


What is the “lite” in “alt-lite?” The discourse of white vulnerability and dominance among YouTube’s reactionaries

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Abstract

This article examines the discourse of “alt-lite” YouTube personalities in a North American context, with a focus on how whiteness is understood and represented. It argues that, despite their self-presentation as color-blind conservatives, these figures are firmly embedded within white supremacist ideology. A qualitative approach to content analysis is adopted to excavate the logics underlying these videos and to highlight the rhetorical tools at work. By framing themselves as the vulnerable targets of progressive movements, “alt-lite” personalities have helped to revive and legitimize a discourse of white victimhood. Their videos emphasize the historic dominance of “white culture” while bemoaning the current and future vulnerability of white people in a politically correct, social-justice-oriented world. Ultimately, the article argues that “alt-lite” figures are united by a set of mitigating rhetorical strategies, which are used to temper and obfuscate their reactionary views. These strategies include performatively aligning with one minority group to denigrate another; highlighting personal relationships with non-white people and knowledge of non-white cultures; embracing a color-blind worldview purportedly rooted in the civil rights movement; and maintaining ironic distance when espousing more overtly hateful racial stereotypes. The adoption of these strategies by right-wing micro-celebrities should not deter scholars and civil society groups from acknowledging when those same figures traffic in white supremacist rhetoric.

Keywords

alt-lite, alt-right, rhetoric, whiteness, YouTube

Introduction

This article explores how whiteness is framed and understood among right-wing YouTube personalities in a North American context. While a growing body of academic literature has taken on the topic of online extremism, this article draws attention to a network of so-called “alt-lite” personalities who operate at the edge of acceptable discourse—at least according to the tech platforms that host them. The term was coined by members of the “alt-right” to characterize fellow reactionaries who, in their view, were not bold enough to explicitly embrace white nationalism (Hawley, 2019). In recent years, journalists, academics, and civil society groups have also adopted the term to reference a subsection of the online right that serves as a gateway to more extreme white supremacist content. To interrogate the nature of “alt-lite” as a category, this article begins by reviewing the literature on how race and racism manifest in digital spaces. It then traces the lineage of the term “alt-lite” amongst academics and civil

society groups. Drawing from the extant literature, I sample 78 videos from “alt-lite” YouTube channels and use qualitative content analysis of discourse to evaluate how these individuals advance claims about whiteness. In doing so, I ask the question: what is the “lite” in “alt-lite?” I find that, despite the stated positions of these figures, their videos emphasize the historic dominance—and implied superiority—of “white culture,” while invoking civil rights discourse to frame whiteness as a marginalized identity in the present and imagined future. I identify several mitigating strategies that these figures use to obfuscate their views and to dodge accusations of racism.

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Background

Researching Race and the Digital

This work draws upon, and aims to contribute to, the existing literature on race and digital cultures. Early internet researchers suggested that online communication would enable disembodied identity “play,” wherein individuals, liberated from their offline bodies, could assume radically different online personas (e.g., Hansen, 2006). For the most part, this vision did not come to pass, as dominant commercial platforms adopted business models that relied on users’ adherence to a fixed identity, as visual representations of the self proliferated throughout social media, and as users chose—more often than not—to connect with people they already knew offline (Marwick, 2013). Meanwhile, Nakamura’s (2008) work showed that even in anonymous or pseudonymous environments, online communities assumed a default user who was white, male, and straight. When users revealed that their identity differed from this default, for example, in multiplayer games, they were often subject to racist and sexist attacks from other players (Gray, 2014, p. 45).

As social media platforms like Facebook grew ubiquitous, scholars shifted their attention to online self-presentation. Informed by Goffman’s front-stage/back-stage formulation, Grasmuck et al. (2009) found that Black, Latino, and Indian ancestry college students demonstrated high levels of color-consciousness in their social media profiles and actively highlighted their racial identities online. In her book, boyd (2014) uses ethnographic methods to study teenage internet use and found students’ tastes in online platforms were informed by discourses of racial difference. She observed that white and middle class students left MySpace—which they saw as increasingly “ghetto”—in the mid-2000s for Facebook, while Black and brown students did not (p. 34). Other scholars have explored how people of color navigate online platforms and carve out spaces to have candid conversations with one another (Hughey, 2008; Parker & Song, 2006). Public sphere theory has been taken up by scholars to characterize the function of online communities like Black Twitter, which Hill (2018) describes as a “digital counterpublic.” Brock (2012) illustrates how the practices of Black Twitter users interact with the trending topic algorithm to amplify their conversations. He writes, “Black Twitter hashtag domination of the Trending Topics allowed outsiders to view Black discourse that was (and still is) unconcerned with the mainstream gaze” (p. 534). I argue in the analysis section that the visibility of this content, on Twitter and other platforms, has triggered a reactionary backlash against progressive people of color online.

In her 2012 literature review and critique of how race has been studied by internet scholars, Daniels argues that the field has been under-theorized and urges researchers to critically examine how whiteness manifests online. With the renewed visibility of white nationalist movements in Western democracies (Brown, 2017), scholarly focus has indeed

turned in this direction. For example, Kanjere (2019) found that, when confronted with the reality of their privilege online, white people emphasized their own innocence and vulnerability—that they personally had done nothing to harm people of color and so the constant discussions about racism perpetrated by white people, some in the distant past, were themselves accusatory and hurtful. This common framing obscures the systemic dimensions of racial oppression, focusing instead on individual actions and, by extension, individual innocence (Foster, 2013). Kanjere’s paper affirms the findings of many offline studies, which consistently show that white subjects invoke the rhetoric of color-blindness when asked to consider how race may have affected their life experiences (Bonilla-Silva, 2014; DiAngelo, 2019). The color-blind worldview holds that everyone is the same deep down, skin color does not matter any more, and highlighting disparities between racial groups serves to increase division rather than overcome it.

Research on far-right extremism has shown how white supremacist and other reactionary groups have exploited the affordances of digital platforms to amplify, monetize, and mask their ideologies (Daniels, 2018). In the current media ecosystem, these groups are driven not only by their political agendas but also by the online attention economy, which rewards the most sensational, outrageous, and emotionally salient content (Harsin, 2015; Persily, 2017). YouTube, in particular, has been identified in multiple studies as an important vector of radicalization (Evans, 2018; Lewis, 2018). Despite the persistent trope that radicalization takes place in “dark corners of the Internet,” firsthand testimonies and cross-platform studies have shown that mainstream social media platforms—YouTube, Facebook, Twitter—have been some of the most effective at disseminating racist, Islamophobic, misogynistic, and transphobic ideas (Davey et al., 2020; Roose, 2019). Within this highly polarized landscape, social media platforms not only allow reactionaries to share content but also enable them to coordinate large-scale “networked harassment” campaigns against individuals who disagree with them (Lewis et al., 2021; Massanari, 2017). This article brings together existing research on both white and non-white publics online to explore far-right discourses of victimhood and empowerment. In undertaking this task, I join other scholars in the field of critical whiteness studies who have turned to examine the discursive construction of race among white subjects, “as they struggle to recuperate, reconstitute and restore white identities” in the post-civil rights era (Twine & Gallagher, 2008, p. 13).

Defining and Problematizing the “alt-lite”

This article seeks to locate “alt-lite” YouTube personalities within the landscape of online extremism and interrogate how whiteness is represented by those who position themselves as mainstream conservative comedians, pundits, and entertainers. Scholars have documented how, from the

late-2000s, a group of far-right intelligentsia including Richard Spencer, Paul Gottfried, and others associated with the HL Mencken Club, sought to re-brand and raise the profile of white nationalism within the United States (Hartzell, 2018; Michael, 2017). Notably, in March 2010, Richard Spencer founded *AlternativeRight.com*, “a magazine focused primarily on exposing the ‘illusion’ of racial equality and arguing for the importance of embracing pro-white racial consciousness” (Hartzell, 2018, p. 19). While the explicit white nationalism of the “alt-right”¹ grabbed media attention following the election of Donald Trump and the “Unite the Right” rally in Charlottesville, most culture warriors in the online right disavow the goal of building a white ethno-state and, as a result, have been deemed “alt-lite” by their more militant counterparts. The rift between these two factions became more pronounced when, in November 2016, video footage from a conference showed Richard Spencer declaring “Hail Trump. Hail our people. Hail victory,” while audience members raised Nazi salutes. This event, later dubbed “Hailgate,” prompted prominent figures within the online pro-Trump alliance to publicly disavow the “alt-right,” even when they had previously seen themselves as playing on the same team (Hawley, 2019; Marantz, 2020). While the terms “alt-right” and “alt-lite” loomed large in the aftermath of the 2016 US presidential election, 4 years later, they have already begun to fade from popular consciousness and morph into new political alliances. Still, the arguments and strategies deployed by contemporary far-right movements remain largely consistent year upon year, even as their figureheads and group identifications continue to evolve.

Despite the fact that the term “alt-lite” was coined by white nationalists as a pejorative, in recent years, the term has also been taken up by journalists, researchers, and civil society groups as a useful shorthand, although substantive research on “alt-lite” ideology remains scarce. One of the most influential pieces of writing on the “alt-lite” came from the Anti-Defamation League (ADL; 2017), who defined the group as “a loosely-connected movement whose adherents shun white supremacist thinking, but who are in step with the alt right in their hatred of feminists and immigrants, among others.” That same year, Nagle (2017) wrote in her book *Kill All Normies*:

Today, the movement that has been most remarkably successful at changing the culture rather than the formal politics is the alt-light. They were the youthful bridge between the alt-right and mainstream Trumpism . . . They succeeded largely by bypassing the dying mainstream media and creating an Internet-culture and alternative media of their own from the ground up. (p. 41)

Lyons (2017) wrote in a report for Political Research Associates, “Alt Rightists have relied on the Alt Lite to help bring its ideas to a mass, mainstream audience, but to varying degrees they have also regarded Alt Lite figures with resentment, as ideologically untrustworthy opportunists.” Hawley went into more depth in his 2018 book, where he

distinguishes the “alt-lite” from the “alt-right” by emphasizing the former’s greater loyalty to Donald Trump, their preference for cultural and economic arguments over explicitly racial ones, and their support for Israel. He also identified how “alt-lite” personalities “attack Islam because of Muslims’ purported anti-Semitism and homophobia—issues that do not concern the alt-right very much,” a rhetorical strategy that will be explored later on in this article (p. 186).

More recently, two quantitative studies on YouTube radicalization have operationalized the category of “alt-lite” in their methodologies. Munger and Phillips’ (2020) study on right-wing YouTube influencers included a typology of three kinds of channels: *Conservatives*, *Alt-Lite*, and *Alt-Right*. They define *alt-lite* as an ideologically mixed cluster of personalities who are united by their enjoyment of “racist and otherwise offensive humor as a means to antagonize and upset . . . liberals and leftists.” Ribeiro et al.’s (2020) study uses a four-group typology, with channels categorized as *media*, *the Alt-lite*, *the Intellectual Dark Web*, and *the Alt-right*. They write,

While users in the I.D.W. discuss controversial subjects like race and I.Q. without necessarily endorsing extreme views, members of the Alt-right sponsor fringe ideas like that of a white ethnostate. Somewhere in the middle, individuals of the Alt-lite deny to embrace [*sic*] white supremacist ideology, although they frequently flirt with concepts associated with it.

Their study finds that YouTube users who start off commenting on more mainstream videos by “alt-lite” or “Intellectual Dark Web” (IDW)² channels consistently migrate, over time, to more extreme “alt-right” or white nationalist content. These studies corroborate personal testimonies from those who have shared their stories of radicalization on the platform (Evans, 2018; Roose, 2019). Munger and Phillips (2020), however, find that audience demand has been underemphasized in discussions of online radicalization, and that since 2017, mainstream conservative creators have seen a rise in viewership while “alt-lite” and “alt-right” channels have seen a steep decline.

In one of the most comprehensive studies to date on user’s viewing habits on YouTube, Chen et al. (2021) collected data on 915 adults in the United States over the course of 3 months: which videos they watched, which they engaged with, and which were recommended to them. Their study was concerned with far-right extremist content, and they focused their analysis on two types of channels: “Alternative” channels, which “serve as gateways to more extreme forms of content” and “extremist or white supremacist channels.” Their list of gateway channels was drawn from Ribeiro et al.’s lists of “IDW” and “alt-lite” channels, Data & Society’s Alternative Influence Network (Lewis, 2018), and Ledwich and Zaitsev’s (2020) list of “anti-SJW” channels.

In surveying the literature on the “alt-lite,” a few themes seem to unite these varied definitions. First, researchers tend to emphasize the gateway function of “alt-lite” commentators,

Table 1. YouTube Channels Most Frequently Identified as “alt-lite” (Number of Subscriptions and Views Retrieved From YouTube in September 2019).^a

| Channel name | Subs | Views | ADL (2017) | Lyons (2017) | Nagle (2017) | Main (2018) | Hawley (2019) | Munger and Phillips (2020) | Ribeiro et al. (2020) ^b |
|--------------------|-------|-------|---------------|-----------------|-----------------|----------------|------------------|----------------------------------|--|
| MILO | 860K | 136M | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y | Y |
| Gavin McInnes | 360K | 42M | Y | Y | Y | | Y | Y | Y |
| Mike Cernovich | 79K | 2.7M | Y | Y | Y | | Y | Y | Y |
| Breitbart News | 137K | 23.6M | | Y | Y | Y | Y | | |
| Lauren Southern | 712K | 59M | | | Y | | | Y | Y |
| Brittany Sellner | 126K | 8.3M | Y | | | | | | Y |
| Computing Forever | 420K | 100M | | | | | | Y | Y |
| Lauren Chen | 406K | 45M | | | | | | Y | Y |
| No Bullshit | 660K | 141M | | | | | | Y | Y |
| Paul Joseph Watson | 1.73M | 413M | | | | | | Y | Y |
| Rebel News | 1.26M | 464M | | | Y | | | | Y |
| Stefan Molyneux | 929K | 283M | | | | | | Y | Y |
| styxhexenhammer666 | 389K | 195M | | | | | | Y | Y |

^aInfoWars was listed as an example of an “alt-lite” media outlet by two of the sources, but was not included in the table because, by the time of data collection, the channel had already been taken down by YouTube.

^bDue to the high volume of data analyzed by Ribeiro et al., this article counts only the 23 channels included in their initial seed list of “alt-lite” channels.

who they describe as introducing far-right ideas to mainstream audiences. Second, these definitions distinguish between the race-based nationalism of the “alt-right” and the “civic” nationalism of the “alt-lite,” which focus on the United States’ greatness based on values and culture rather than race. Finally, they emphasize the group’s appeal to younger audiences through their savviness on digital platforms. In recent quantitative studies, the category “alt-lite” has been taken up to represent a step on people’s radicalization pathways, somewhere between mainstream conservatism and explicit white supremacy. However, the ground-truth remains more complex. For instance, Chen et al. (2021) categorize Mike Cernovich and Faith Goldy as white supremacist channels while Steven Crowder and Michelle Malkin are merely “alternative” or “gateway channels.” Having spent many months immersed in the world of reactionary YouTube channels, however, it is not immediately clear to me that Mike Cernovich espouses a more extreme ideology than Steven Crowder. The categorization of Laura Loomer, Steven Crowder, Michelle Malkin, and Candace Owens as “gateway” content risks obfuscating how white supremacist rhetoric appears in varied and insidious ways in their content. In this study, I take up the concept of “white supremacy” as it has been articulated by critical race theorists (e.g., Gillborn, 2006). That is, white supremacy manifests not only in claims that white people are superior to other groups but also in rhetoric, policies, and practices that reproduce the dominance of white people and the oppression of people of color. Using this more expansive definition, I want to interrogate the positioning of “alt-lite” figures (by themselves and researchers) as falling outside the bounds of white supremacist activism and ask, what exactly is “lite” about the “alt-lite?”

Data and Methods

This article seeks to clarify and deepen academic understanding of an ambiguously defined category through qualitative analysis of “alt-lite” YouTube videos. To start, I drew from the literature cited above to compile a list of YouTube channels that have been identified as “alt-lite.” For the purposes of this article, I narrowed my focus to the 13 channels that were referenced by at least 2 of the 7 sources consulted (see Table 1).

It is important to note that some of these channels have been labeled “alt-right” by news outlets and civil society groups at different points in time. For the purposes of this study, the fact that these channels have been identified as “alt-lite” by at least two of the seven sources indicates that their rhetoric at least attempts to create distance between them and explicit white nationalist or white supremacist ideology. I am interested in understanding how whiteness is constructed by these figures who strategically eschew the language of white pride and instead position themselves as color-blind conservatives. What do these, supposedly more mainstream, figures have to say about whiteness in an American context?

Over several months in late 2019 and early 2020, I visited each of these channels and, using YouTube’s search function, queried the terms “white,” “white privilege,” and “white people” to surface videos that engage explicitly in discussions about whiteness. I then compiled a database of the top five videos returned by YouTube for each of my search queries on all 13 channels; this process yielded a list of 151 unique videos. Of these, I viewed 78 videos, which—based on titles, thumbnails, and descriptions—met my sampling criteria:

Table 2. Videos Sampled From Each Channel by Year.

| Channel | Unique videos returned | Videos with over 10k views | Videos meeting sampling criteria (2 and 3) | | | | | | | Total |
|--------------------|------------------------|----------------------------|--|------|------|------|------|------|------|-----------|
| | | | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 | 2018 | 2019 | 2020 | |
| Breitbart News | 14 | 3 | | | | | | | | 0 |
| Brittany Sellner | 11 | 11 | | | | | | | 2 | 2 |
| Computing Forever | 13 | 13 | | | 3 | 2 | 1 | | | 6 |
| Gavin McInnes | 14 | 12 | | | | 1 | 1 | | | 2 |
| Lauren Southern | 11 | 11 | | | | | | | | 0 |
| Mike Cernovich | 14 | 3 | | | | | | | | 0 |
| MILO | 12 | 12 | | | 1 | 2 | | | | 3 |
| No Bullshit | 13 | 13 | | | 1 | 8 | 3 | 1 | | 13 |
| Paul Joseph Watson | 10 | 10 | | 3 | 3 | 1 | 1 | | | 8 |
| Rebel News | 15 | 14 | | 1 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 3 | | 14 |
| Roaming Millennial | 11 | 11 | | | 2 | 1 | 3 | 1 | 4 | 11 |
| Stefan Molyneux | 13 | 13 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 2 | 1 | | 8 |
| Styxhexenhammer666 | 14 | 13 | | 1 | | 8 | 1 | 1 | | 11 |
| | | | 1 | 6 | 15 | 28 | 15 | 7 | 6 | 78 |

1. Videos with over 10,000 views;
2. Videos that explicitly discuss whiteness in a North American context; or
3. Videos that explicitly discuss race or racism in a North American context.

As summarized in Table 2, three of the channels returned no videos that met the sampling criteria. In the case of Breitbart News, this was largely due to the channel's positioning as a source of breaking news, rather than commentary. As such, video titles and blurbs were largely descriptive and did not reference concepts like whiteness or white privilege. Both Breitbart News and Mike Cernovich's videos also had low view counts, indicating that their followers engage more with their content on other platforms—such as their own websites or Twitter—rather than on YouTube. No videos from Lauren Southern's personal channel met the sampling criteria due to her relatively infrequent posting and international focus; however, one of her videos for Rebel News did. Similarly, the sample includes two videos from Gavin McInnes's personal channel and five of his videos for Rebel News. The average video length was just over 14 min, with seven videos lasting over 30 min and two videos over an hour. In all, 1109 min (approximately 18.5 hr) of video content was viewed for the purpose of this study.

Next, the sampled videos were subject to a qualitative content analysis of discourse (e.g., Berbrier, 2000; Daniels, 1997). Drawing from Jager and Maier's (2009) "fine analysis" model, my approach is concerned with argumentation strategies, the internal logic of texts, contradictions, and intertextual references, as opposed to linguistic approaches that foreground details like word order, turn-taking, grammar, and hesitation. I also draw from ethnographic approaches which insist on situating texts in their "particular circumstances of

production and consumption" (Hine, 2000, p. 52). As such, my analysis looks to both the formal features of the text as well as the online ecosystem in which it is embedded. Throughout the data collection process, I took detailed field notes guided by two questions:

1. What claims regarding whiteness, and white people, are being advanced?
2. What are the logics underlying these claims?

The resulting field notes contained descriptive summaries on each video's subject matter, as well as key quotes and observations relating to the two questions above. After all 78 videos were viewed once, I read through the notes and annotated recurring themes and rhetorical strategies. Some of the videos were then viewed a second time to draw out further quotations and clarify emerging findings. The analysis presented below emerges from this process of viewing, note-taking, re-viewing, and transcribing, but is also inevitably tied to my own social position as a woman of color and immigrant. Writing from this position, I draw on a long tradition of critical methodologies, which aim to make explicit the logic of white supremacy and other oppressive systems to undermine and dismantle them (Reisigl & Wodak, 2000). In the period since data collection was undertaken for this article, Gavin McInnes's, Stefan Molyneux's, and Computing Forever's channels have been banned from YouTube as the company seeks to address concerns that the platform has a radicalizing effect on users. As a result, during the analysis stage, some of the videos were accessed through the Internet Archive's Wayback Machine. The implications of these recent de-platformings by YouTube will be explored in the Discussion section of the article.



Figure 1. YouTube response video thumbnail (Rebel News, 2016).



Figure 2. YouTube response video thumbnail (Paul Joseph Watson, 2016a).

Analysis

Overview

In exploring these channels, the styles and genres ranged broadly: from news segments, to vlog-style videos recorded in living rooms, to highly edited talk shows taped in recording studios. While the selected videos varied in length, style, and production value, their talking points remained remarkably consistent. Watching them as a researcher quickly revealed the extremity of “alt-lite” content, with white YouTubers³ using the n-word and other slurs, perpetuating theories of white genocide and scientific racism, and depicting non-white people as savage or barbaric. A significant portion of the sampled videos target liberal news outlets or supposedly progressive ideas and are framed as “takedowns,” “responses,” and “debunkings.” I will refer to this popular sub-genre as *response videos* throughout the article (see Figures 1 and 2). Response videos are “made by YouTubers of one political valence as rebuttals to videos espousing an opposing political valence” (Lewis et al., 2021). Within right-wing spaces, these videos follow a familiar format: YouTubers typically play clips or read passages from popular videos or articles that espouse progressive politics, pausing to critique or “debunk” the points raised. These videos usually accuse liberal media outlets of condescension, reverse racism, and general SJW⁴ cringe-worthiness. They became especially prominent in the mid-2010s—in the wake of the first Black Lives Matter protests and Trump’s political ascendancy—when many liberal digital media outlets like Vox, BuzzFeed, and MTV began producing video content on the subject of racism in America. Popular on YouTube, these videos were often narrated by people of color and spoke directly to an imagined white viewer about concepts like

privilege, cultural appropriation, implicit bias, and micro-aggressions. Some of these videos like BuzzFeed’s “24 Questions Black People Have for White People” (As/Is, 2015) went viral, drawing new attention to ongoing conversations about racism in America. The virality of these videos also made them targets, especially as takedown videos could dramatically increase a conservative YouTuber’s visibility and success on the platform. Many right-wing response videos gained so much traction that they far surpassed the target video in terms of views and galvanized swarms of people to down-vote and leave vitriol in the comments section of the original post (see Figure 3).

Among the videos sampled for this study, just under one third adopt a response video format (playing clips from the original video or reading passages from an article) but all of the videos are broadly oriented around discrediting or mocking liberal Americans and the institutions supposedly aligned with them: the mainstream news media, universities, and Hollywood. In the remainder of this section, I will consider how “alt-lite” figures advance claims about whiteness and their own white identities within this highly polarized online landscape.

White Vulnerability: The New Civil Rights Struggle

Both “alt-lite” and “alt-right” figureheads emphasize the vulnerability of white people, even within societies where they make up a sizable and powerful majority. This tactic has a long history within the United States, as Berbrier (2000) has shown in his work tracing the “victim ideology” of white supremacist groups throughout the 20th century. Among “alt-lite” personalities on YouTube, claims of victimhood are frequently advanced in response to structural critiques from

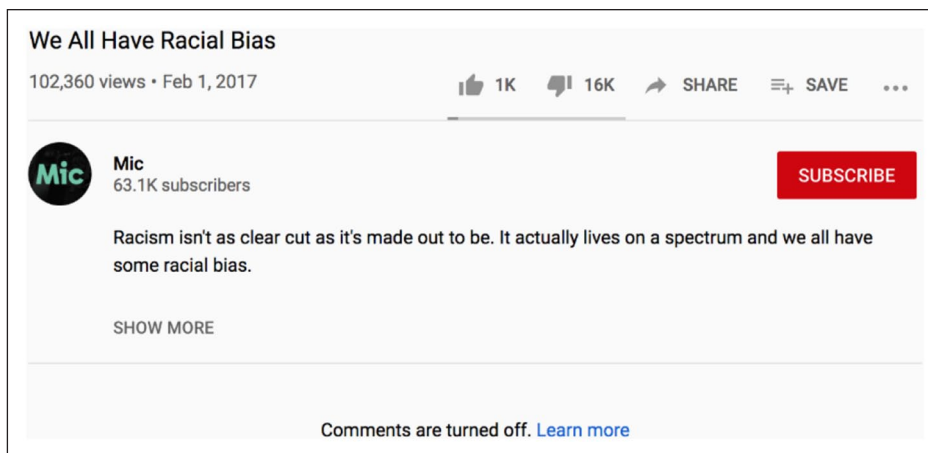


Figure 3. Target video uploaded by Mic on racial bias: low like/dislike ratio and comments turned off due to the onslaught of negative, hateful comments (Mic, 2017).

progressives about racism in the United States; these critiques are re-framed as personal attacks against white people, and white men in particular. For instance, the excerpts below are drawn from “alt-lite” responses to three different videos that each addresses how racism manifests in the 21st century:

Why is it racist to make generalizations about beliefs, lifestyles, or behaviours based on a person’s race, unless they’re white? (Paul Joseph Watson, 2016a)

Wow you’re very comfortable talking sh*t about white people. Ok. Well, yeah. A lot of white people have been getting triggered by the word racist lately. That is true. And it’s because a lot of people like you have been calling white people racists lately. It’s not coming out of the blue, guy. Channels like Dot Mic, BuzzFeed, Seriously.TV, MTV News, you all have been calling white people racists over and over again for the better part of a year. That’s why white people are being triggered by the word “racist” because you keep calling us f*cking racist for no reason. (No Bullshit, 2017b)

I’ve had this discussion before. It’s such a lazy thing to do to tell someone who isn’t black that they cannot say n-----. Stopping someone from saying n-----, n----- or any other word based off the color of their skin is wrong and is actually an example of discrimination. (No Bullshit, 2017a)

In each of these excerpts, the act of talking to white people about racist behavior is framed as a form of racist aggression in itself, which then justifies retaliation. All three of the videos quoted above have thumbnail images that prominently represent the Black people who are featured in the target piece, with large text displayed next to their faces: “Buzzfeed is racist,” “Calling white people racist is bullshit,” “Advising whites is bullshit.” While the first two videos target relatively large media outlets, BuzzFeed and Mic, the third is directed at a young Black YouTuber with a small following

on the platform (91 subscribers at the time of writing). When No Bullshit uploaded his response, the original video had less than 100 views. Despite these power asymmetries, No Bullshit directed vitriol toward the original poster and linked to her video, making her vulnerable to harassment by his large online following (Lewis et al., 2021). At the end of his video, he signs off: “Thanks for watching today’s episode everybody. Comment below how much you think this black whale weighs. I’m guessing over 200.” (No Bullshit, 2017a). At the time of writing, No Bullshit’s video remains online and has over half a million views.

Even as they invoke dehumanizing racial stereotypes in their attacks against progressive people of color, “alt-lite” commentators insist that they hold a color-blind worldview and are the victims of a gross double standard in modern life: non-white people are allowed to critique the actions and behaviors of white people while the reverse is forbidden:

You can write an article about a bunch of reasons why a whole race of people is so bad, and they ruin things, and they’re you know smelly dumb white scum basically. And can you imagine like if a site, any site, were to write an article that were basically an inversion of this? If we were talking about Black people or Hispanics or something, immediately a bunch of internet vigilantes would show up and they would pressure their web hoster to get rid of their site . . . Somehow BuzzFeed manages to escape that and I can tell you why. It’s because there’s no real outrage about it. Only a small group of people understand that this is the moral and ethical equivalent of exactly its inverse, which would be considered heinously racist. (Styxhexenhammer666, 2017a)

“Things white people killed in 2016.” Can you imagine if it was *things Black people killed in 2016*? I’m sure that would go down well! But apparently the last acceptable form of racism is that against white people . . . People like this guy from Mic and people like Richard Spencer are basically opposite sides of the same coin. (Computing Forever, 2017b)

“Alt-lite” personalities consistently use this double-standard argument to signal that progressive movements have become so dominant and so race-obsessed that they now marginalize the very people they claim are the oppressors. This tactic allows them to simultaneously accuse liberals of reverse-racism while distancing themselves from “alt-right” figures like Richard Spencer, as seen in the above quotation from Computing Forever (2017b). Each, they argue, represents a form of “identity politics,” whereas they simply see people for who they are and what they contribute to society.

This rhetoric recalls Bonilla-Silva’s (2014) concept of “abstract liberalism,” a framing device wherein the language of equal opportunity is used to deride progressive policies as preferential treatment or discriminatory. Among “alt-lite” figures, frequent references to Martin Luther King and other civil rights leaders serve as shorthand for this kind of argument:

Martin Luther King’s dream was that there would be a nation where we are not judged by the colour of our skin but instead by the content of our character; not a nation in which kids are forced to take privilege tests in school, telling them how guilty or victimized they should feel based on their skin colour. (Lauren Southern for Rebel News, 2015)

If this was a white performer saying, “Hey you know I want white people at the front of the venue” for whatever concocted bullshit socially progressive-sounding reason, and said “Well everyone else needs to move back a few rows,” what do you think would happen? It would obviously be labelled as racist by the media. There would be no defense of it . . . It’s like a Rosa Parks situation. (Styxhexenhammer666, 2017b)

[Reading from a New York Times Opinion Piece] “Spare me platitudes of how we are all the same on the inside.” [Chuckles] Because skin colour matters more than, you know, the contents of a person’s character right? (Computing Forever, 2017a)

You know, this sort of white guy, white girl, a fairly normal person, fairly normal attitude to things. Don’t give a shit about skin colour, don’t care if you’re a boy or a girl, judge you by the contents of your character, not the colour of your skin. Can’t remember who said that! The left has moved on a bit from Doctor King. And yet you’re assailed with these fake allegations [of racism], with these lies, and then you have no idea how to combat them. (MILO, 2017)

The civil rights movement is invoked frequently by “alt-lite” figures to signal an allegiance to the *idea* of racial equality while condemning any policies or practices that materially address systemic racism such as reparations, affirmative action, or even confronting white privilege. At the same time, their rhetoric demonstrates a notable reversal of civil rights discourse, which aimed to shed light on past abuses to advocate for a more just future. “Alt-lite” voices, like their “alt-right” counterparts, imagine a glorified past and an “apocalyptic future of alienation” in which white people are

not only undermined, but erased altogether (Mason, 2007, p. 109). To invoke such a future, which serves as an important animating myth to these YouTubers, they weave tales of persecution, which are told and re-told to frame pro-white movements as the new civil rights struggle:

The Rotherham rape scandal destroys the myth of white privilege. The victims were victimized because they were white. The rape gangs got away with it because they weren’t white, thanks to decades of social engineering, race baiting, and political correctness. This marked the beginning of white people being treated as second-class citizens because of the colour of their skin: the very definition of racism. (Paul Joseph Watson, 2015)

Since day 1, I have rejected the violent, Marxist Black Lives Matter and Antifa movements and their extremist ideologies because that’s what they are . . . I reject their blatant and abhorrent hatred of white people and whiteness. I reject their deceitful narrative that everyone who opposes them is racist . . . I reject their tearing down of our statues and their attempts to erase our history. I reject their hatred of the nuclear family and especially of Christianity. I reject all of it. (Brittany Sellner, 2020)

The construction of white marginality and persecution serves an important function within the context of these videos. The pervasive idea that white people will be rendered second-class citizens in their “own” countries marks liberals and people of color as the new oppressors, which then justifies the deployment of violent, dehumanizing rhetoric against them.

White Dominance: History’s Saviors and Civilizers

Having established the widespread victimization of white people, “alt-lite” figures go on to defend the innocence and value of “white culture” by enumerating the great intellectual and humanitarian contributions of white people throughout history.⁵ For example, in response to historic injustices perpetrated by European colonizers and their descendants, they consistently pivot their attention to atrocities committed by other groups:

Slavery existed long before the Europeans settled in the Americas, dating back to the dawn of civilization . . . In the 7th century, hundreds of years before the Atlantic slave trade began, the Arab slave trade was transporting African slaves to the Middle East. This trade lasted for over a thousand years. In between 10 and 18 million African slaves were brought over to the Arab world, much more than ever taken by Europeans. Additionally, the Barbary slave trade in Northern Africa actually traded enslaved Europeans, not Africans. (Roaming Millennial, 2016)

I love being made to feel collective white guilt for the slave trade, even though whites were the first in the world to end the

slave trade . . . I love being made to feel collective white guilt for the slave trade, despite the fact that the Islamic slave trade was far more brutal and lasted for much longer. I love being made to feel collective white guilt for the slave trade, despite the fact that more whites were abducted and enslaved by Muslims than the number of Blacks enslaved by whites. (Paul Joseph Watson, 2016b)

Pick up a history book in your racial studies course. Naturally, because that particular book will be written from a perspective that will focus purely on the fact that all white people are responsible for slavery. Yes. Also it won't tell you that other races have also kept slaves. It also won't go into detail about how more white people died ending slavery than ever engaged it. (Computing Forever, 2017b)

As illustrated above, "alt-lite" commentators emphasize that slavery and colonization were historically perpetrated by white and non-white people alike, but it was only white people who brought these practices to an end. The frequent invocation of the Arab slave trade provides these YouTubers with a convenient foil to the transatlantic slave trade; this shift in focus dovetails well with their own Islamophobic rhetoric, which paints Muslims as backwards and inherently violent.

This retelling of history, which appears again and again in "alt-lite" video content, not only erases the struggles for freedom led by colonized and enslaved peoples, but also situates non-white subjects in a position of perpetual indebtedness, from which they must constantly demonstrate both their worthiness and their appreciation (Hartman, 1997). For instance,

We lost millions of guys to wars fighting to keep you free. You're using all our inventions now. And don't talk to me about slavery, the balance sheet was zero after the civil war. You're sitting on *our* technology and *our* inventions and *our* hard work. And you're sitting there saying "Wow you suck." Look, I never really thought of myself as a white guy until I was told that I suck. Then I went over to Google and I looked it up and I said, "Whoa these guys are kinda awesome." Yeah, I have something to say. This is my new years resolution: I'm going to start accepting that I created the modern world. And I'm also going to start saying to people like you, you're welcome you f*cking ingrate. (Gavin McInnes for Rebel News, 2016)

White people were the first in the world to legally end slavery: reformers like William Wilberforce who campaigned for the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833. White people also literally put their lives on the line to conduct raids in African countries to free Black slaves from their Arab captors. Hundreds of thousands of white Americans died in a civil war partly to end slavery. There's your historical context." (Paul Joseph Watson, 2017)

In the first excerpt, McInnes explicitly connects his pro-white rhetoric to the visibility of progressive media and his subsequent sense of victimization. He insists that Black Americans can no longer point to historical injustices, such as slavery, to explain current inequalities. At the same time,

however, he happily takes credit for the technologies and inventions supposedly pioneered by white people throughout history. In this way, pro-white rhetoric simultaneously denies the reality that people of color inherit the effects of historical violence, dispossession, and segregation, while endorsing the idea that today's white Americans can inherit the achievements of previous generations. These claims—however paradoxical—are repeated so frequently, and with such fervor, that they form a kind of common sense among right-wing communities online (Ganesh, 2018).

When confronted with progressive arguments about white supremacy, "alt-lite" personalities cite bogus figures to elevate the historic achievements of white people and frame them as inarguably benevolent. This narration of American history, and world history, fixes white people as saviors and civilizers, whose misdeeds are vastly overshadowed by the gifts bestowed upon subjugated peoples: modernity, Christianity, individualism, emancipation. For example,

The white race has had its faults of course but has also done some incredibly wonderful things as well: like spending massive amounts of blood and treasure to end the slave trade worldwide, like creating the idea of universal rights . . . In modern science, 97% of all modern scientific advancements between 800 BC and 1950 AD came from Europe and North America, not including Mexico. The modern world is a white, male phenomenon. And that has prevented the deaths or allowed the continued life of literally billions of people. (Stefan Molyneux, 2019)

The United States of America is white culture. Canada and Australia are white culture too. And many parts of Europe. Just because you don't understand what white culture is, doesn't mean it doesn't exist. What's more likely is these racist SJWs know that there's a white culture, and they know how dominant in the world it is because we're the best, we make the best countries to live in and the best culture too . . . like the Internet, music, and Hollywood movies. (No Bullshit, 2018)

In examining these claims, the boundary between "alt-lite" discourse and explicit white supremacy essentially vanishes. These statements endorse the idea that white people are superior without those words ever needing to be said aloud. In an online landscape where videos about white privilege or patriarchy frequently go viral, "alt-lite" figures justify their pro-white talking points under the banner of "defending white people" against racist leftists.

Mitigating Strategies: Performatively Aligning With People of Color

Despite their openly racist rhetoric, "alt-lite" YouTubers adopt an array of "mitigating strategies" (Reisigl & Wodak, 2000, p. 83) that temper or obfuscate their racist rhetoric and signal their adherence to mainstream, color-blind conservatism. These strategies help them to avoid deplatforming and demonetization while appealing to a wider cross-section of viewers. For instance, across all the channels studied,



Figure 4. Screenshot from Gavin McInnes's (2018) video.

“alt-lite” YouTubers performatively elevate or align with minoritized communities or individuals when it suits their purposes. Conservative YouTubers frequently highlight their personal relationships with individual people of color in order to deflect accusations of racism. This strategy relies on what DiAngelo (2019) calls the “good/bad binary”: the common assumption that only deeply immoral people can be racists and that these people make up a small, defective minority. Under this narrow definition of racism, close relationships with non-white people serve as proof that an individual does not deserve to be labeled a racist.

A video uploaded by Gavin McInnes illustrates this common rhetorical move. In 2016, McInnes founded the Proud Boys (2017), “a pro-western fraternal organization for men who refuse to apologize for creating the modern world.” Despite his insistence that it was merely a drinking club for old-fashioned men who enjoy sports and cold beer, the Proud Boys gained notoriety. Their skinhead-like uniform, violent hazing rituals, and rallies that often led to brawls unsurprisingly drew media attention. In 2018, after McInnes delivered a talk at the Metropolitan Republican Club in New York, several self-avowed Proud Boys got into a fight with protestors and were subsequently arrested (Moynihan & Winston, 2018). Following this event, McInnes posted a 36-min video to YouTube, which had well over half a million views by the time his channel was de-platformed in 2020. In the video, McInnes alternately reads from a script and rants in his signature, indignant style.

The entire video is filmed with McInnes standing next to a photograph of one of the arrested men with his family, namely his Black wife and children (see Figure 4). The photograph chosen by McInnes seeks to exculpate the man in question by revealing his *true unprejudiced nature*, which has been obscured by the mainstream media. The photo

implies that the arrested Proud Boy cannot possibly hold racist views because he has a loving Black family.

In the same video, McInnes plays a montage of himself praising different non-white groups and individuals to similarly absolve himself. Among “alt-lite” YouTubers, this strategy is extremely common. When accused by a student of being a white supremacist during a campus lecture, Milo Yiannopolous responds: “Am I? See the amount of Black dick that’s been in my mouth . . . I must be the most self-loathing white supremacist in the world” (MILO, 2016). The short clip depicting Milo’s retort has received over 3 million views and illustrates how “alt-lite” YouTubers bring up non-white friends, lovers, and family members to defend their moral characters and shut down opposition, all while engaging in openly racist rhetoric.

A variation of this strategy occurs when individuals align themselves with whole groups of people through praise or performative concern. In a 2018 video criticizing the *New York Times* journalist Sarah Jeong, Ezra Levant—the founder of Rebel News—opens by saying,

Koreans: industrious, smart, outstanding. I love Koreans. They’re so successful in South Korea itself, and in Canada and America, as most Asian immigrants are. I mean, let’s just speak candidly, I know this is stereotyping, but it’s positive stereotyping: Asians are great! Here’s an official chart by the US census. It’s from the last census in the US a couple years ago. It shows income by race. It’s sort of politically incorrect to do this, but look at this. See that line at the top there? That red line? That’s Asians. (Rebel News, 2018)

After ostentatiously praising Koreans by invoking the model minority stereotype, he launches into his critique:

Sarah Jeong herself is living the dream: she’s free, she’s happy, she’s not under threat in North Korea, she’s not starving like

North Koreans are. She's welcome to reach any height in America . . . But wow is she angry at America and Americans, and to be more precise at white people, and at men, and at white American men in uniform. The very kind of people who kept South Korea free by giving up their own lives. (Rebel News, 2018)

Here, Levant invokes white savior discourse, as discussed earlier, to imply that any success that Koreans like Jeong are able to secure for themselves is ultimately *because* of white Americans, to whom they owe a perpetual debt of gratitude. His praise for Korean people serves to bolster his own argument, advance his worldview, and shield himself from criticism when he goes on to insult and patronize Jeong. This same instrumental approach is evident when conservative YouTubers performatively express concern for one minoritized group in order to denigrate another:

Women are treated like second-class citizens in Muslim countries, that's a fact. Sure it's not all and it's not everywhere, but it is happening in many places and there seems to be a lot of pretending going on in the heads of this video's writers . . . They want to pretend women aren't treated poorly in Islam. What a goddamn joke. (No Bullshit, 2018)

These personalities frequently decry the treatment of women and lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) communities in majority-Muslim countries as a way to paint Islam as backwards, intolerant, and uncivilized. This concern for queer people and women, however, arises only in situations where it can be weaponized against Muslims. Similarly, Milo Yiannopoulos often performs concern for Black working people in order to make an argument about immigration:

I mean one of the reasons why some Black commentators love Trump so much is because they realize what the Black community didn't, which is that one of the groups hit hardest by illegal immigration, particularly Hispanic immigration, are the Black working classes, who find themselves priced out of the jobs market and plunged back into this sort of state dependent unemployment that has caused so many problems for Black cities in the first place. It is the overburdening of public resources, of hospitals and schools, that make conditions in Black communities even worse than they are already. (MILO, 2017)

In this way, Yiannopoulos gestures toward his own sympathy for Black people while building a career from disparaging Black Lives Matter and other movements actually led by Black activists. In all of these cases, the lived experiences and voices of minoritized people are dismissed, even as “alt-lite” YouTubers periodically perform concern to demonstrate their tolerance for non-white Others. The struggles of minoritized communities are worth mentioning only insofar as they can be used disingenuously to advance their own talking points.

Mitigating Strategies: Humor, Irony, Ambiguity

More than their Fox News or talk radio counterparts, many “alt-lite” YouTube celebrities perform outrageous, sometimes goofy comedic bits that establish them as “edgy” while allowing them to maintain ironic distance from the views they are espousing. These amateurish bits are well-suited to the visual and do it yourself (DIY) nature of the platform. Unlike mainstream conservative news outlets, which need to maintain a veneer of professionalism for their legitimacy, YouTubers gain credibility with audience members through the demonstration of authenticity and intimacy (Lewis, 2020). For example, Milo Yiannopoulos performs a recurring caricature of Congresswoman Ilhan Omar. Even as he advances vile, dehumanizing ideas about Muslim women, he breaks character and laughs at himself throughout the video, which distances him from the caricature he is depicting. Similarly, in a 2017 video for Rebel News, Gavin McInnes blackens his face and performs minstrel-like impressions of liberals scolding white people for their various misdeeds (Figure 5).

Such performances—usually involving bad accents, haphazard costumes, offensive makeup—allow “alt-lite” celebrities to demonstrate their fearlessness (they can say and do what they like!) without earnestly engaging with the ideas they are advancing. The use of dehumanizing caricatures, often to ridicule high-profile women, puts the target individual “in her place” by making her the object of scorn, derision, and mockery. When these representations are criticized for perpetuating harmful stereotypes, “alt-lite” YouTubers frequently invoke humor, irony, and satire to shield themselves from criticism and to frame progressives as overly sensitive whiners who can't take a joke:

I think one of the biggest problems with my message is that I did both a comedy show and a news show and a comedy news show. This enables people to take satirical content and make it sound like some sort of serious political dictum. When you hear quotes that sound racist or antisemitic, you are hearing a *joke*. Taken out of *context*. (Gavin McInnes, 2018)

Now I think we should fight this outrage culture, this sort of culture of fake allegations of racism and sexism, mob justice and shaming by ourselves being outrageous. I think the best way to respond to outrage culture is to be shocking. So I put “fagg*t” on my bus, call people tr*nnies, call feminists ham-beasts, ham-planets, ogres, monsters, hippopotamuses, I could go on . . . (MILO, 2017)

These kinds of statements help “alt-lite” figures to evade accountability and are particularly pervasive on YouTube, where the medium of video gives creators ample space for semiotic “play” and ambiguity. As such, when No Bullshit opens up a video with “Hello and welcome back to No Bullshit. Today we're joined by the White YouTuber. White power up in this b*tch today, am I right? No just kidding, and



Figure 5. Screenshot from McInnes's video for Rebel News (2017).

I definitely shouldn't say that before today's video," he is able to simultaneously invoke the specter of white supremacy while jokingly disavowing it (No Bullshit, 2017a). These practices help "alt-lite" YouTubers to strategically position themselves as court jesters, who are provocative enough to keep viewers coming back but never sincerely hateful enough to warrant deplatforming.

Discussion: What Is the "lite" in "alt-lite"?

After viewing and analyzing many hours of this video content, I find that "alt-lite" does not represent a coherent worldview but rather a collection of practices that help right-wing and far-right personalities reconcile their stated color-blind worldview with their highly popular and profitable brand of reactionary politics. The one YouTuber included in this study who falls outside this definition is Stefan Molyneux, who in multiple videos matter-of-factly endorses scientific racism: the widely disproven idea that white people have higher IQs than non-whites, which explains differences in life outcomes. The others, however, shy away from discussing inherent racial differences in favor of thinly-veiled "cultural" differences when rationalizing American racial hierarchy. However, all of the YouTube channels studied in this article, including Stefan Molyneux's, rely on a set of mitigating strategies to temper and obfuscate their arguments: performatively aligning with one minority group to denigrate another; highlighting personal relationships with non-white people and knowledge of non-white cultures; embracing a color-blind worldview apparently rooted in Martin Luther King's teachings and the civil rights movement; and maintaining ironic distance when performing more overtly hateful racial stereotypes. This careful positioning within the attention economy has allowed most of the

channels discussed in this article to remain on YouTube, and stay monetized, even as the platform works to remove "hateful and supremacist content" (YouTube, 2019).

While it may be the case that "alt-lite" creators sometimes serve as people's introductions to far-right talking points, it would be a mis-reading to suggest that these individuals in fact "shun white supremacist thinking" (ADL, 2017). Similarly, classifying these channels as "gateways to more extreme forms of content" as opposed to "extremist or white supremacist channels" (Chen et al., 2021), obfuscates how white supremacy manifests in contemporary discourse. Individuals may reject or remain silent on the need to establish a white ethno-state but still engage in white supremacist rhetoric. All of the channels studied here perpetuate narratives of white victimhood, which are used to block equity- and justice-related actions and policies while fueling resentment against people of color. Despite the violence of their rhetoric, "alt-lite" figures like Lauren Southern and Milo Yiannopoulos have successfully leveraged their popularity on YouTube to secure book deals, speaking tours, and roles at news outlets, where they continue to mainstream their reactionary ideologies.

Meanwhile, YouTube's efforts to "tackle hate" on the platform have proven ambivalent (YouTube, 2019). The platform's demonetization of popular right-wing accounts has been met with loud backlash and accusations of censorship, which paradoxically reinforce the narrative of white persecution while prompting creators to diversify their income streams through subscription models and crowd-funding (e.g., Crowder, 2019). YouTube's removal of two known white nationalists in 2019 caused such a clamor that the individuals' accounts were quickly re-instated (BBC, 2019). In June 2020, YouTube finally banned Richard Spencer and David Duke, a former grand wizard of the Knights of the Ku

Klux Klan, from the platform. Two of the “alt-lite” YouTubers discussed in this article, Stefan Molyneux and Gavin McInnes, also had their channels taken down that month. By the time their channels were removed from YouTube, both these men had gained substantial followings—360,000 subscribers to McInnes’s channel and almost 1 million to Molyneux’s—and had been active on the platform for well over a decade.⁶ This practice by the platform of removing channels that engage in racist discourse only *after* their creators have gained success and notoriety, accruing financial rewards along the way, exemplifies the too-little-too-late cyber-libertarian approach to content moderation so often adopted by tech platforms (Daniels, 2009).

Conclusion

In this article, I collected discursive threads from “alt-lite” YouTube videos to better understand a contentious and vaguely defined group within the online political landscape. Watching these videos, it becomes clear that—despite their protestations—“alt-lite” personalities are firmly entrenched in white supremacist ideology. First, these personalities frame any discussion of white supremacy or white privilege as an act of racist aggression. Second, they insist that people of color are indebted to the achievements and benevolence of white people throughout history. Third, they suggest that efforts to uplift or protect historically oppressed groups are in fact a kind of structural discrimination against white people. Finally, they share a set of “mitigating strategies” which allow them to position themselves as provocateurs and color-blind conservatives while avoiding de-platforming by companies like YouTube, which tend to adopt narrow and outdated definitions of white supremacist content.

This article moves away from discussing pro-white ideology as marginal or fringe and aims to highlight how white identity politics have grown out of mainstream understandings of race and racial difference. It also problematizes the assumption that “alt-lite” content is less extreme in its arguments and assumptions than “alt-right” and white nationalist content. There remains a significant knowledge gap in understanding the effects of such content on individual viewers, and future scholarship should seek out respondents from online communities to better understand the connections between progressive speech and reactionary responses. Learning about these connections through qualitative and quantitative methods can help anti-racist scholars and activists to target their interventions. Still, the work of critically analyzing discourse remains an essential step. Doing so helps us to better understand the evolving logic underlying racist ideology and better serve the emancipatory aims of critical theorizing.

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Notes

1. The term “alt-right” is adopted critically in this article (and kept in quotations) to reference a recent iteration of white supremacist organizing that seeks to disguise its hateful ideology with pseudo-academic language and digitally literate branding.
2. The Intellectual Dark Web (IDW) is a network of YouTube personalities, mostly academics and talk show hosts, who position themselves as public intellectuals challenging the rigidity of progressive orthodoxy.
3. Of the 13 channels listed, all but two (Rebel News and Breitbart News) are centered on individual personalities. Of these 11 individuals, all are white except for Lauren Chen, who identifies as “Asian” and “half Chinese.”
4. SJW stands for “social justice warrior,” which is a term conservatives frequently use to disparage progressives.
5. The conceptualization of “white culture” by far-right groups is itself an anachronistic invention, which encompasses everything from ancient Greek philosophy to modern-day rock music. It is worth noting that the ancient figures, who are often raised up as examples of white achievement, would not have conceived of themselves as “white” or belonging to a “white race” (McCoskey, 2002).
6. Both McInnes and Molyneux started their YouTube channels in 2006.

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