Gavin McInnes’s hate machine
by Robert Tynes

Abstract
At first, the Proud Boys were a seemingly innocuous white boys club that sprouted from the banter and riffs of online talk show host, Gavin McInnes. But the far right group grew into a nation-wide white supremacist organization. The group came about, thanks to McInnes and his *The Gavin McInnes Show* (TGMS). The Proud Boys and Gavin McInnes are a prime case study of the problem of free speech and the Internet. Here we see hate speech hiding behind the protective cloak of free speech. The conundrum becomes: How do we deal with fascist politics in the democratic space of the internet? The study conducts a frame analysis of over 32 hours of TGMS, utilizing Stanley’s (2018) rubric of fascist politics. By analyzing McInnes’s online discourse — his hate machine — we obtain a deeper understanding of how fascist politics gently slides into the mainstream and becomes a threat to peaceful political action.

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Introduction
On 3 October 2020, the crass online personality Gavin McInnes showed up at a get well soon rally for U.S. President Trump outside Walther Reed Hospital. McInnes was rallying with his Proud Boys devotees. Two years earlier, he and the Proud Boys were banned from Twitter, Periscope, Facebook and Instagram. PayPal canceled his ability to conduct transactions through their service. These platforms were attempting to curb the harm caused by members of the far right group and McInnes, a self-described Western chauvinists, or at least to deflect any taint they may have left on these social media companies. Given that McInnes’s Proud Boys had achieved national prominence by 2020. One wonders what good the banning may have done.

The Proud Boys and Gavin McInnes are a prime case study of the problem of free speech and the Internet. Here we see hate speech cloaked as neutral “free speech,” as in: “I’m just speaking my truth and this is a public forum.” The fact, however, is that the rhetoric spouted by McInnes is actually fascist political action. McInnes is using social media and paywall protected programs to mobilize hate. This speech may be protected under the First Amendment of the U.S. Constitution; however, social media companies and online programmers do not have to publish such content. But they can, and do. So, the conundrum we have to consider is: How do we deal with fascist politics in the democratic communication spaces of the Internet?

According to McInnes, the Proud Boys are not Nazis, nor are they “fag haters”; rather they are an inclusive men’s club
that grew out of “guys being guys.” We “started the club because a producer from an old comedy vidcast was a 24 year old virgin who refused to quit porn. It could have been called the ‘getting Ben laid’ club” (McInnes, 2018). The group was an informal collection, connected in spirit through McInnes and his rants on The Gavin McInnes Show. Broadcast online via the crass and conservative entertainment company CompoundMedia, The Gavin McInnes Show was right-aligned, political commentary often masked as “just good fun” discriminatory humor. McInnes saw himself as a hipster, huckster, hacker, stirring it up for his virtual community. Then, in July 2016, McInnes “convened his local ‘Proud Boys’ chapter for their first in-person meeting” (Disser, 2016). What had been an Internet band of brothers, fan club had now become solidified as a dive-bar-bound group of far right provocateurs.

Over the next year, the Proud Boys evolved into a national organization with thousands of members in cities such as New York, Seattle, Portland, and Fort Worth. Meanwhile McInnes roused the left by giving a talk at New York University in February 2017. The lecture/diatribe riled up students and eventually devolved into a street skirmish between Proud Boys and members of Antifa. A few months later various Proud Boys appeared in alt-right rallies in Berkeley, California, then, in August, Proud Boys representatives joined the Unite the Right (UTR) rally in Charlottesville. McInnes was not at the UTR rally, though, and so he did not join in the political violence. Instead, he was broadcasting ambiguous messages on his Internet shows and podcasts, disowning some of the most extreme Proud Boys, including white supremacist Jason Kessler, while still cracking heinous jokes about immigrants, gays, transsexuals, and feminists. More violence broke out in October in New York City outside of the Metropolitan Club. McInnes gave a talk at the Republican venue and afterwards Proud Boys members fought with Antifa protesters.

By August 2019, Gavin McInnes and the Proud Boys became an even more prominent far right force. Chatter on Twitter and numerous news outlets, such as the Guardian and the New York Times, hinted that violence could ensue as the Proud Boys hyped their upcoming rally against Antifa in Portland, Oregon. The Guardian reported “500 rightwingers” showed up at the event, travelling “from around the country to march back and forth across the city’s bridges, and briefly occupy a patch of its waterfront” (Wilson, 2019). Despite the hype, there was minimal violence, confined to a few incidents. According to Proud Boys organizer Joe Biggs, the point of the rally was not to cause mayhem (even though Biggs had made inflammatory statements on social media leading up to the event). According to Biggs, the rally was a success because it garnered national support, including support from President Trump: “Go look at President Trump’s Twitter ... He talked about Portland, said he’s watching antifa. That’s all we wanted. We wanted national attention, and we got it. Mission success” (Papenfuss, 2019). A day before the event President Trump had tweeted, “Major consideration is being given to naming ANTIFA an ‘ORGANIZATION OF TERROR.’ Portland is being watched very closely. Hopefully the Mayor will be able to properly do his job!” (@realDonaldTrump, 2019). It was fitting that Biggs pointed back to a social media message from the President for legitimacy.

By 2020, the Proud Boys were well-known participants in political violence at Black Lives Matters across the U.S. Their prominence was boosted even more when, during the U.S. Presidential on 29 September 2020. Trump was asked by moderator Chris Wallace if he would denounce white supremacists, such as the Proud Boys. Trump hedged his answer and did not directly condemn racism. Instead, he replied that the Proud Boys should “Stand back and stand by.” The Proud Boys immediately adopted the phrase as a rallying slogan on social media platforms including Telegram. For the group, it became a presidential directive to get ready to be violent on election day.

This article first looks at the beginnings of the Proud Boys, a seemingly innocuous white boys club that sprouted from the banter and riffs of online talk show host, Gavin McInnes. It is an examination of how a populist radical right [1] group formed, thanks to McInnes and a combination of open access social media and a paywall protected Internet show called The Gavin McInnes Show (TGMS). The Proud Boys are unique in that they evolved from TGMS and took to the streets; meanwhile other platforms and far right hosts, such as Ben Shapiro, Alex Jones, and Steven Crowder, have not produced a highly organized, far right, activist groups. In this respect, Gavin McInnes seems to be doing something different.

In order to uncover this difference, the following study asks: What are the rhetorical strategies that McInnes and his crew employed online? Is it fascist politics sparking violence or is it, as McInnes claims, “just joking around”? By looking at McInnes’s online discourse, his hate machine [2], we get a better glimpse at how fascist politics gently slides into the mainstream.

As a marketer and political entrepreneur, McInnes seems to be capitalizing on the convergence of at least three social forces in the U.S.: Populism, Disintegrating Manhood, and the White Identity Crisis. These social forces are discussed in the theoretical framework section of the article. The objective is to reveal some of the grander dynamics involved in the production of the Proud Boys phenomenon, and taking advantage of some ready-made, American historical discourses.
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The locus for processing these social forces becomes social media and *The Gavin McInnes Show (TGMS)*. The fascist political tool section of the article presents the instruments, or rhetorical moves, that McInnes’s discourse utilizes. Stanley’s (2018) dimensions of fascist politics become strategies for McInnes. A frame analysis of McInnes’s media content demonstrates that McInnes’s seemingly slick bravado is actually an assemblage of hate. The implications of McInnes’s discourse are addressed in closing.

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McInnes's background and birth of Proud Boys

McInnes describes himself as coming from a punk nerd background, growing up in a town near Ottawa, Canada. In his book, *The death of cool* (2012), he wrote that he played in a band called Anal Chinook in the late 1980s, had been stomped on by Nazi Skinheads, had lots of sex and consumed plenty of drugs (McInnes, 2012). Eventually, he and his friends stumbled through an idea called Vice magazine, which they later turned into a television show. After founding Vice, McInnes left the show and went on to develop several other projects. Along the way, he continued to drink and do drugs, have sex, and hassle the press: “Pranking the media went from a lark to a lifelong commitment” [3]. Meanwhile, he became a media entrepreneur; starting an advertising company called Rooster NYC; making the films *The Brotherhood of the Traveling Pants* and *How To Be A Man*; appearing as a regular on Fox News’s *Red Eye*; and developing a pilot show for Al Gore’s network, *Current TV*. As a self-identified “attention whore”, McInnes combined his rabble-rousing teenage roots with a mass media savvy that helped maintain a focus on him. In 2015, after appearing on the video podcast *The Anthony Cumia Show*, he went on to host his own, paywall-protected video podcast called *The Gavin McInnes Show*. It was here that the Proud Boys became an itch, then an idea, then a thing.

The Proud Boys were not an intended consequence of political forethought (McInnes, 2016). The root of the idea for the group appeared to develop from the first 10 or so episodes of *The Gavin McInnes Show*. One of the running gags/projects was to get one of the producers, “Rat,” laid. Rat became emblematic of why American men were pathetic — they were nerdy, unmotivated, and not persistently in search of sex. They had had the “man” sucked out of them, thanks to feminism and PC culture. Over the course of many more episodes, the idea matured and a fan base grew. After the show, McInnes and the soon-to-be Proud Boy entourage spilled into the night and continued their anti-wimp camaraderie. Said McInnes (2016):

> What began as a few fans in a bar across the street from the studio singing “Proud of Your Boy” and laughing at the reparations videos of Gazi Kodzo soon became a bona fide men’s club with rituals, traditions, and even its own in-house court called “The Sharia.”

The group became grounded in the identity of “Western chauvinists who refuse to apologize for creating the modern world” (McInnes, 2016), and they developed an idiosyncratic method for inclusion, such as #NoWanks, which meant laying off masturbation and porn for 30 days. There were at least four different levels, or degrees, to being a Proud Boy. The first degree meant publically declaring your allegiance to the group. The second degree involved committing to #NoWanks and getting punched by five men until you could blurt out five breakfast cereals (note that this ritual was pulled from McInnes’s younger days in Canada [4]). The third degree necessitated the person getting “Proud Boy” tattooed on their body. The fourth degree involved “engaging in a major conflict for the cause” (Proud Boys USA, 2019). Rallies against Antifa and raucous meet ups in various cities became opportunities to earn the fourth degree; a chance to beat up the opposition for the Proud Boy cause. It was here that the Proud Boy identity appeared to solidify as a group consciousness [5].

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Theoretical framework

The essential question that this research confronts is: How did McInnes’s speech produce a prominent, mainstream, far right, hate group — the Proud Boys. After all, there are numerous far right and alt-right opinion leaders on the Internet, such as Ben Shapiro and Stephen Crowder. And there are certainly numerous hate groups spouting their rhetoric on the Internet, such as the Atomwaffen Division, Patriot Front, and the Ku Klux Klan. But none of these Internet hosts have created, nurtured, and mobilized white men to be politically active and confrontational — willing to fight for their
Western, male culture — in such a nuanced, and slippery, way. As noted by the Southern Poverty Law Center (2020): “McInnes plays a duplicitous rhetorical game: rejecting white nationalism and, in particular, the term “alt-right” while espousing some of its central tenets.” McInnes’s crafted rhetoric has not only generated the Proud Boys, but it has also enabled the group to be accepted into mainstream political arena, which includes being legitimized by the U.S. President Donald Trump.

The general explanation for the phenomenon seems to be a combination of multiple social forces converging, which are then activated by a soon to be prominent right-leaning media/opinion leader, hate entrepreneur — Gavin McInnes. In order to see what might be occurring, it is necessary to accept a significant global social force, a political economic force that was highly significant in the 1970s and then continued on to have devastating effects past the second millennium: neoliberalism.

As Harvey (2005) has stated, neoliberalism enacted a worldwide ‘creative destruction’, not only of prior institutional frameworks and powers ... but also of divisions of labor, social relations, welfare provisions, technological mixes, ways of life and thought ... ” [6] We may mistakenly assume that economic forces are only monetary shifts, but this hides the reality that any new, major economic force entails a significant restructuring of how people relate to one another. Klein (2008) argued that the neoliberal restructuring was intentionally disruptive and violent. It was nothing but threatening, and that threat is what the world has been living with for decades. Additionally, with neoliberalization, we find that the new structure promotes an exhaustive preference for individual gains over group well-being. The result is a hyper-emphasis on identity. As a consequence, numerous other social forces react and attempt to counter the social psychological effects of neoliberalism. The Proud Boys, I argue, are an expression of this dynamic.

Some reverberations/reactions to neoliberalism that are at play in the United States, and are relevant to the formation of Proud Boys:

1. Populism
2. Disintegrating manhood
3. The white identity crisis

Populism

Although populism in America dates back to the Know Nothings party of the mid-1800s, the most contemporary and well-known manifestation emerged with the Tea Party in 2009. In 2016, populism grew into a nation-wide social force. As such, the thin-centered ideology of “the people” becomes a major factor in the Hillary Clinton versus Donald Trump presidential election (Mudde and Kaltwasser, 2017). Clinton metamorphosed into the an emblem of elitism, while Trump, with his crass and crude past (“grab some pussy”) and in-your-face threats (“lock her up”), rose to prominence as a representative of the common folk. With the election, the polarization of American politics created a clearly defined form of populism that was grounded upon:

an ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic groups, “the pure people” versus the “corrupt elite”, and which argues that politics should be an expression of the volonté générale (general will) of the people. [7]

Ironically, the moral framework had shifted away from proper behavior and respect for others, and towards a new normal, where elites were the enemy (as pronounced by an elite, real estate millionaire), and the people were the victims (as was Trump, according to the new norm). Further, the general will of the people was being ignored and needed reinstatement (“Make America great again”) [8].

It was during the rise of this new American populism environment that Gavin McInnes and the Proud Boys came into being. McInnes donned the same stance that many other far right pundits assumed: all politicians were corrupt, the media lied and “PC” culture was ruining the country. For McInnes, The Proud Boys represented the general will, a group of men who were trying to reclaim a universal manhood that had been eroded by pluralism (as represented by homosexuals, blacks, transsexuals, and feminists). They were the prototypical populist—“antipluralist” and in search of direct representation in the form of Gavin McInnes [9]. After all, it was McInnes who had the ability to make the classic populist claim that his people, The Proud Boys and other far right representatives on his show, are the people “and that only the populist [McInnes, et al.] represents this real or true people.” [10]

Disintegrating manhood
Before the contemporary rise of populism, another social force had been developing since World War II, that of disintegrating manhood. In *Stiffed*, Faludi (2000) argues that America emerged from the war:

> “with a sense of itself as a masculine nation, our ‘boys’ ready to assume the mantle of national authority and international leadership. The nation claimed an ascendency over the world, men an ascendency over the nation, and a male persona of a certain type ascendency over men.” [11]

Over the following decades, this hyper-focus on manhood slowly disintegrated, as the national claim of “man builder” fell apart piece by piece. Men returning from war did not get whatever they wanted as reward for giving their lives. Cold War dominance did not fully materialize. Subsequent wars, especially Vietnam, no longer “made men.” Instead, they seemed to produce humiliation. The 1960s with feminism and the rise of corporate, desk-centric labor, further deflated the man from the male. Once the 90s hit, disillusionment turned to anomie:

> “The frontier, the enemy, the institutions of brotherhood, the women in need of protection — all the elements of the old formula of attaining manhood had vanished.” [12]

The women’s movement may have helped create the perception that men were the out-group, but it was clearly not the only factor. Nevertheless, the result was a backlash, a men’s movement to counter the perceived enemy, feminism, and to reverse the present, a burgeoning pluralism.

As victims, Gavin McInnes and The Proud Boys have cultivated a following of frustrated males, seeking to re-inflate manhood for the country. Similar to the men who Kimmel (2017) writes about in *Angry white men*, The Proud Boys are men who are refusing “to be dragged kicking and screaming into that inevitable future” [13]. The problem, according to Kimmel, is not that men have lost so much and are now destitute in America. Rather, men in the U.S. are experiencing “aggrieved entitlement” or the notion that what was rightfully theirs had been stolen by forces they cannot see. American men assumed that they were “the heir to a great promise, the American Dream ... [but that] turned into an impossible fantasy for the very people who were supposed to inherit it.” [14]

McInnes himself took on the role of warrior for the lost cause of men. Drawing from his own narrative of a raucous past filled with sex, drugs, money, sex, drugs, money ... and more sex (McInnes, 2012), he decried how pathetic and weak males are today, in part, thanks to feminism and PC culture. At least the first ten episodes of *The Gavin McInnes Show* involved “making a man” of the 24 year-old virgin, nicknamed Rat. For McInnes, Rat was a victim of today’s world, someone so disempowered that he chose to watch porn, masturbate, and stay away from women. As a consequence, Rat became McInnes’s project, trying to get him to have sex with some of his buxom guests, and encouraging him to learn to fight, to kick some ass. Ultimately, Rat was a failed effort for McInnes. Nevertheless, he was essential for helping to mobilize a male fan base and larger following, who were ready to mobilize politically for the cause of the aggrieved, entitled, American man.

### The white identity crisis

Instead of easing racial tension, the election of Barack Obama signaled the polarization of the American electorate around skin color. Then, in 2016, the Trump presidency solidified the white vs. black divide. Bunyasi (2019) found strong evidence that whiteness was a significant factor in the election of Donald Trump in the 2016 presidential primaries. Bunyasi’s study showed that Trump “was especially supported by whites who think that their racial group fares worse in the job market than do black Americans ... who believe that there are generally more disadvantages to being white than there are advantages; and who disagree with the notion that systematic racism mainly benefits whites.” [15] Even though racism was a major, if not the major, historical fact of America, after the year 2000 it seemed that the nation was moving towards greater civil rights and had made significant progress towards preventing and expunging race-based hatred. In 2016, however, the opposite, negative trend began, and “white identity” became politicized. [16]

The politicization of whiteness, according to Jardina (2019) can be “activated in response to group threat.” [17] In the U.S., the idea that whites were a minority, helped create the crisis. The populist, nativist narrative of illegal aliens invading the homeland stirred up white anxiety, and, as Jardina suggested, some whites “co-opted the language of subordination and oppression.” [18] The “white male persecution complex” was readily apparent with the Bret Kavanaugh Supreme Court confirmation hearings in 2018 (Pozner, 2018). Fox News host Tucker Carlson went so far
as to say that “criticisms of Kavanaugh and the power systems that hold him up are a form of ‘genocide’ against white people” (Marcotte, 2018). After more than 250 years of being on top, whites had flipped the narrative, even though it was not the reality.

McInnes is more than willing to incorporate the white identity crisis into his rhetoric. He has had guests, such as British white nationalist Tommy Robinson, on his show to talk about the attack on western culture — a veiled euphemism for white people. McInnes has also rambled off into rants about the invasions of immigrants, making masked references to the Great Replacement [19]. Further, McInnes supports the notion that white genocide is a fact (Coutts, 2017). The counter, for McInnes, is The Proud Boys, who are proud to call themselves Western Male Chauvinists, a group of men are at war with other impinging “cultures”. Jardina’s discussion of the progression from white identity to white consciousness provides a clear analytical lens of what has happened with The Proud Boys. McInnes has encouraged the politicization of white identity and he has continually encouraged whites and the Proud Boys to believe that their group experiences some type of deprivation, which they “should work collectively ... to address the group’s grievances.” [20]

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**Fascist politics as a tool**

The main focus of this research is to understand how Gavin McInnes is mobilizing white men for political, sometimes violent, action. Because McInnes is a media entrepreneur, he has built and enacted his message on social/internet-based platforms. He has hosted vidcasts on paywall protected forums — The Gavin McInnes Show & Get Off My Lawn — as well as fully open venues such as YouTube with Rebel Media’s “How’s it goin’, eh?” and Gavin McInnes’s own channel, which has over 350,000 subscribers. Not only does McInnes have multiple shows and other social media accounts, on Twitter, and Telegram, etc., a lot of his content is reposted on YouTube or other sites when he gets banned from a platform. The result is constant amplification of his messages and the creation of a hate machine [21].

McInnes is not a traditional member of the elite. He is neither a U.S. Senator nor a Wall Street king, nor a leader of a powerful country. Rather he is picaro, a political entrepreneur, a media entrepreneur, a capitalist who utilizes Internet platforms to garner a following, a consumer base. He found a market and he became good at selling in that market place. As a consequence he also became a “symbolic elite” for the far right [22]. McInnes has always been plugged into mass media but it was not until he hopped on Internet platforms that he transformed into a far right leader. Via YouTube and other platforms he had joined part of the Alternative Influence Network (AIN). AIN is “an assortment of scholars, media pundits, and Internet celebrities who use YouTube to promote a range of political positions, from mainstream versions of libertarianism and conservatism, all the way to overt white nationalism.” [23] According to Lewis, YouTube has become a site where far-right ideologues have formed a communications network to counter mainstream media, and that network has become a powerful forum for shaping the political views of a younger generation.

McInnes and others have developed credibility on the Internet by stressing three qualities: Relatability, Authenticity, and Accountability [24]. Relatability includes letting the audience “in” by not acting like an elite broadcaster, using more common language and even freely swearing and discussing often less visualized topics. McInnes often fulfills this by drinking beer while filming, discussing buttholes and displaying images such as the anatomical, surgical transformation of transsexual transitioning from male to female. The relatability factor ties into Authenticity as viewers get the sense that they are talking to a “real guy” who, even if you don’t agree, at least he’s honest about what he thinks. McInnes films The Gavin McInnes Show on a low budget set with a desk and green screen. The image on the screen, however, looks as if it was an expensive major media set. McInnes does not hide this fact, though, and openly plays around with the green screen effect, showing the viewers that he is seemingly transparent about his façade. This component of credibility has become even more essential in the Trump, “post-truth” era of “fake news” (McIntyre, 2018). Finally, McInnes generates Accountability with a call-in line for viewers can shoot-the-shit with him, or viewers can show up to the studio and watch it live, which is how he cultivated the earliest iteration of The Proud Boys group.

While the AIN network has numerous hosts/influencers, Gavin McInnes is one of the few who has created a politically active far right group, The Proud Boys. Not only are they vocal, they have fought in the streets for their cause of Western male chauvinism. This study argues that McInnes is able to mobilize political actors in part because of his rhetorical strategies, and those strategies involve what Stanley calls fascist politics (Stanley, 2018). It is an approach
that “dehumanizes segments of the population. By excluding these groups, it limits the capacity for empathy among other citizens, leading to the justification of inhumane treatment, from repression to freedom, mass imprisonment, and expulsion to, in extreme cases, mass extermination.” [25] Fascist politics does not necessarily mean fascism, though. The point is that McInnes is using the strategies as a tool, as a “mechanism to achieve power” [26], and it is a tool that begins with dismantling pluralism and concretizing an Us versus Them ideology. Stanley outlines 10 different facets to fascist strategies within fascist politics:

1. The mythic past
2. Propaganda
3. Anti-intellectual
4. Unreality
5. Hierarchy
6. Victimhood
7. Law and order
8. Sexual anxiety
9. Sodom and Gomorrah
10. Arbeit macht frei

These are the mutually reinforcing rhetorical arguments that contribute to the dismantling of pluralism and the dehumanization of people.

1. The mythic past

This is when a reference to some sort of mythic past is invoked, “a pure mythic past that was tragically destroyed.” [27] Comments such as “How great things were once upon a time,” and how they have been threatened/harmed/dissipated now. Make America great again (MAGA) is an example of the myth past invocation in the Trump era. The speaker might proclaim it was a glorious, patriarchal past that was “lost by the humiliation brought on by globalism, liberal cosmopolitanism, and respect for ‘universal values’ such as equality ... [and the myths] are generally based on fantasies of a non-existent past uniformity.” [28]

2. Propaganda

Propaganda is when you deflect attention away from on your own corruption, inverting the logic and making false claims about the corruption of others. The strategy redefines what corruption is. It is “really about the corruption of purity rather than the corruption of law.” [29] Hence, you claim purity and denounce the other as impure.

3. Anti-intellectual

Anti-intellectualism entails the rejection of expertise, including in government, universities, science, and the media. It “undermine[s] public discourse by attacking and devaluing education, expertise, and language.” [30] Anti-intellectualism often includes attacks on gender studies and feminism; if education is promoted, it should “glorify the mythic past” [31], not reinforce plurality.

4. Unreality

Unreality is about dislodging the truth through “regular and repeated obvious lying.” [32] Conspiracy theories abound. Language is used to pass on information but also to evoke strong emotions; presenting lies or strong embellishments as truth under the flag of “speaking my mind.”

5. Hierarchy

Natural hierarchy becomes fact, and equality is seen as false or as an error in thinking. Hierarches of worth are the reality and “their existence undermines the obligation for equal consideration.” [33] Of course, patriarchy is the natural order. Survival of the fittest is unquestioned.

6. Victimhood

The degradation of the natural order/hierarchy creates victims, who are victimized by equality movements. The once dominant group is now oppressed and nationalism is rallying point for all those victimized.
7. Law and order

According to Stanley, “... law-and-order rhetoric is explicitly meant to divide citizens into two classes: those of the chosen nation, who are lawful by nature, and those who are not, who are inherently lawless.” [34] This may lead to exclusion based on gender roles, religion, race, etc. Threat is often invoked in this type of discourse. There is a strong use of Us and Them, right side versus wrong side.

8. Sexual anxiety

This strategy generates anxiety about and threats to manhood; “fear of interbreeding and race mixing, of corrupting the pure nation ... sexualizing the threat of the other.” [35] There might be talk of being raped by Them. Also, we find a constant “fear that one’s family is under existential threat from those who reject its structures and traditions.” [36]

9. Sodom and Gomorrah

The family and the rural community are a place of pure national values. There is talk of “hardworking rural residents” and supporters of the nation [37]. Cities become places of pluralism and threat. Making a families and making babies is essential for survival of the Us in-group.

10. Arbeit macht frei

Here the emphasis is on group value as a function of labor. ‘Work makes you free’ because you are a part of the enlightened in-group. Out of necessity, the out-group is demonized for their poor work ethic. They are lazy and criminal and “live off state largesse.” [38] In the U.S., the Protestant work ethic is “weaponized” against others [39].

Taken together, Stanley’s 10 strategies of fascist politics are a major force in shaping and narrowing a social group’s ideology and worldview. Some of the strategies may be more salient at times depending upon the situation and usefulness. In the rhetorical tool chest of a skilled media entrepreneur such as Gavin McInnes, these fascist tactics have created the ideological groundwork from which The Proud Boys have drawn justification for participating in acts of political violence.

Methodology

Given the central importance of Gavin McInnes as a symbolic elite (van Dijk, 1993), this study focuses on his mediated discourse — how he constructs both an in-group and an out-group based upon the contemporary competing social forces of Populism, disintegrating manhood, and the white identity crisis. As van Dijk (1987) argues, white majority group members do more than express their views when taking about an out-group, they also reproduce prejudice. Reproduction is not a passive action, though. It is an active method of persuasion, one that is controlled by the speaker at the cognitive level and one that attempts to alter the cognition of the audience (van Dijk, 1987).

This study utilizes frame analysis (Goffman, 1974; Entman, 1993) in order to understand the deeper nuances of the reproduction of the far right ideology, looking mostly at The Gavin McInnes Show (TGMS). TGMS is chosen because it is where far right, Western male chauvinists, i.e., The Proud Boys, were discursively created. As a text, TGMS reveals how McInnes reproduces the out-group (“gays”, “Jews”, “blacks”, “transsexuals”, “feminists”, etc.) and the in-group (The Proud Boys). More specifically, the show produces cognitive frames [40] that constrain perception of the issues and social groups discussed. Following Entman (1993):

To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communicating text, in such a way as to promote a particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described. Typically frames diagnose, evaluate, and prescribe ... . [41]

In order to determine which frames dominate, this study analyses Gavin McInnes’s Internet political commentary show, The Gavin McInnes Show, as this is where the Proud Boys were formed. The main rubric for coding is the ten elements of fascist politics outlined in Stanley’s (2018) text: the mythic past, propaganda, anti-intellectual, unreality,
Gavin McInnes’s hate machine

hierarchy, victimhood, law and order, sexual anxiety, Sodom and Gomorrah, and arbeit macht frei. These are the frames. The episodes are the unit of analysis. Episodes of shows were viewed and fascist political strategies were counted. A single sentence could have a single frame, multiple frames or no frames at all. A discussion might be a frame unto itself, or there could be many intertwining frames within the discussion. I coded the content and checked coder reliability by having another researcher code several of the episodes that I had coded. A comparison of the two codings showed a close to 95 percent similarity [42].

The sample for The Gavin McInnes Show consisted of 21 episodes, or approximately 32 hours of content. In total, there are 407 episodes of TGMS, spanning from 15 June 2015 to 23 August 2017. The sample examined the first 10 available episodes (#1-9 & 11), one random draw (#26), and 10 episodes surrounding the 2016 U.S. Presidential election (#238–247). These timeframes were chosen in order to test variation: the first 10 shows might not have involved fascist politics as the show was just beginning and McInnes might not have fully formulated his political rhetoric, and the Proud Boys had not materialized yet. The U.S. presidential election timeframe was a heightened political moment and a time of strong polarization. We might either see evidence of strong democratic frames or the opposite. Additionally, the Proud Boys were a fully formed entity.

Findings

The world that McInnes builds with his guests on The Gavin McInnes Show is self-referential. For his early shows in 2015, his guests included porn star Mercedes Carrera, far right Rebel Media founder Ezra Levant, far right political commentator and former Breitbart editor Milo Yiannopoulos, pro-Confederacy African American H.K Edgerton, sex offender rights activist Galen Baughman, and far right/conservative political commentator Ben Shapiro; and these were not anomalies. This eclectic spread of guest choices continues on into 2016 with appearances by the pro-Trump African American female personalities Diamond & Silk; British far right activist Jack Buckby; Canadian alt right, white nationalist Lauren Southern; antifeminist, South African-born Theryn Meyer; and British far right and anti-Islam activist Tommy Robinson. The cumulative effect is a discursive space that only has far right opinions. There is no room for critical debate. Even though McInnes argues his points with an unseen leftist audience, alternative views are never given a space to materialize. In total, these guest choices produce a discourse that is closed, circulating and recirculating opinions that only reinforce confirmation bias. They create the appearance of a majority, even though many of the quests are outsiders and debunked experts. The total effect of the guest base is to transform the right wing “silent majority” into an “outspoken only.” And the Them that manifests on the TGMS constantly bolsters the fascist politics frames.

Analyzing over 32 hours of TGMS using Stanley’s (2018) fascist strategies reveals one grand finding: all of the strategies are present at one time or another in the shows. Table 1 presents the count, mean and range for each strategy. Sexual Anxiety, Anti-Intellectual, Unreality, and Hierarchy are the most salient strategies, occurring 100–200 times each. The range is for the number of occurrences within each show. As shown in Table 1, some episodes are saturated with the fascist frames. The maximums are: Anti-Intellectual 23, Sexual Anxiety, 21, Unreality, 20, and Hierarchy, 17. The mean also demonstrates how consistently the strategies enter the discourse.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frame count</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Range</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sexual anxiety</td>
<td>213</td>
<td>10.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-intellectual</td>
<td>210</td>
<td>10.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unreality</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>7.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hierarchy</td>
<td>115</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victimhood</td>
<td>61</td>
<td>3.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Propaganda</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2 shows the top four strategies: Anti-intellectual, sexual anxiety, unreality, and hierarchy. Note that the Table divides into the first 11 shows analyzed (#1–9, 11, & 26) and then the episodes around the 2016 Presidential election (#238–274). Here we see sexual anxiety being the most prominent strategy in the first 11 episodes and then continuing on as significant into later episodes. For the 2016 presidential election timeframe, anti-intellectual becomes the more prominent strategy and unreality and hierarchy increase in strength when compared to the 2015 episodes.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>2015 Episodes 1–9, 11, &amp; 26</th>
<th>2016 Episodes 238–274</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Frame count</strong></td>
<td><strong>Mean</strong></td>
<td><strong>Frame count</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual anxiety</td>
<td>138</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-intellectual</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>12.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unreality</td>
<td>55</td>
<td>9.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hierarchy</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>5.8</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1 highlights the salience crossover from sexual anxiety to anti-intellectual.
The crossover from sexual anxiety to anti-intellectual, unreality, & hierarchy strategies reveals how social forces and timing have an effect on the discourse that McInnes puts forth. The beginning season of TGMS in 2015 is heavily influenced by the social force of disintegrating manhood as shown by the high levels of sexual anxiety. As discussed earlier, the first 10 episodes are obsessed with getting producer Rat/Ben laid. In Episode 3, McInnes talks about Rat as a symbol of a generation that has lost its manliness, specifically with respect to rampant sex: “Every time I look at Rat my cock heart snaps in two ... when I was your age I had AIDS”. That same anxiety is extended onto other threats to manhood such as transsexuality. Episode 9 dedicates a large part of the discussion to sexual reassignment surgery, specifically vaginoplasty. McInnes pulls up detailed anatomical images onto his broadcast screen. He talks the audience through some of the surgical procedure and then brings celebrity Caitlin Jenner into the discussion. Throughout the segment, McInnes makes comments about the surgery and how transsexuals “mutilate some more cock meat”.

By Episode 11, we find a further evidence of sexual anxiety with McInnes hosting comedian Dante Nero. Nero details his #NoWanks self-discipline concerning masturbation in which he pledged to himself not to masturbate “except once a month”. The point is to help Nero date more instead of staying at home and getting obsessed with pornography. McInnes readily appropriates the pledge, and #NoWanks later becomes a strong component of membership in the Proud Boys. Psychologist David Ley (2018) notes that masturbation has a long history of being blamed for a loss of manhood. This belief has been revived with the far right and conservatives with KKK member David Duke calling pornography a Jewish conspiracy to weaken white, Western males, and U.S. senator Ted Cruz in 2007 arguing that U.S. citizens “have no substantive due process right to stimulate their own genitals.” These are just a few of the discussions that proliferate within and across TGMS episodes, and the cumulative discourse around sex and manliness
Gavin McInnes’s hate machine expresses the influence of the disintegrating manhood social force.

Populism is one of the most ever-present social forces in the world post-2000 and we find its effects throughout TGMS. As shown above, anti-intellectual, hierarchy, and unreality are fascist political strategies that run through episodes spanning 2015–2016 and they become highly apparent surrounding the 2016 U.S. presidential election. These three strategies indicate a strong attempt to generate an Us versus Them dichotomy based around the idea of elites versus “the people.” In McInnes’s case, the elites are leftists/PC police, feminists, intellectuals, the media, among others. A part of the debunking the elites includes fabricating conspiracy theories and supporting lies. McInnes creates “the people” early in the life of TGMS, stating:

Red necks ate the salt of North America ... America is anti-intellectual and I know this makes the NPR folks mad ... sorry ... we left Europe behind. We do ‘fuck her right in the pussy’ jokes. We do Beavis and Butthead. We have Dumb and Dumber (Episode 3).

McInnes boasts of “commonness” and “the common people” as being less than intelligent are a discourse that populists, especially Trump, use again and again and again. The irony is that McInnes is Canadian (not American) and he is quite well off financially.

McInnes is almost always attacking the mass media and reporters (New York Times, CNN’s Jake Tapper, and so forth). These jabs at the press become boasts when Donald Trump wins the presidential election. McInnes repeatedly slams the media for “getting it wrong” because they ignored what the real people wanted and were feeling. He proclaims Trump to be of the people, even if he is an elite real estate developer, because “he tells it like it is” and will trash what needs to be trashed (Episode 243). Libtards are also to blame for not seeing the Trump win as possible. McInnes even claims the intellectual position has infected his son’s brain.

The prevalence of the unreality strategy supplies more evidence of populism as a social force in McInnes’s discourse. On the day of Trump’s win, McInnes expressed how he was not so sure Trump would win and he was concerned that the election would be rigged by bussing in Mexicans across the border to vote (Episode 244). During the same discussion McInnes spins off on a tangent a tangent to claim the “pussy grabbing is not cheating,” as if that connection to Trump’s pre-election comments about grabbing pussy were not transgressive. The unreality strategy spills over into the discourse of callers to the show as well. One guest caller claimed that Massachusetts “stopped the production of veal” and then went on to claim that Nazis were actually pro-ethical treatment of animals (Episode 243). The caller, as nurtured by McInnes’s discourse, has come to think that his opinion and misguided interpretation of history is legitimate. The self-empowerment of the caller is an indicator of how influential populism can be.

Hierarchy also supports the populist world-view and McInnes’s discourse is strewn with references to the election being about the “matriarchy versus the patriarchy” (Episode 242) and patriarchy being “back in the drivers seat” thanks to Trump’s win (Episode 244). McInnes even goes so far as to say “Last night we elected God” (Episode 243). Hierarchy peaks often during 2016, but it is not a new strategy. Early on in the TGMS we find women being the target of domination: “women deep down ... want to be subjugated” (Episode 4). We find that same hierarchical strategy expanded into an openly populist view. “There is this obsession with equality in this country that is unreal,” says McInnes (Episode 6). Hierarchy itself is enough of a marker for the presence of populist ideals and combined with the strong presence of anti-intellectual and unreality fascist strategies, the social forces is ever present in the discourse.

The third social force of white identity crisis is highly salient in the TGMS sample, not only through strategies such as victimhood, but also through the repeated use of the “n-word” by McInnes. A simple count of the “n-word” reveals that 70 percent of episodes have “n-word” mentioned at least once. Some of the usages include “n*** fart” (Episode 9), “n*** curse” (Episode 8), and “there is no ‘i’ in n***” (Episode 245). He says “n***” while pretending to be an African American (Episode 2), and he claims that Piers Morgan said “people who say n*** should go to jail” (Episode 3). Actually, Piers Morgan did not say the n-word. He said that Blacks should stop using the word out of respect for civil rights (Morgan, 2014).

By saying the “n-word” so often, McInnes creates a discursive space that allows for socially unacceptable speech. This empowers his audience to use the speech as well. In Episode 245, a caller said the n-word repeatedly when talking about graffiti. McInnes claims that he is doing this on purpose, as an act of free speech; and he has said numerous times during TGMS that he is not racist. At the same time McInnes jokes about sending slaves back to Africa. The repeated usage of the word is an attempt to normalize the practice, to, in fact, normalize racism. “What normalization does,” says Stanley (2018) is transform the morally extraordinary into the ordinary. “It makes us able to tolerate what
Gavin McInnes's hate machine was once intolerable by making it seem as if this is the way things have always been.” [44] The effect is to solidify White as an identity [45].

With whiteness fully entrenched in the discourse, McInnes brings in the notion of victimhood on average 3.1 times per episode. When Trump wins the election, McInnes celebrates on Episode 243, saying “We’re done with shame ... we’re done with apologies”. Guest Pat Dixon echoes the sentiment: it is the “dawn of a new era ... I feel like it’s white boy day”. And a caller later in the same episode talks about Hillary’s influence on the electorate: “It really is random how the targeted white males.” What McInnes has done with his discourse is made manifest the white identity crisis. By repeating racist language and tropes he polarizes identity into black versus whites. By framing the situation as white boys as victims he generates threat and pushes many viewers into a white consciousness position.

The social forces populism, disintegrating manhood, and white identity crisis are all apparent in the sample, thanks to several of the fascist political strategies. The other strategies are just as important and effective at motivating the audience. Here are some examples for each of the strategies:

Mythic past: McInnes says, “will give us our purpose and legacy back again ... It started in 1776” (Episode 242); “When does it end?” he says, “take down the Confederate flag, take down the American flag?” (Episode 4)

Arbeit macht frei: “We don’t have old money. If you bust your ass you can make millions,” says McInnes (Episode 243); “Get to work” and stop being a mopey, lay-about says McInnes to those who sided with Hillary Clinton; he frames Colin Kaepernick and kneeling as “lazy and cowardly” (Episode 241).

Sodom and Gomorrah: McInnes says, “Since the 50s we’ve incentivized welfare and split up the family” (Episode 1); “We need to start getting people to breed,” he says (Episode 11); To be clear to men, he says, “We’re here to breed ... we’re on the planet to make babies” (Episode 4).

Propaganda: “Hillary cheated,” says McInnes, “and that’s why they lost” (Episode 244); he claims that whites, not blacks are the ones really being profiled by the FBI (Episode 239).

Law & order: Why are people attacking men? He asks. “Men are responsible for putting people in jail.” (Episode 242); There is no evidence of cops hunting black men for sport, he says. “But you like that narrative.” (Episode 2); and a caller in another episode asks: “When is law enforcement going to get its teeth back?” (Episode 245)

In total, the findings from the sample analyzed make it clear that Gavin McInnes does engage in fascist political strategies in his show and the discourse created is extremely exclusionary — nothing but an Us versus Them environment. Further, while he may be at the center of the abrasive discourse, we can also see how the social forces of populism, disintegrating manhood, and the white identity crisis shape and focus the discourse enacted. Again, he becomes the entrepreneur of hate, harnessing these forces for his own benefit.

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**Conclusion**

One might argue that Gavin McInnes is not necessarily a fascist. However, it is obvious that he is using fascist political rhetoric as a tool to persuade his audience that the liberal elites in America are bad, and that white males are under siege. While his views may be obvious to some on the left, he has been able to persuade many that the invasion is real and that there is a crisis in the U.S. that must be fixed. The remedy, in part, is The Proud Boys and violent confrontation. McInnes’s language is at times slippery, but this study reveals that his message is racist, is exclusionary and does produce and reproduce hate. He may hide under a veil of free speech; nevertheless his words are not proposing freedom for all. In fact, pluralism is the enemy for McInnes. Because he generates hate, social media platforms have been justified in their banning of McInnes from their forums, even if the action only slows down mobilization of further hate.

McInnes is a master at manipulating popular notions of common sense. He proposes that immigration is a pathway to overcrowding and takeover. If we let everyone in, nothing will be left, he says. Why can’t I say the n-word, he argues, Blacks do it all the time? Trannies can’t make babies, he says, and isn’t that the point of genitals? By utilizing simplistic logic, McInnes convinces “the people” that they are the people, all of them. That’s just common sense.
But herein lies the problem. Common sense is not necessarily good sense. In fact, turning common sense “on” often turns critical analysis “off”. Gramsci warned of the dangers of common sense. He saw that common sense answers to complex questions reinforced dominant ideologies. By revealing the common sense frames that McInnes activates, we clearly see what ideology McInnes wants on top. This exposure is valuable and should not be dismissed, as his manufactured common sense “is also the site for the resistance to that ideology.” When we demonstrate that his ideas are not “common” at all, but rather fascists products meant to squash pluralism, then we can begin to develop democratic, counterstrategies that will hopefully diminish the appeal of The Proud Boys and political violence.

The grander problem remains, though: McInnes’s is not a solo act when it comes to generating hate. He is only one small node of an Alternative Influence Network (AIN), which has many actors who are not banned; and it is the network as a whole that sustains online hate. Further, social media, and other online content, producers may have the right to publish/produce what they want, and they can ban offensive and harmful content from individuals and groups. But when should they take this action? At what point does it become an imperative to stop the manufacturing of hate? The McInnes/Proud Boy case shows that the social media ban came too late, and that despite the ban, new venues, such as Parler, spring up to fill the absence. For now, the most readily available tool to counter the effects of McInnes’s rhetoric is to see it for what it is — a call to fascism and hate. Given the ever-increasing presence of white supremacy and racist political violence in the U.S., naming and understanding how hate machines develop becomes more than a theoretical exercise. It is an imperative for peaceful pluralism.

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Notes

1. For this study, I use Mudde’s (2017) distinctions concerning right-wing politics. For Mudde, far right is an overarching concept that includes both the extreme right and the radical right. The difference lies in the approach to democracy. The extreme right “fundamentally opposes democracy” (p. 1), whereas the radical right “accept[s] democracy ... but oppose[s] fundamental values of liberal democracy, notably minority rights and pluralism”. A further subset of the extreme right is the populist radical right “combines nativism, authoritarianism, and populism” (p. 2). The Proud Boys and McInnes are part of the populist radical right. Hence, far right in this study is shorthand for the populist radical right when attached to The Proud Boys and McInnes.

2. Hate machine here is a reference to Raunig (2010) in his reworking of Deleuze and Guattari’s (1987) concept of machine. For Raunig, abstract machines (one of which I am referring to as a “hate” machine) are “transversal concatenations that cross through multiple fields of immanence, enabling and multiplying the connections in this field of immanence” (Raunig, 2010, p. 106). McInnes, as media/hate entrepreneur, is corralling/harnessing multiple fields of immanence for his own empowerment.


5. In White identity politics, political scientist Ashley Jardina (2019) draws an important distinction between group identity and group consciousness that is pertinent to political behavior and violence. Group identity involves
attachment to, or favoritism for, a particular set or sets of people; and, “the stronger one’s identification with a group, the more meaningful that group membership is to one’s self image” (p. 35). Further, when threat is introduced, group identity can transform into group consciousness. Threat helps politicize identity to become a specific type of self-awareness. Consciousness “requires that individuals not only feel attached to their group, but that they also believe their group experiences some type of deprivation and should work collectively within the political system to address the group’s grievances. It is, in short, a mobilized political identity” (p. 40). With the fourth degree ritual, Proud Boy members assume that a threat to their identity is real and that they should fight to defend it. The degree institutionalizes group consciousness through political violence.

6. Harvey, 2005, p. 3.
8. See Guardino (2018) for a deeper exploration of the hegemonic aspects of the populist discourse, especially during the Reagan years.
11. Faludi, 2000, p. 16.
19. The Great Replacement is a far right conspiracy theory that proposes that “white women are not having enough children and that falling birthrates will lead to white people around the world being replaced by nonwhite people” (Bowles, 2019). For the far right, immigrants are the replacers and hence the enemy.
21. McInnes is similar to the political entrepreneurs/violent specialists as described by Tilly (pp. 34–35, 2003), who see a window of opportunity (Kingdon, 2003) for self-empowerment when social forces converge.
22. Van Dijk, 1993, p. 47. For van Dijk (1993), symbolic elites include reporters, writers, professors and other members of the media. This set of elites has “a primary role in setting the agenda” and affecting the norms of a society, and they “play a crucial role in both the reproduction of and the resistance against racism”; van Dijk, 1993, p. 47.
23. Lewis, 2018, p. 3.
27. Stanley, 2018, p. 3.
Frames are defined as “a spatial and temporal bounding of a set of interactive messages” (Bateson, 1972, p. 191).

Entman, 1993, p. 52.

Colleague Alex Pearl assisted in coding reliability and research for the project.


Stanley, 2018, p. 190.

McInnes does this with the word “rape” too, stating it again and again and again in the episodes and arguing that it is a very rare phenomenon as most women as more willing agents than they say (Episode 11).

Simon, 2015, p. 23.

References

@realDonaldTrump, 2019. “Major consideration is being given ...” 10:04 AM, 17 August, Twitter.


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**Editorial history**

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