the NPI, the highest number of results were for immigration, followed distantly by healthcare. There were zero mentions of the NPI with any discursive markers of civil rights (LGBTQ+, gay, homosexual, lesbian, gender, transgender, affirmative action) or education (charter schools, vouchers, segregation, desegregation, integration, school system), despite reports on these topics being available on their website.

The NPI was described several ways in news mentions. The most often used phrase was *white nationalist think tank* followed closely by *think tank*. Table 1 shows the top ten of the 58 words or phrases used to describe the NPI among the news mentions.

Table 1: Frequency of Top Ten NPI News Description Phrases

	<i>N</i>	%
white nationalist think tank	36	22.09
think tank	35	21.47
white supremacist think tank	20	12.27
independent organization	20	12.27
white nationalist	14	8.59
white supremacist	13	7.98
white nationalist organization	9	5.52
white nationalist group	7	4.29
white supremacist group	5	3.07
“think tank”	4	2.45

There is a difference noted between “*think tank*” and *think tank* without quotation marks; the former implies that they are not really a think tank, while the latter legitimizes them as such. Similar distinctions were made with the phrases “*alt-right*,” “*research and education*” group, *white nationalist “think tank”* and *white supremacist “think tank.”* These results were noted as distinct from their non-quotation mark counterparts because they signal or imply something different discursively. The NPI was described as *racist* only twice (0.85%). Many articles used the definition of the NPI from their website:

The NPI describes itself as “an independent organization dedicated to the heritage, identity, and future of people of European descent in the United States, and around the world.”

The alt-right is often associated with white nationalism, but Bannon recently told the Hollywood Reporter: “I’m not a white nationalist, I’m a nationalist. I’m an economic nationalist.” Furthermore, Trump told the New York Times, “If I thought [Bannon] was a racist, or alt-right, or any of the things that we can, you know, the terms we can use, I wouldn’t even think about hiring him.”

Here, the President acknowledges that certain “terms” could dismiss a potential employee outright. Steve Bannon, one of President Trump’s aides during his campaign and at the beginning of his term, ran Breitbart news and claimed that the outlet was “the platform for the alt-right” (Posner, 2017). Because his publication received national, negative attention, he sought to soften the language around his views, describing himself as a nationalist but not a white nationalist. When the news allows this wordplay, and allows a racist organization to define itself, they are setting discursive boundaries around the organization and sanitizing their ideas.

College newspapers used more clear phrasing in their descriptions of NPI, but still framed them as a legitimate organization. For example, although this article called the group white nationalist and white supremacist, the body of the article still described the NPI as a think tank and ran an image of Spencer:



THE NATIONAL POLICY INSTITUTE
Richard Spencer, who coined the term “alt-right,” came under fire for hosting a conference in D.C. that centered around white nationalism and white supremacy.

The logo in the background, the normative white man smiling in a suit and tie, and his organizational affiliation underneath his picture in capital letters are all forms of cognitive

legitimacy. Images like this, where Spencer is credited with “coining” a term, force the reader to make comparisons between him and others who coin terms or invent things, like social theorists, policymakers or scientists. Each news mention of him, each image, each article that credits him as inventing this movement, furthers his personal legitimacy. This in turn legitimizes the organization he runs. In contrast, *The Occidental Quarterly* does not receive the same type of leniency from the news.

While *The Occidental Quarterly* (TOQ) was mentioned a number of times, it was generally in reference to a petroleum company. There were differences in the way each of these entities was discussed in the media. Out of hundreds of news mentions, while NPI was called *racist* twice, TOQ was called *racist* 23% of the time. There were much fewer news mentions of TOQ, and when it was mentioned, it was only done so in connection with NPI in 5 cases. In searching TOQ plus the policy area of healthcare, there were negligible results. Similarly, there were no mentions of TOQ in relation with any other common right-wing policy areas and their subcategories listed previously. In addition to examining popular mentions through news articles, I used academic databases to determine this group’s activity in more formal knowledge production.

Google Scholar search

To examine their academic reach, the organization and its journal were searched in multiple academic databases. “*National Policy Institute*” was searched, then “*The Occidental Quarterly*.” There were no results on Web of Science, PubMed, or the Virginia Commonwealth University library database that mentioned the NPI or TOQ uncritically. Here, I used “critical” to mean that they were only mentioned to study them as a racist organization. An “uncritical”

citation would be a mainstream publication or author citing a TOQ article as legitimate academic research. When searched on Google Scholar, “*The Occidental Quarterly*” returned 434 results. These results consisted of articles published in TOQ, mentions of TOQ in the body of a paper, and papers that cited a TOQ article as a reference. From those 434 results, I created a subsample of all the articles that had been cited at least once (n=80). Of this subsample, 62.5% of these articles were published in TOQ, and 37.5% published in journals other than TOQ (henceforth called “non-TOQ journals”). Each article was used as a reference in a number of articles, from a number of separate journals, creating a network that radiated out to more mainstream publications. The implications of these types of networks will be further discussed later in this paper.

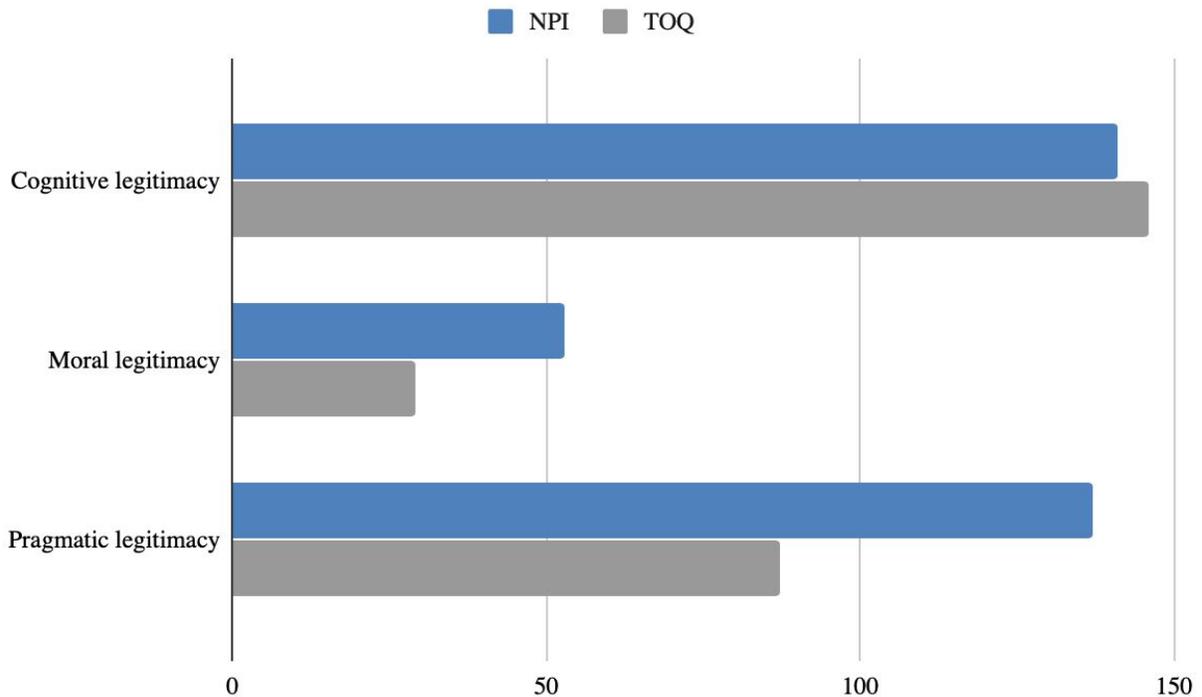
Of the articles published in non-TOQ journals, two categories emerged from my observation: critical mentions of TOQ in mainstream publications, and articles from TOQ that are cited uncritically in mainstream publications. Of the articles from non-TOQ publications, 45.2% cited them uncritically as evidence to bolster an argument they were making in their research. To compare the different types of legitimation strategies used in each of these methods of communication, three of the highest cited articles from TOQ were chosen for qualitative coding, as well as three NPI reports on similar topics with the highest views on Scribd.

Content Analysis

Both the NPI reports and TOQ articles were analyzed using the same initial coding scheme: Suchman’s (1995) and Williams’ (2018) typologies of legitimacy, and Bonilla-Silva’s (2006) implicit vs explicit racist discourse frames. NPI reports showed more pragmatic legitimacy and coded racism; TOQ articles showed more cognitive legitimacy and explicit

racism. Figure 2 displays the frequencies of each legitimation type found in each publication (NPI vs TOQ).

Figure 2: Frequencies of Legitimation Strategies



NPI exhibited higher levels of legitimation strategies in general. Both groups used cognitive legitimation strategies most often, followed by pragmatic and ending with moral. TOQ utilized cognitive legitimacy more often than NPI, but fewer instances were found of moral and pragmatic legitimacy. In the following sections, I summarize the themes found that support each of the legitimacy types.

Cognitive legitimacy. Both the NPI reports and the TOQ articles appealed to cognitive legitimacy more often than any other type. A major theme in this area was the idea that “PC culture,” is hindering the progress of “real” science, culture, progress and democracy.

Among elite opinion makers, however, the importance and predictive power of IQ is denied, as is the idea that it is genetically based. This denial is completely at variance with 100 years of research on IQ and the consensus opinion among research scientists.

Colorism NPI

In describing those in academia who disagree with their view that certain races are genetically inferior as “elite opinion makers,” they draw a boundary that includes the audience. This idea serves to frame the NPI as protecting intellectual purity, simply on the side of the facts. Theirs is the “common sense” view.

To this end, there were also significant levels of what I call “rationalizing language” throughout these reports. For example, in discussing a biological basis for differences between races and sexes, they describe research that matches their assertion as “well-established and well-known,” or “not particularly controversial.” Scholars who propagated these views were described as “illustrious” and “eminent,” listing their affiliations. This type of language allows the organization to frame its views as “matter of fact” and “taken-for-granted,” legitimizing their views as the norm.

In each report and article, authors laid a foundation, showing how mainstream, legitimate institutions used similar devices in order to legitimate their own. For example, to set up their argument for genetic differences in IQ, one report referenced other types of institutional examinations:

The practical value of IQ is indicated by the reliance in recruitment by two of the nation’s most important institutions upon measures that are, for all intents and purposes, IQ tests. Colleges make extensive use of SAT and ACT scores in the admission process. Both of these tests correlate very highly with IQ tests. Likewise, the United States armed forces use the AFQT (Armed Forces Qualifying Test) in selecting recruits. The test is based on performance on four subtests—Word Knowledge (WK), Paragraph Comprehension (PC), Arithmetic Reasoning (AR), and Mathematics Knowledge (MK). Given the similarity of the abilities measured by the AFQT and standard IQ tests, it is hardly surprising that the two are highly correlated. Both college admissions tests and the AFQT are regularly used by researchers as reliable proxies for IQ tests.

Education NPI

Repeating phrases like “the traditional wisdom” and defining the inferiority of black and hispanic people as “obvious and consequential” serves to normalize this language and these assertions. Mimicking the standards of academic institutions, utilizing the legitimacy of titles, and referencing empiricism further bolsters their claims, creating a distinctive credibility.

There were several instances of what I call “reframing” in the texts. This theme was most often on display in an article that discussed their term, “ethnopreference.” The text engages with the anthropological concept of “ethnocentrism,” describing it as “ethnopreference and a negative attitude towards other ethnicities or races.” In defining the term themselves, they tease out a positive and negative component:

Since World War II, the culture of European and European-American (Western) peoples has been loaded with media dramatizations associating their ethnocentrism with historical horrors and tragedy. The resulting repression of ethnocentrism and the psychological defense of “reaction formation” have produced distortions of behavior of some Western peoples, against the survival interest of the individual or group. The positive component of ethnocentrism, that we term “ethnopreference,” is neglected, unrecognized, or suppressed.

Ethnocentrism TOQ

Ethnocentrism as a sociological concept denotes a power relationship among actors. In a global economy and connected society, ethnocentrism of a periphery country is not equal to ethnocentrism of a core country. In ignoring that distinction, the authors reframe the concept as one that has been “repressed,” which would otherwise be impossible. Similarly, the authors redefine terms like “diversity,” “globalism,” and “nationalism.” In an article that detailed the history of segregation and integration, the author made an attempt to frame psychologist Kenneth Clark, an expert witness in *Brown vs Board of Education*, as the real racist:

Clark’s historic knowledge of, and support for, egregious remarks of Thurgood Marshall, the lead NAACP attorney, who was later elevated to the U.S. Supreme Court. In one such statement (well known to Clark in 1954), Marshall stated: “But know one thing Alfred [a white colleague of Marshall’s]—when we niggers take over the power, every time a white man takes a breath he’s gonna have to pay a fine.”

In addition to historical revisionism found in multiple articles, one article made overt attempts to use rhetoric to “flip the script” on traditionally held views, reframing history with what I call “sanitizing language.” They referred to the Nazi party as “German National Socialists,” and continuously put Holocaust in quotation marks. Similar to the boundary work done by the quotation marks around *think tank* in news mentions of NPI, TOQ uses these quotes to imply something isn’t real. Instead of describing it as genocide, they described the Holocaust thusly:

German National Socialism attempted to consolidate an ethnocentric foundation for a German nation-state that gloried fraternity rather than the Marxist doctrine of class struggle that was dividing the people of other European nation-states.

Ethnocentrism TOQ

They do eventually refer to an ethnic cleansing, but in reference to the seizures of land that happened in Europe after World War II:

“What ensued was the largest and most sweeping “ethnic cleansing” in history...About 2.1 million of these died from a combination of war, hunger, cold and disease.” (Bell-Fialkoff 1993). Following the reunification of West and “East,” at 137,826 square miles Germany’s territory is smaller than that of Montana.

Ethnocentrism TOQ

By reframing and sanitizing historic events, these authors utilize the cognitive legitimation strategy of comprehensibility, constructing themselves as savior in a world that is chaotic and hostile towards people who think like them. Sanitizing language was also used to diminish the idea of explicit racism. Slaves who were raped were referred to as “black mistresses;” “calling someone a nigger is not racism. It is rudeness.” By making these distinctions, these texts are negotiating identity between organization and individual, allowing them to frame themselves and their ideas as normal and in line with other mainstream institutions.

There were several attempts through these reports to draw boundaries from conservatives. Conservatives, used interchangeably with “the Right” and “Republicans,” were said to maintain the same loyalty to “the orthodoxy” as the Left. Painting themselves as the true right, they describe conservatives as members of the elite:

It is difficult not to conclude that those who carry the mantle of conservatism are, in fact, not conservative at all, but are closer to apolitical apparatchiks of what has become an oligarchic social order.

Colorism NPI

While they describe the left as inherently at odds with their ideology, they argue that Republicans could and should be on their side, staking out America as a land by and for whites, “rooted in European custom and ancestry”:

Why does the Republican Party refuse to take such a principled position? One obvious reason is that those who object to the leftward drift in American society are overwhelmingly White and of European descent. Most Whites have little to gain, and much to lose, by the continuation of current trends. Most non-Whites, on the other hand, have no difficulty with leftist policies, since a considerable proportion benefit from them. There is no doubt that, should the Republican Party champion the interests of the majority White Americans, the dominant media would demonize the Republican Party and paint them as endorsing a divisive and ugly racist strategy. But it is foolish to worry over this since the Republican Party is already so characterized in the media. Indeed, the Democratic Party claims to represent the interests of all minorities and the other casualties of oppressive “White privilege” and have clearly defined themselves a vehicle for the aggrieved, whatever their class, race, or sex. How would it do Republicans any harm to accept the left’s characterization as the defenders of the historic (European) nation?

Colorism NPI

Although they acknowledge they are closer to the right ideologically, in one report, they highlight the differences between specific conservative celebrities’ “egalitarian” ideology and the ideology of the founding fathers they claim to agree with:

Many Americans cite the “all men are created equal” phrase from the Declaration of Independence to support the claim that this view of race was not only inevitable but was anticipated by the Founders. Interestingly, prominent conservatives and Tea Party favorites like Michele Bachman and Glenn Beck have taken this notion a step further and asserted that today’s racial egalitarianism was the nation’s goal from its very first days.

They are badly mistaken.

Ethnocentrism NPI

In an attempt to “lift the veil” on the colorblind rhetoric of both parties and conservatives in particular, the article continues on to detail the founders’ true feelings about slavery, abolition, and equality:

It was true that many of the Founders considered slavery a terrible injustice and hoped to abolish it, but they meant to expel the freed slaves from the United States, not to live with them in equality. [...] Most abolitionist activism therefore reflected a deep conviction that slavery was wrong, but not a desire to establish Blacks as social and political equals.

Ethnocentrism NPI

Through these declarations, the NPI was modeling Williams’ “coherence in identity,” negotiating who they are and who their audience is by drawing parallels and differences between themselves and similar groups.

The aesthetics of both the NPI reports and the TOQ articles kept with the aesthetics of similar organizations, using cognitive legitimation strategies. The format of the reports, with cover art, the NPI logo, and the author’s name, title, and affiliation mimicked white papers from major policy think tanks. The author biography at the end of each report detailed their credentials, implying expertise. The citation practices of footnotes also matched think tank white papers. The TOQ articles were formatted to mimic mainstream academic journals, using similar headers, footers, and citation practices (i.e. volume and number of the edition the article could be found in, author’s last name and page numbers at the top). Interestingly, one TOQ article used both endnotes and footnotes, placing the footnotes at the end of the paper after the endnotes. In addition to clear attempts at aesthetic similarities with mainstream institutions, both the NPI reports and TOQ articles were riddled with typos. From leaving out punctuation at the ends of sentences to misspelled words, there were unusually high levels of errors. These errors suggest

that there is no peer-review of these articles, or editors for the journal. Despite using all the aesthetic stylings of legitimacy, TOQ does not follow the rules of traditional publication. They don't need to *be* legitimate, they only need to *appear* legitimate. Another way they do this is by communicating shared values and benefits with their target audience members, using pragmatic legitimacy.

Pragmatic legitimacy. The NPI reports in particular used extensive in-group communication. Like most groups, the alt-right shares a common language, with certain words and phrases serving as dog whistles, or coded language that means one thing to the public and another to members of the group. Several phrases were used repeatedly to describe outsiders in positions of power, such as “postmodern elites,” “self-conscious egalitarians,” “globalists,” and “internationalists.” The boundaries constructed between outsiders and group members were often antagonistic, with members frame as under constant assault:

Getting on today in the elite circles of academia, the media, politics, and corporate America requires allegiance to this *deracinated vision* and a disdain for the concerns of the benighted and recalcitrant Americans, who cleave to their bibles and their nation and their other assorted superstitions. This explains the vicious attacks on those who believe *human differences are real* and express reservations about the benefits of *multiculturalism*, *unfettered immigration*, and the *internationalist* agenda. Those that do so challenge the essential underpinnings or the privileges, both honorary and pecuniary, of *statist bureaucrats* and *managerial elites* and their *enablers* in academia and the media.

Colorism NPI, italics added for emphasis on coded words and phrases

These words and phrases have a specific meaning between the organization and their audience, drawing discursive boundaries between the group and outsiders, sanctioning professionals and other academics who disagree with their views as “elitist.” In doing so, they utilize Suchman's subtype of influence legitimacy. Similar examples were also found in the TOQ articles, but to a lesser extent.

There was a high occurrence of victimization in both the NPI reports and the TOQ articles. Both detailed what happens when professors and scientists spoke out against what they label “the orthodoxy” and in favor of policies and research based on the genetic inferiority of black and brown people. For example, a TOQ article discussed backlash to a paper published in the *Harvard Educational Review* that argued black students’ social and emotional issues impeded their learning and could not be solved by school reform. They implied that this backlash ruined the author’s life, comparing his collegiate office to a prison cell:

It is beyond the scope of this paper to document more than a few of Jensen’s experiences. Following publication of his paper, police had to protect Jensen when he lectured, Jensen and his family were threatened, and Jensen’s office was more like a San Quentin cell than a faculty workplace.

Education TOQ

Similarly, NPI articles generalize this idea to professors everywhere, framing new professors as particularly vulnerable:

For those academics without tenure, the penalty for dissenting views or research that reveals uncomfortable findings will result in the denial of tenure and very likely in the denial of positions elsewhere. They are, in fact, driven from positions they have devoted years to obtain and deprived of their very livelihood. For young instructors supporting or helping to support families such risks are unacceptably high.

Education NPI

There were several anecdotes of individuals, all of whom were white professional men, experiencing punishment for their racist views throughout each of the texts included in my sample.

Additionally, there were several mentions of victimization through the imposition of collective guilt throughout the texts. Guilt was described as a feeling imposed by “elites” onto white individuals for historical tragedies they had no part in perpetrating. NPI explained this as

“the hateful idea of group guilt,” while TOQ articles describe these feelings as a syndrome that induces depression:

Coupled with the spread of the popular *guilt syndrome*, induced guilt for an alleged American failure to rescue Jews over sixty years ago is a likely factor in promoting reluctance to secure America against uninvited immigrants from the Third World. [...] Guilt is—in a sense—a self-administered punishment. False guilt is unlimited self-punishment. With false guilt—the current Western sickness—comes depression. Attempts at expiation of false guilt do not lift the depression. They become a self-destructive psychopathology.

Ethnocentrism TOQ

Telling a story of how actor and author Garrison Keillor received less applause than James Earl Jones at an event, TOQ questioned if instances like this could be the reason for mental illness and high rates of suicide among white men:

Can the social psychopathology of defenses with internalized conflict, guilt, or poor self-image that the behaviors Keillor’s or the Portland State audiences displayed be a major factor in white suicide? “Increasing social anomie” and loss of attachments were considered possible risk factors in 1989. At the end of the twentieth century, white males accounted for 72 percent of all suicides in the United States.

Ethnocentrism TOQ

These instances of victimization were classified as pragmatic legitimation and in particular, dispositional legitimation, because of the communication of shared values and linked fates with an audience. This finding is consistent with both the psychological and sociological literature on members of alt-right and white supremacist groups (Berbrier, 2000; Gomes, 2019; Gallaher, 2019; Bloch, Taylor & Martinez 2020). While individuals that belong to white supremacist groups feel they are victims, the act of framing whites, particularly white men, as victims is a strategy used by these organizations to discursively bind individual wants to the organization’s mission.

Moral legitimacy. Reports and articles showed instances of framing and reframing black behavior as problematic, while noting that this behavior is exacerbated by specific policies and phenomena. For example, in discussing differences between black and white students, one author noted the poor behavior of black students but blamed racial oppression:

Antisocial behavior by African-American youths may, at least partly, be a result of negative input—repeated dramatizations of racial injustices, for example.

Ethnocentrism TOQ

The articles and reports described their organizations' views on race-based policies as benevolent, arguing that acknowledging IQ deficiencies in black and hispanic populations would help those "less lucky in life's genetic lottery." Using coded language, they framed racial minorities as particularly defenseless against capitalist exploitation, although they often attributed this to the "egalitarian orthodoxy":

...policies tend to obscure the far more serious problem of how to deal with the problems technological progress present for *people with limited intellectual resources*. In the past, such people could support themselves with menial jobs on farms and in factories, and in a host of semi-skilled trades. But these sorts of jobs are becoming increasingly rare. Lower and middle-class Americans with *IQs below the White average* are caught in the pincers of labor-saving technologies, offshoring, outsourcing and the massive importation of labor.

Colorism NPI, italics added for coded racism

There were multiple references to our "moral imperative to provide opportunities to less talented individuals," implying that although the authors believed black and hispanic people are genetically inferior, they should still lead fulfilling lives. They repeatedly argued that acknowledging the biological inferiority of non-white people would allow their "greater need" to be taken more seriously by policymakers, and that the separation of races would benefit non-whites the most.

There was also a concern for the well-being of society at large. Reports argued that we “undermine public safety” and “hinder effective measures of crime control” when we “fail to acknowledge racial and sexual differences.” Several references were made to separating races as a social good, not only for racial minorities but for society as a whole:

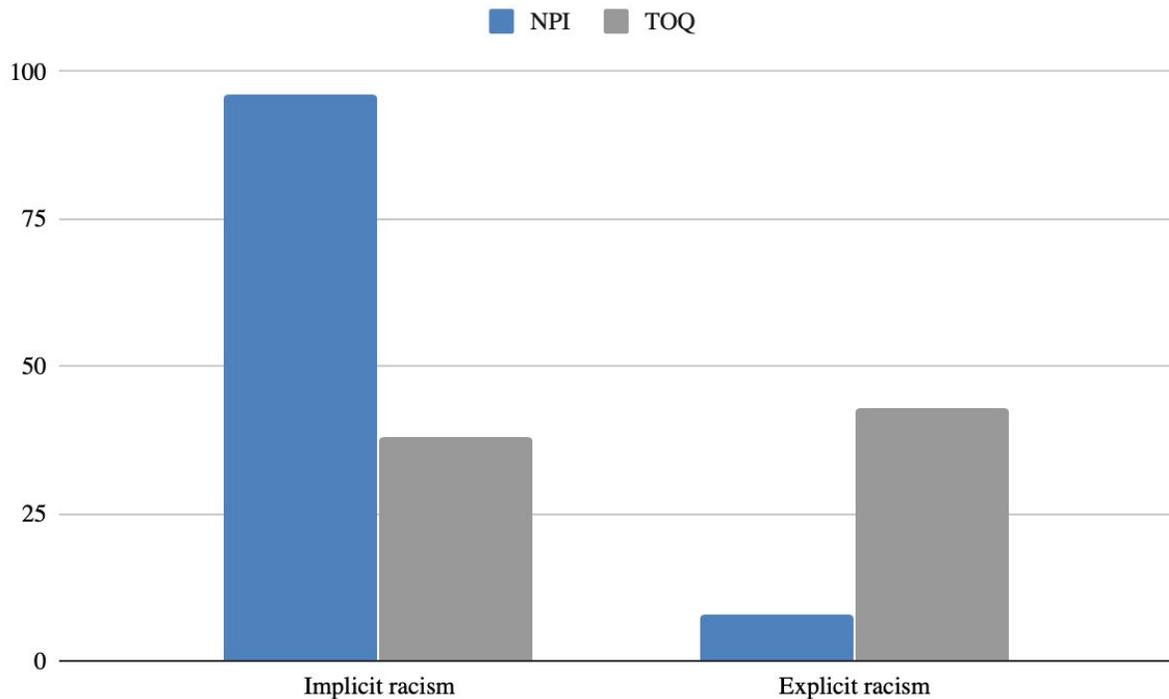
By utilizing the progressive insights of these evolutionary analyses and clarifying definitions accordingly, it will be possible to reduce confusion on issues of race, ethnicity, and diversity. Understanding of these bases of human behavior can inform the arts, education, politics, and immigration legislation toward policies for optimum quality of life.

Ethnocentrism TOQ

By feigning a commitment towards integrity and social progress in achieving their goal of white separatism, the organizations make an appeal to procedural legitimacy.

Explicit vs implicit racism. There were significant, unexpected differences between the NPI reports and the TOQ articles in their racialized discourse. There were numerous instances of coded racism in the NPI reports. The TOQ articles were overtly, explicitly racist, repeatedly using racial slurs. Figure 3 shows the frequencies of explicit vs implicit racism among both publication types.

Figure 3: Frequencies of Explicit vs Implicit Racism



There were more codes in general for implicit racism. All four of Bonilla-Silva’s colorblind racist frames were present. Naturalization in particular was present in instances of coded racism among TOQ articles:

Human groups that lose their internal sense of identity and cohesion in respect of other groups eventually cease to exist as discrete realities. Such groups may become absorbed in neighboring populations.

On the other hand, when a distinctive population or gene pool retains its identity and persists in generally practicing endogamous marriage, showing a sense of “brotherhood,” the probability of survival as an identifiable biological group is enhanced.

Ethnocentrism TOQ

NPI also frequently used naturalization framing. In fact, NPI used the word “natural” several times, arguing that “partiality is natural to mankind,” and that acknowledging the “natural diversity of abilities and temperaments” among humans would be beneficial to society writ large in the form of changes to policies implemented to end racist disparities:

A recognition of natural group differences would allow for a serious challenge to programs of racial preferences in the form of Affirmative Action, minority set-asides, and disparate impact rulings, all of which are premised on the assumption that racial differences in ability and temperament do not exist.

Colorism NPI

The NPI reports rarely mentioned which groups they are referring to when they described “children with low IQs” or “racial and sexual disparities in criminal conduct.” It was always implied. The implication creates space for plausible deniability.

Abstract liberalism was used throughout the NPI reports. Interestingly, although NPI drew distinct boundaries between what they labeled right- versus left-wing views, they used the language of liberalism to code their racism. In a report on the racial education gap, one author describes the views of his father and grandfather:

They disapproved of bigots and told me to treat everyone respectfully. But they also knew there was a difference between equality of opportunity for individuals and equality of results for groups.

Education NPI

This idea that one could acknowledge the inferiority of black people and still respect their right to exist and lead “gratifying lives” was a common theme throughout the NPI reports. TOQ also used this language on occasion, citing respect for one’s own culture and other cultures as “the societal therapy for our time”:

Practicing ethnopreference, we can respect our own ethnicity, and enjoy the spectacle of other ethnicities and their cultural expressions. [...] Understanding ethnopreference resolves ambivalence and uncertainty about the utility of self-worth and identity. With this clarity we respect ourselves, and respect and enjoy the wonderful diversity of other peoples and their cultures. [...] With new a understanding of the positives in ethnicity; with consciousness, wonder, and respect for human racial or ethnic differences—just as value and seek to conserve plant and animal species—we can reduce social tensions and conflict.

Ethnocentrism TOQ

This is still a racist ideology, but using this frame codes the language as more socially acceptable. There were many appeals to personal freedoms and liberties, particularly on the topic of segregation. *Brown v Board* was the ultimate form of governmental control, forcing your child to suffer or fail based on those in class with them:

many parents regarded busing or racial balance as an interference with “the concept of community” and with the “liberty to direct the upbringing and education of children under their control.”

Education NPI

There were also several mentions in the texts about the cultural inferiority of black and latinx students.

Cultural racism was frequently used in NPI and TOQ reports, particularly on the topic of education. Several references were made to the inherent criminality of black children, and their poor behavior in the classroom was cited as the “true” reason the racial gap existed. Culture was referenced specifically, arguing that black students are better off in black schools with black teachers:

There is more comfort for children and more stability for a society where there is a commonality of ethnicity, culture, and interest.

Ethnocentrism TOQ

In discussing the history of integration, one author fully describes Bourdeiu’s theory of cultural capital and the power structures that function in America without ever noting it as a sociological concept, instead implying that white culture is simply better and therefore minority students succeed when they are taught it:

Hirsch emphasized the importance of what he called “core knowledge.” He noted that most cultures focused on basic acculturation until youths reached an age of about thirteen. At that age Catholics were confirmed, Jews bar or bat mitzvahed, and tribal boys and girls underwent the rites of passage into the tribe.

Similarly, according to Hirsch, familiarity with certain information was also taken for granted in America’s upper spheres, where those who lacked core knowledge did not seem to belong. That

was the way things were, and Hirsch wanted to make sure that students from disadvantaged backgrounds had the opportunity to learn what was expected and needed to get ahead. Thus, as Hirsch saw it, the job of elementary and junior high schools was to transmit the basic information needed to thrive in a society, which in practice meant “the transmission to children of the specific information shared by the adults.” Upper-class White youths often picked up the requisite information automatically, because they lived in families that were disproportionately well-to-do and intact. But Black and Latino youths, and many working- and middle-class Whites as well, were less likely to acquire the core knowledge because their family lives were disproportionately disadvantaged, disorganized, or parochial. To address this situation, Hirsch established a Core Knowledge Foundation that produced a packaged plan that specified how teachers and students should spend about 50 percent of their time. By 2010 some 1,184 schools used all or part of what was called the Core Knowledge Curriculum. The curriculum focused on the elementary grades and emphasized the importance of giving students the basic knowledge that was needed as a foundation for more advanced learning.

Education NPI

There is coded racism in the idea that white, upper class families are “intact” and black and latinx families are “disorganized and parochial.” This article heralds Hirsch as a hero in education who went on to face discrimination because of his views, whereas Hirsch simply built education policy around one of the most well-known concepts in sociological theory.

Describing students who succeeded as “disproportionately the children of parents who cared about education,” these reports repeatedly implied that the culture of minorities, along with their genetic inferiority in intelligence, were the real reason for the persistence of racial gaps in education. One author repeatedly referred to the No Child Left Behind act as an “educational Katrina,” in that the government could have solved the problem by recognizing racial differences and instead exacerbated it. One report argued that the “characteristics of the lower-class black classroom” subsumed integrated classrooms, bringing down the academic performance of all students. The report went on to detail white flight after integration and bussing:

Middle-class parents then transferred their children to private schools or moved to predominantly White suburbs. The problem, Coleman said, was “the degree of disorder and the degree to which schools . . . have failed to control lower-class black children.” It was “quite understandable,” Coleman said, for middle-class families “not to want to send their children to schools where 90 percent of the time is spent not on instruction but on discipline.”

Here again, the desire for racial separation is framed as “reasonable” in light of the cultural inferiority of black students.

The culture of black and latinx students and families were discussed in other NPI reports as well. They were described as “dysfunctional people” who were “simply incapable of creating healthy communities.” One author stated that evidence for a biological basis of racial IQ differences is suppressed, sarcastically using the white-black education gap as an example:

[...] one must claim to believe that such differences are always attributable to social causes and never to any inherent characteristics of individuals. For instance, if Black children are disciplined more frequently in school, it can only be attributed to teachers’ biases. It can never be due to the fact that Black children are many times more likely to engage in criminal acts on the streets when not in school, and do not drop their propensities simply by walking through the schoolhouse door.

Colorism NPI

While minimization of racism was used a few times in the articles, it was not a frequent framing. Only one excerpt is of note, the opening lines of an NPI article:

Today, the United States officially takes the position that all races are equal. Our country is also committed — legally and morally — to the view that race is not a fit criterion for decision-making of any kind [...]

Ethnocentrism NPI

All of Bonilla-Silva’s framings were at play in each of these texts, but much more often in the NPI reports. It was expected that the NPI would use implicit racism to recruit more people into their audiences. More common in TOQ articles, however, were instances of explicit racism.

Each of the TOQ articles were historical accounts of different topics. The article on colorism was particularly egregious in its use of explicit racism. Indian people were referred to as “coolies” several times, and several references were made to “half-breed mulattos.” When discussing the aftermath of the abolition of slavery, the author mentioned that flogging workers

had also been outlawed, creating a problem among plantation owners who needed obedient workers:

To solve the problem of securing a reliable supply of labor, the plantation owners brought in a number of Indians from the Indian subcontinent and also some Portuguese and Chinese, who were found to be more reliable laborers than the blacks[.]

Colorism TOQ

Rather than concealing their racism by not mentioning specific groups and generalizing their language, TOQ articles simply stated their view:

Europeans preferred mixed-race mulattos and possibly because they were generally found to be more intelligent than the blacks and more competent in skilled artisan work. [...] at the end of the twentieth century Haiti was the poorest country in the Caribbean with an annual per capita income of \$1,383. Remarkably, its neighbor the Dominican Republic, whose population is 16 percent white, 73 percent mulatto, and 11 percent black, has a per capita income more than three times greater at \$4,598 (real GDP at PPP, 1998). Haiti also has much higher fertility than the Dominican Republic at 6.4 TFR as compared with 3.3, and much higher infant mortality at 105 per 1,000 births as compared with 1998 figures. Both of these are indicative of a low IQ population. [...] Whites remain “prejudiced” against blacks or, alternatively, realistic in their perception of blacks.

Colorism TOQ

Much of the coded racism referred to black people specifically, with a few mentions about latinx people. The explicit racism was applied to multiple races and ethnicities, including Indian, Native American, and Jewish people. In an article that consistently referred to the Holocaust in quotation marks, implying that it isn't real, one TOQ author described the infiltration of progressive circles with “radical jews” bent on destroying western society:

The Jewish radicals, who provided an initial “critical mass” for the New Left, sought radical political action because the dominant culture seemed so strong. Given the social marginality Jews still felt in predominantly Christian Western societies, radical Jews (including notably Cohn-Bendit in France) sought to weaken the culture that rendered them marginal.

Ethnocentrism TOQ

Despite multiple instances of explicit racism, TOQ articles were still cited in peer-reviewed journal articles. In fact, the article with the highest occurrence of explicit racism was the most cited on Google Scholar.

Several articles that cited the chosen TOQ articles were examined for context. While the mainstream articles that were assessed were all anti-racist in nature, advocating for better support for black students, more study of identity construction and the harm of “pigmentocracies,” etc., they all cited TOQ uncritically. From brief mentions of the concepts to full paragraphs on their studies, all 39 articles that cited the three TOQ articles I examined made no mention of the explicit racism found within them, nor of the white supremacist nature of the journal. The study also found, however, that the NPI as an organization does not use explicitly racist language, that they instead use in-group communication strategies and coded racism, and that their journal, *The Occidental Quarterly*, is explicitly racist in their discourse. In the discussion section, I will attempt to unpack the role of the media in legitimization, the role of digital databases in the dissemination of these ideas, and how appeals to different types of legitimacy can use both implicit and explicit racist discourse.

DISCUSSION

The role of news media in shaping discursive boundaries

The news media plays a specific role in the legitimization of the NPI and the proliferation of its ideas. Hypothesis 1 was confirmed: news media used sanitizing and minimizing language in their descriptions of the NPI. Different outlets seemed to be conscious of the organization’s play on cognitive legitimacy. Journalists from major news outlets like the Washington Post to smaller outlets like the San Antonio Current remarked on how pedestrian “The National Policy

Institute” sounds. One called it “demure,” another called it “boring sounding,” yet another described it as “benevolent-sounding.” They described the language used by the NPI as “post-modern intellectual prose,” “racially conscious,” and noted the degrees of its leader Richard Spencer. While this research did not delve into online forums or infiltrate private meetings or communications, future research could do so, perhaps looking at forums at the same dates of these news articles to learn how members of the group responded to these news mentions. News outlets called Spencer by his formal title: “National Policy Institute President and Director.” When video of him was played on any major television news outlet, particularly from 2016-2018, the chyron on the screen read “Richard Spencer” in bold and “Director, National Policy Institute” each time. In doing so, inadvertently or not, these news outlets boosted both the personal legitimacy of Spencer and the cognitive legitimacy of the NPI, as they were able to mimic other organizations in the field. These frequent news mentions, sometimes played multiple times over a 24 hour news cycle, gave Spencer and his organization exposure on a national level. Painting Spencer as an academic, a President, and a director of a nonprofit think tank, these outlets boosted this individual as a trustworthy and legitimate persona in the same way that McDonald (2014) found in her study of conservative think tanks. The attention garnered by this organization and its leader served to mainstream their ideas as research based. One outlet described Spencer’s belief that black and hispanic people have lower IQs and are therefore genetically predisposed to crime as “ideas that are scientifically controversial to say the least.” When news media does not identify these views as racist, they become more acceptable, allowing the organization a larger platform for recruitment. In contrast, TOQ received virtually no mainstream media coverage.

While there were hundreds of news mentions of the NPI, from editorials to think pieces to interviews with leaders themselves, TOQ received little to no attention, even in longform pieces exploring the “alt-right ecosystem.” NPI and TOQ were rarely mentioned in connection with one another. This gives a kind of cover for the journal; if the journal was mentioned as a subsidiary of the NPI, the existence of the “think tank” in mainstream discourse could automatically delegitimize it. It appears that in news mentions, the appeal to empiricism, both Spencer as an academic and professional and the NPI as a research organization, allowed them to bypass the criticism received by TOQ. Furthermore, the sensationalist nature of Spencer and the spectacle of his organization shielded TOQ from the same coverage that NPI received. This was not the case, however, in academic databases.

Google Scholar, citation practices, and human curation in digital tools

While the NPI reports were clearly geared toward audiences for the purpose of persuasion and recruiting, as evidenced through the rationalizing language, carefully coded racism, and in-group communication, the TOQ articles were written as accounts of history. There was little nuance or argument, if any, throughout the articles. While each explained historical perspectives on topics, there were fewer legitimation strategies employed. There was use of sanitizing language, for example, a reference to slavery as, “mass immigration of darker-skinned peoples,” as well as dehumanization, which are both examples of Bonilla-Silva’s minimizing and naturalizing frames. In reading the papers from several authors who cited TOQ articles, there is no indication whatsoever that they subscribe to a white supremacist ideology. In fact, many of those authors positioned their research as a solution to racial inequalities, in education, disability studies, psychology and even the sociology of race and ethnicity. Yet, they used articles with

explicitly racist language to bolster their claims. There is a question, of course, of whether or not authors read full papers they cite. Because academics are pushed by the adage of “publish or perish,” there is pressure to get research out quickly. Many recent studies show that researchers use abstracts in lieu of reading full papers, often relying on the statistics cited in the abstract, which can be inflated or misrepresentative (Assem et. al, 2019; Jiancheng et. al, 2019). Students are often told it is impossible to read every word of every article assigned, and that part of graduate school training is learning to skim. In addition, women faculty and faculty of color bear the burden of “invisible labor” in academia, being assigned tasks that their white, male counterparts are not, and providing mentorship for students of color (SSFNRIG, 2017). Poor students of color face similar time obstacles, in that the “student” role is often not their primary role (Sallee, 2016). These constraints on their time, along with the aforementioned availability and ease of use of Google Scholar, could make certain groups in academia more susceptible to using convenience citations. While it can be argued that individuals should be reading full articles before citing papers, there is a deliberate mystique around journal criteria in general and digital databases in particular.

TOQ was named “racist” in the news media much more often than was the NPI, but there were no mentions in academic literature of the NPI that viewed them as legitimate. There were also no mentions of TOQ in any other academic database aside from Google Scholar. Google Scholar is largely a black box; there is very little research on how their rankings are determined and how articles become listed as credible scholarly work. As opposed to every other academic database, there is no human involvement with the rankings or search results for Google Scholar. This may be a reason why TOQ is listed in citations. Google Scholar is one of the only academic

research databases for those without access to university libraries, and is one of the most widely used even among academics. Community colleges in particular teach students how to use Google Scholar, as it is a large, user friendly, free database. As of 2020, high school students are also being taught to use Google Scholar for research. This is a similar problem to Daniels' finding of cloaked propaganda sites, shrouded in the cognitive legitimacy of empiricism.

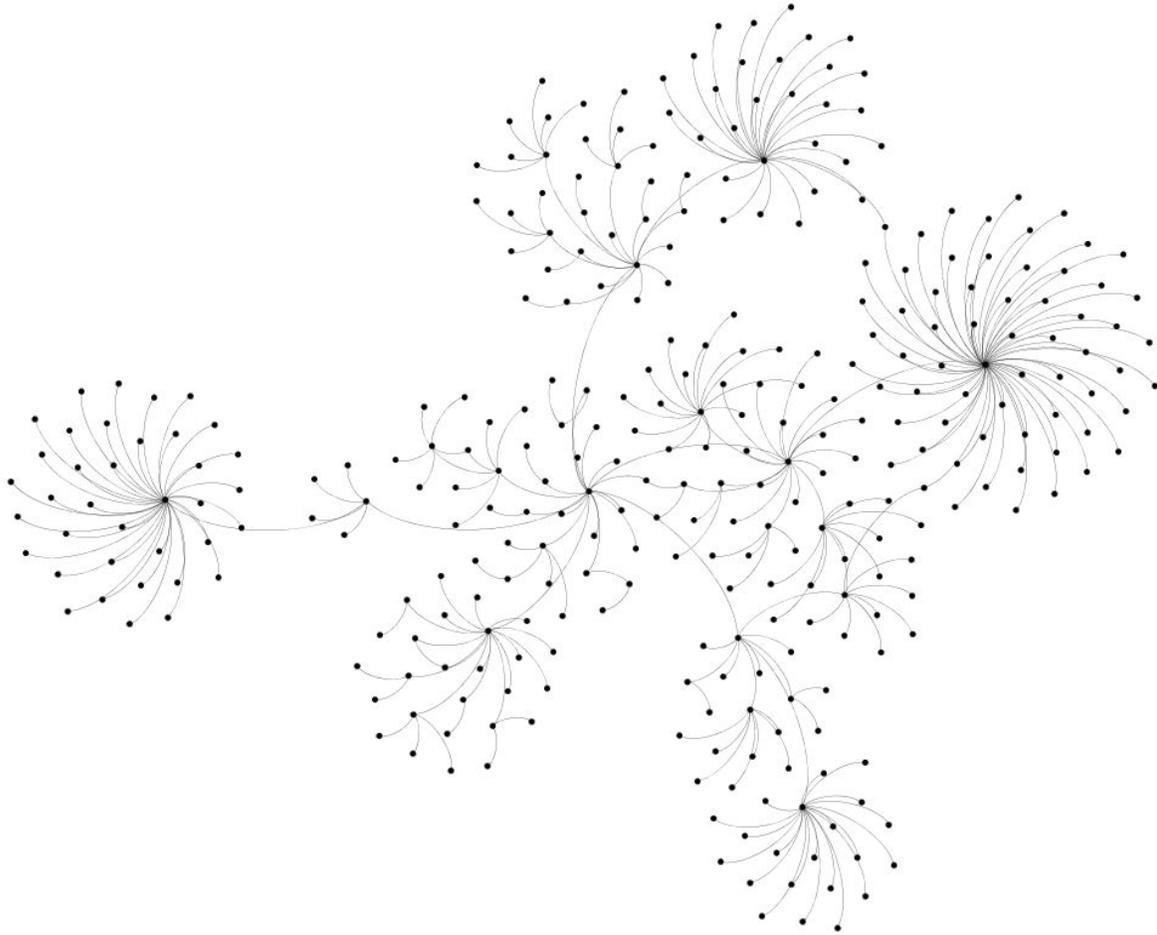
We know that the internet is racist, because all the structures of the offline world are reproduced and reified through sites, tracking, and search algorithms (McIlwain, 2017). Digital space, just like (IRL), operates from a white racial frame, leaving space for specific ideology that matches that frame to seep in. Researchers in infometrics have performed studies on Google Scholar testing its comparability to other digital databases like Scopus or Web of Science. These studies mainly focus on the size of these databases (Gusenbauer, 2019), as well as their scientific impact (Martin-Martin et. al, 2019). Researchers interpret the existence of more highly cited articles in Google Scholar as evidence that Google Scholar is more comprehensive, and that the smaller size of comparable databases denotes coverage deficiencies among them (Martin-Martin et. al, 2018). Although much attention has been paid to the coverage of these databases, researchers agree that “the quality of resources indexed and overall policy still remains known” (Halevi, 2017; Herther, 2017). There is little research on how the Google Scholar ranking algorithm functions, on how the system is programmed to add citations, or on the criteria used to add journals or authors. There is one webpage from Google Scholar Help titled “Inclusion Guidelines for Webmasters” that discusses how an author can upload their articles to their websites for inclusion, and how journals must use specific journal hosting services¹. Most of the

¹ <https://scholar.google.com/intl/en/scholar/inclusion.html>

information Google gives explains how to format your website and files so that their automated Web crawlers will pick it up.

These uncritical citations that view TOQ as legitimate create networks of citations. I also observed that TOQ authors who are professors cite each others' respective TOQ published articles in mainstream peer-reviewed journals. Only Google Scholar allows this type of citation gaming, which allows articles that cite articles that cite TOQ to end up in university databases even though TOQ is not recognized as a legitimate journal. We know that the traditional journal system is gameable. The Sokal Hoax, where an academic wrote a "ridiculous" paper full of nonsense jargon that got accepted into a peer-reviewed journal, was recently tried again in 2018, calling into question the validity of the current system (Mounk, 2018). There are also recent studies that identify the existence of "predatory journals," specifically in medical science (Ross-White et. al, 2019). More research is being performed that highlights the ways in which the peer-review process is flawed, especially in light of capitalistic pursuits like pharmaceutical companies publishing fake studies to sell their newest products. The internet, however, and Google Scholar's black box in particular, has exacerbated these issues. The harm in allowing explicitly racist rhetoric to permeate these networks cannot be overstated. As an example, a simple social network analysis was performed on one of the higher cited articles from TOQ (Figure 4). Stepwise motions from the article were taken out, analyzing those who cited it, then who cited those articles, then who cited those. While this could be taken much further, only three steps provided hundreds of citations and a large network, all of which have been touched by explicitly racist language that informs implicitly racist ideology.

Figure 4: Social Network Analysis, Pigmentocracy and three citation levels



The use of implicit and explicit racism as legitimation tools

The most unexpected finding of this research was the different ways NPI and TOQ used explicit and implicit racist discourse despite the similarities in their use of legitimation strategies. Hypothesis 2 and 3 were confirmed, although there were more appeals to the other forms of legitimacy than expected. There were interesting differences between the discursive practices of NPI and TOQ.

The NPI reports selected for this study had high levels of persuasive language, and were clearly speaking to a specific audience. In accordance with these findings, I argue that the NPI does not need to be taken seriously in the same way as Brookings, the American Enterprise Institute, or other think tanks, because it is not serving the same function. As Ray (2019) argues, NPI is a meso-level racialized organization that serves to both bring in an audience through specific strategies and reify the racial order to secure resources for that audience. Rather than a source of policy knowledge or white papers, these “reports” are actually propaganda, written as recruitment tools for their cause. The high levels of victimization, using words like “obvious,” “simple” and “clear” to describe how they arrived at their conclusions, and the framing of their positions as noble and moral in the face of a wealthy elite all serve to identify with a specific, disaffected audience, regardless of how “real” that disaffection is. Their appeals to moral legitimacy were also unexpected. Expressing concern for their “less-abled countrymen” framed their desire for the acknowledgement of racial differences in IQ as benevolent rather than insidious. By discussing the “well-documented” biological differences between races, they are able to discuss their belief that black people are inferior to white people without actually saying it - a perfect example of Bonilla-Silva’s naturalization. As dangerous as these persuasive documents are, they have little reach without the news mentions legitimizing the organization itself. TOQ, on the other hand, has infiltrated what we as academics consider sacred: empiricism.

Finally, hypothesis 4: TOQ will use implicit racism in their articles. This hypothesis failed. TOQ used explicit racism at surprisingly high levels. Because their reports were found in mainstream journals, I expected there to be an almost stealth element to their language, as if they needed to sneak their way into academia. This was not the case. The existence of TOQ, their

prevalence in mainstream academic journals and their use of explicitly racist language goes against what was hypothesized. Rather than a recruitment tool, the journal is used as a hub of knowledge production, where group members can generate theoretical frameworks to rationalize and sanitize their ideologies. While such high levels of explicit racism were unexpected, there were also significant instances of reframing traditional views and rewriting history to juxtapose their racism as reasonable. Suchman (1995) described cognitive legitimacy as the most powerful form there is. Perhaps the cognitive legitimation strategies employed by the journal - mimicking standards, formats, citation practices and esteemed titles - are enough to allow their explicitly racist articles to make it quietly into mainstream publications. I also observed that many authors of TOQ articles are older, Professor Emeritus, and referenced their work in the 40s and 50s. Perhaps because there was such a long lineage of race-based science, these types of articles are commonplace. It was alarming to see them in journals of race, ethnicity, and social justice.

Limitations & Future Research

Because of the nature of this project, I specifically used a variety of methods for a full picture of this organization. Therefore, the analysis of each set of data was not as in depth as it could have been. In addition, there are several groups and publications connected to the NPI that could have been studied. Future research could expand on any of the three categories of methodology; a deeper dive into the news mentions could analyze the alt-right as a whole, including groups connected, to map their ecosystem. The data could be separated by “type” of news outlet in order to determine if there is a difference in coverage based on its political leaning. More social network analysis could be performed on citations, to determine the true reach of this publication and whether or not these articles are playing a central role in race

studies knowledge production. A content analysis could be performed on multiple groups, their websites, their reports, and their communication strategies.

CONCLUSION

In this study, I examined the legitimation strategies and racist discourse among a white identity group, the National Policy Institute. I found that news mentions of the NPI serve to frame it as both a racialized organization and a think tank. These ideas should be at odds, because think tanks are supposedly race-neutral structures that use facts and empiricism and not ideology. But, in a white racial frame, nothing is neutral. This legitimates the racialized aspect of the organization and allows it and its leaders to be viewed as pioneers in their “industry.” I found that this organization uses cognitive and pragmatic legitimation strategies and coded racist language that allows them to both maintain their standing with their target audience and recruit and radicalize new members. I also found that, in contrast with the NPI, their associated pseudoacademic journal *The Occidental Quarterly* uses explicitly racist rhetoric. They are able to infiltrate Google Scholar, the largest scholarly database with no human aspect to its curation, because their cognitive legitimation strategies give them cover. All 39 articles that cited the three TOQ articles I examined made no mention of the explicit racism found within them, nor of the white supremacist nature of the journal. This means that white supremacist organizations create a network, allowing their ideology and rhetorical devices to seep into mainstream journals and policymaking. In his book, Bonilla-Silva (2006) quoted a newspaper from the 1940s that used explicitly racist rhetoric, labeling black people as less than human. He said that “Today only white supremacist organizations spout things such as this in open forums” (p. 57). While this study found uses of explicit racism, there were more instances of coded racism among this white

supremacist group. Their use of colorblind racial frames and manipulative language is dangerous to future generations. With access to the internet, these online publications are amplifications of Daniels' cloaked propaganda sites. As mentioned previously, Southern Poverty Law Center has compiled reports on how tech companies could stop these networks by limiting their access to platforms and funding, in order to stop the dangerous terrorism these groups commit and inspire. Research on how these far-right networks are funded could reveal connections to mainstream neoconservative organizations, and this project demonstrates a need and foundation for further study.

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