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Blurring the Spectrum: Exploring Queer Conservatism

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BLURRING THE SPECTRUM: EXPLORING QUEER CONSERVATISM

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ABSTRACT

Running parallel to the groundbreaking and historic advancement of LGBTQ rights over the past decade has been the rise in the prominence and public discourse of queer conservative thinking. From the Log Cabin Republicans to far-right nationalistic politics, queer conservatives underscore both diverging ideologies within the modern American conservative tradition and the increase of far-right politics in Western societies. This study argues that queer conservatism, while traditionally less explored in the broader context of sexuality politics, is consequential to an understanding of the LGBTQ community and queer politics. Thus, an exploration of queer conservatism as a political ideology is explored, in addition to novel quantitative analyses of this community. Additionally, theories are offered to explain the rise of far-right nationalistic views within queer conservatism after the 9/11 and Pulse nightclub terrorist attacks. This study concludes that, while queer conservatism is a subset of the LGBTQ community, its foundations, legacies, and implications are critical to broader discussions of intersections of sexuality, heteronormativity, race, and post-9/11 politics.

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INTRODUCTION

On June 12, 2016, almost 47 years to the day from the LGBTQ rights movement-launching Stonewall Riots, a lone gunman opened fire on Pulse nightclub, an LGBTQ club in Orlando, Florida. After the over three-hour long standoff between the gunman, first responders, and negotiators, forty-nine were dead and fifty-three more were wounded – most of whom were the Latinx attendees of that evening's "Latin Night" (Rothaus 2016; Stolberg and Pérez-Peña 2017). The massacre, being the deadliest act of violence against American LGBTQ people, shook deeply not only the queer[1] community, but the wider American consciousness as well, as the Pulse massacre was the deadliest terrorist attack conducted on US soil since 9/11 and, until the Las Vegas shooting in 2017, the deadliest mass shooting in American history.

Though not as common in more contemporary times, violence and disruption directed at queer people in bars, nightclubs, and other gathering spaces holds a lasting legacy for the LGBTQ community. For decades during the early to mid-twentieth century, police raids on largely mafia-owned bars were not uncommon as these protections were never treated as gospel, nor in coffee shops and restaurants where drag

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[1] A note on language usage in this paper: the term "queer" is used throughout. Despite being commonly known as a derogatory term originally used against the LGBTQ community, "queer" has gone through a reclamation process by the gender and sexual minority community and is now increasingly used within the community. Taken from the LGBTQ media monitoring organization GLAAD, queer is generally accepted to mean, "An adjective used by some people…whose sexual orientation is not exclusively heterosexual." GLAAD also notes: "Some people may use queer, or more commonly genderqueer, to describe their gender identity and/or gender expression" ("GLAAD"). Finally, GLAAD's reference guide also stipulates "LGBTQ" being the currently accepted and preferred acronym for the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, plus, community. Because of the diversity of the LGBTQ community, "queer" is employed in this study. "Queer" is also used to employ the academic sense of the word and non-heteronormative analyses present in this work.

queens, transgender people, and other queer folks gathered[2] (Faderman 2015). Indeed, the Stonewall Riots began in the early hours of June 28, 1969 primarily as a fight against a police raid. And more recently, hate crimes committed against LGBTQ individuals at nightclubs have been documented like the 2014 case of a man setting fire to a Seattle nightclub because of his hatred of gays and lesbians (Carter 2014). Regardless of the perpetrator's motive, the violence witnessed at Pulse fit entirely too well into the collective memory of the LGBTQ community.

While the attack on Pulse brought kind words and reaffirmations of support for the LGBTQ community from world leaders, politicians, and activists (Chan 2016; Garunay 2016; Hunt and Jones 2016), an unusually impassioned response came from some unlikely sorts: conservatives. While many criticisms were levied at right-wing religious leaders' reactions to the shooting (Bever 2016) and the number of Republican Congressmen leaving out the LGBTQ community in their remarks about Pulse (Weigel 2016), some on the right were much more explicit in both their mention and support for the LGBTQ community.

Notably, then-candidate Donald Trump made specific overtures to the queer community in his first presidential campaign rally following the shooting, stating: "We want to live in a country where gay and lesbian Americans and all Americans are safe from radical Islam, which, by the way, wants to murder and has murdered gays and they enslave women" (Corasaniti 2016). Trump doubled down on these remarks in his

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[2] The queer community and the various mafias had a curious rapport with one another during this time, as the mafias could pay off police officers to ward off potential raids on their establishments, allowing the LGBTQ community a place of somewhat more security than other establishments they would otherwise attend.

nomination acceptance speech at the 2016 Republican National Convention – only a few weeks after the Pulse shooting – declaring: "As your president, I will do everything in my power to protect our LGBTQ citizens from the violence and oppression of a hateful foreign ideology" (Johnson 2016). These remarks were historic in that Trump became the first Republican presidential nominee to offer words of support for the LGBTQ community in a nomination acceptance speech.

Yet, Trump was not the only vocal and visible member of the right to comment on the Pulse shooting, the queer community, and radical Islamic terrorism. The alt-right[3] and gay provocateur Milo Yiannopoulos wrote an article for the right-wing media outlet Breitbart the day of the attack titled "The Left Chose Islam Over Gays, Now 100 People Are Dead or Maimed in Orlando" (Yiannopoulos 2016). Meanwhile, other neo-Nazi and historically homophobic individuals and organizations began spreading Islamophobic messages of support for the LGBTQ community (Falvey 2016). The overt critiques of Islam in the comments of Trump, Yiannopoulos, and others on the right cannot be understated, for they represent one of the most singular ties between traditionally homophobic and transphobic groups, and segments of the LGBTQ community.

The increasing political science literature investigating sexuality politics has provided many critical insights into the community. Several studies have highlighted that the majority of the LGBTQ community has traditionally voted Democratic and generally identify as liberal (Black et al 2000; Lewis et al 2011; Perrella et al 2012; Schnabel 2018;

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[3] The term "alt-right" was popularized by one the movement's founders and leading members Richard Spencer. While still somewhat loosely understood, the alt-right is generally understood to be those supporting far-right nationalistic, white supremacist, and anti-Semitic politics (Stack 2018).

Sherrill 1996). Other research has considered the interactions of LGBTQ rights issues on both general and LGBTQ-specific voting behavior (Abramowitz 2004; Hillygus and Shields 2005; Lewis 2005; Mulligan 2008; Smith et al 2006). However, due often to data limitations on the political ideologies, thoughts, and behaviors of the community, and the generally nascent and sometimes zeitgeist-focused nature of sexuality politics, research on the LGBTQ community has sometimes been limited in scope and purpose. Too often, LGBTQ individuals are treated as variables in social science research instead of being the focus of said research – or, as this study seeks to underscore, the community is treated as a monolith in our general and academic discussions.

Thus, when seeking to better understand the political beliefs of the LGBTQ community, it is necessary to dig beyond first-order questions typified by simple descriptive studies. Exploring queer conservatism is one route to this goal. Queer politics has not been immune to the growing tides of far-right fascination, populism, and nationalism over at least the past decade. Research is beginning to note what this tide looks like and how it is impacting broader politics (Bakker et al 2016; Bonikowski 2016; Snyder 2003). Evidenced by Trump, Yiannopoulos, and others to be expanded upon, many on the right are evolving their stances on sexuality issues for their political gain, and the queer community is doing just the same. Queer conservatism is particularly fascinating due to its intersection with beliefs often seen by the mainstream LGBTQ community as antithetical to their rights. Additionally, queer conservatism presents a newer and pronounced usage of one's sexuality as a vehicle for political expression, and the greater complexity with which queer conservatism shades ongoing explorations of far-right populism and nationalism.

Yet, most importantly, better understanding queer conservatism allows for a better understanding of the queer community. This community is notably one of the most diverse minority communities with its many intersections of multiple sexualities and genders, as well as racial, class, and certainly ideological distinctions (Ferris 2006). Obviously, queer conservatism has always existed. However, as will be argued in this study, even after the founding of conservative LGBTQ political organizations like the Log Cabin Republicans in 1978 (the first specifically-conservative LGBTQ political organization in the United States; "Our History") or GOProud in 2009 (a slightly more conservative organization than the LCRs; Zeller 2010), queer conservatism has largely been left out of both political science and historiographical surveys of the LGBTQ community.

Another justification comes from the political power held by the LGBTQ community and the conservatives within. As Gates (2012) explains in his report for the Williams Institute at UCLA, the 2012 LGBTQ vote was likely enough to swing the election in favor of President Obama, as the LGBTQ vote in Ohio and Florida – key swing states – appeared enough to push those states into Obama's corner. This importance is magnified considering 27% of the LGBTQ community voted for John McCain in the 2008 election (Huang et al 2016). Moreover, Donald Trump received only 14% of the LGBT vote – the lowest vote share among Republican nominees since 1992 (Huang et al. 2016). At face value, it appears Trump's historic inclusion of LGBTQ rights in his platform and rhetoric did not help him gain votes from the LGBTQ population.

Combining President Trump's historically low vote share among the queer community with the rise of more radically nationalist members exemplifies the need to better understand this segment of the LGBTQ community. Thus, this research proposes most simply the question: "What does queer conservatism look like?" Even though the question may be simplistic, the routes to answering are anything but.

To answer, this study is designed as follows: first, queer conservatism as an ideology is dissected, highlighting the differences between traditional and newer narratives; next, findings from quantitative analysis using the 2016 Cooperative Congressional Election Study are discussed; then, theories of homonationalism are offered for greater context and exploration; and finally, broader discussions surrounding the research question and data are presented.

A note on source material is important to include. While the foundational research for this study comes from scholarly works, many other sources come from news articles, video interviews published on YouTube, and other less traditional arenas. Because an examination of queer conservatism requires research on the fast-changing nature of this LGBTQ subgroup, and because this subgroup is one not yet frequently explored by political scientists or other scholars in published works, research outside of traditional areas of scholarship is both necessary and important. Every effort has been made to include reputable news and media outlets, and to approach even biased sources from an objective standpoint.

UNDERSTANDING QUEER CONSERVATISM

To begin exploring the politics of the LGBTQ right, it is important first to establish understood definitions. The ideologies discussed in this work are based more in contemporary understandings of conservatism. Focuses on tradition and hierarchy, law-and-order, largely Christian oriented, and a heavy importance placed on small governments are at the root of these ideologies (Schneider 2009). While conservatism in America is very diverse with deviations like morality-centered Christian conservatives, and so-called Country Club Republicans focused mostly on low taxes, fewer regulations, and a generally pro-business approach to politics, there are two distinct branches of conservatism found within the queer community: neoconservatism and paleoconservatism, or what may be more broadly understood as nationalism and the ideology most often employed by the alt-right.

Neoconservatism is often defined by spreading traditional American democracy around the globe and places a greater importance on US foreign affairs (Vaïsse 2010). Paleoconservatism is broadly understood as those conservatives concerned with the protection of a Western identity through greater economic and political nationalism, a restriction on immigration, and a central focus on traditional social policies and norms formulated around religious, ethnic, and national identities (Foley 2007). Scaling back US military intervention abroad often is also encapsulated in paleoconservatism, seen through many in the Tea Party (Skocpol and Williamson 2013).

Just as these splits exist among mainstream conservatism, so too do they occur within queer conservatism. Thus, in this exploration of queer conservatism, this section seeks first to trace the political foundations and evolutions of conservatism within the

queer community. This section will also place the evolutions and ideologies of the queer right into a broader frame found within general treatments of the LGBTQ rights movement and its political organizations. Understandably, because the majority of LGBTQ people lean towards more liberal ideologies, much of the history and political treatment of the rights movement has focused more on the primarily left-leaning organizations like the Human Rights Campaign, Freedom to Marry, the Gay Liberation Front, and the Street Transvestite Action Revolutionaries (Faderman 2015; Stryker 2017).

Political differences among left-leaning queer rights groups have existed since even the early Homophile movement of the 1950s. Historians and political scientists have noted this distinction as being assimilationist versus liberationist (Faderman 2015; Rimmerman 2002; Rimmerman 2008). It is exactly this frame, assimilation or liberation, which can be applied also to the politics and organizations of the queer right.

Rimmerman (2008) summarizes assimilationist LGBTQ politics as stressing the inherent sameness of queer and straight people. Put another way, the only difference between gay and straight America is the gender of one's romantic and/or sexual partner(s). Moreover, as society generally better understands that sexuality exists on a spectrum, this difference is barely one at all. Huntington (2015) perhaps best exemplifies the assimilationist narrative through her dissection of the same-sex marriage fight culminating in legalization via the Supreme Court case *Obergefell v. Hodges*: just like heterosexual relationships, same-gender relationships are loving, committed relationships, and same-gender couples possess the same ability as heterosexual couples to raise their children.

Conversely, liberationist thinking argues for the acceptance of queer people as a distinct cultural minority. What's more, liberationists identify the most important political struggle as against heteronormativity[4] rather than only fighting for civil equality among queer and straight society. This struggle stems from the belief that queer culture cannot exist under straight society so long as heteronormativity dominates our norms and politics (Rimmerman 2008). To simplify, liberationists advocate an accepted difference in society akin to, though not exactly like, distinctions of race or gender.

Due to the longer history of the LGBTQ rights movement based primarily on the left, it is understandable that the assimilationist and liberationist frame has been well established in LGBTQ scholarship. Yet, as will be discussed in greater detail below, recent evolutions within queer conservative thinking also fit within this frame. Thus, if we are to understand queer conservatism, it is crucial to understand the ways in which a queer person's sexuality intersects with, informs, and impacts their politics.

Naturally, this intersection yields different results for different people. So, in seeking to better understand the politics of queer conservatism, it is necessary to trace this ideology from the first and largest conservative LGBTQ organization, the Log Cabin Republicans (hereafter "LCRs"), then turn to the rising levels of right-wing nationalist and white supremacist thinking (aka "alt-right" thinking) present in queer conservatism.

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[4] Schilt and Westbrook define heteronormativity as "the suite of cultural, legal, and institutional practices that maintain normative assumptions that there are two and only two genders, that gender reflects biological sex, and that only sexual attraction between these 'opposite' genders is natural or acceptable" (2009, 441).

The Log Cabin Republicans and Mainstream Queer Conservatism

As noted above, queer conservatism can generally be understood in two camps – neoconservatism and paleoconservatism. The largest and most pervasive version of queer conservatism is rooted in neoconservatism and the conservative wave introduced by President Reagan. Take, for example, Guy Benson, a frequent commentator on Fox News and political editor of the conservative webpage and magazine *Townhall*. Benson argues that his sexuality is only one facet of his personhood, and that he cares more about traditionally conservative values like a small government, defense of the free market, and a strong military than he does about defining his politics solely on LGBTQ issues (PragerU 2018). This argument is one believed and employed by similar LGBTQ conservative thinkers and commentators like Dave Rubin, entrepreneur Peter Thiel, and President of the Log Cabin Republicans Gregory T. Angelo (Drabold 2016; Lloyd 2016; Riley 2017).

It is through the Log Cabin Republicans that classical queer conservatism can best be understood. As their website explains, the LCRs began as a fledgling group of gay conservatives opposed to what became known as the Briggs Initiative ("Our History"). Officially known as California Proposition 6, the Initiative, spearheaded by California state senator John Briggs, was a 1978 California referendum which, if passed, would have banned gays and lesbians from teaching in public schools and would have allowed for the firing of any teacher found to be advocating for or supportive of gay and lesbian people (Rimmerman 2002). The initiative came in the wake of general backlash against

the LGBTQ rights movement when many in the wider public believed exposing children to homosexuals could cause the kids to become gay, or that they may contract HIV/AIDS (Griffin and Ouellett 2003). As the LCRs note, initial polling on the initiative showed the Proposition favored 61% to 31% ("Our History"). Due to the hesitancy of many Californian Republicans and Democrats to fight the issue, many gay conservatives, gay liberals like Harvey Milk, and their allies rose to the challenge (McKinley 2008).

Specifically, gay conservatives in California chose to lobby key policy elites like former Governor and Presidential-hopeful Ronald Reagan. After successful lobbying efforts, Reagan wrote a November 1st editorial in the *Los Angeles Herald-Examiner* lambasting the Proposition, saying it "is not needed to protect our children," and, "it has the potential for real mischief. What if an overwrought youngster, disappointed by bad grades, imagined it was the teacher's fault and struck out by accusing the teacher of advocating homosexuality? Innocent lives could be ruined" (Reagan 1978, 19).

Due to the efforts of these gay activists, Republican and Democrat alike, several political elites, like Reagan, rallied against the Proposition including former President Ford, then-Governor Jerry Brown, and eventually, then-President Carter (LeVay and Nonas 1997). As a result, instead of the Proposition passing 61-31, it failed 58-41, with over a million more Californians voting against the Initiative (School Employees 1978). In response, those gay conservatives officially formed the Log Cabin Republicans ("Our History").

Since their inception and subsequent growth, the LCRs have focused on traditionally conservative ideals. As they explain, "Log Cabin Republicans are LGBT Republicans and straight allies who support equality under the law for all, free markets,

individual liberty, limited government, and a strong national defense" ("About Us"). Additionally, they note that the LCRs "believe equality for LGBT Americans is in the finest tradition of the Republican Party." They "educate [their] Party about why inclusion wins. Opposing LGBT equality is inconsistent with the GOP's core principles of smaller government and personal freedom." In 2012, the LCRs boasted 45,000 members and 44 chapters (Shapiro 2012; recent membership numbers have proven very difficult to find, as the LCRs do not usually publicize these figures).

The LCR fight for both traditional Republican values and the inclusion of LGBTQ rights within the Republican Party has led the organization to many battles largely within the Republican Party. The LCRs' next major battle post-Briggs Initiative came after Pat Buchanan's 1992 "culture war" speech at the Republican National Convention. In response to Buchanan's statements disparaging LGBTQ rights in what he called "a fight for the soul of America" (Buchanan 1992), and responding more generally to President George H.W. Bush's loss in 1992, the LCRs increased both their lobbying efforts and their attempts to unify the Republican party around a winning strategy ("Our History").

It was at this point when the operationalization of the LCRs' politics became increasingly succinct. Throughout the 1990s, the LCRs attempted to make in-roads with the Republican establishment. As the LCRs claim, their efforts led to many Republican lawmakers and elites such as Governor George Pataki of New York, Los Angeles Mayor Richard Riordan and New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani becoming "leading voices of inclusion and liberty" ("Our History"). However, their efforts during this decade are notably more complicated than the organization claims.

The LGBTQ rights struggle during the 1990s is often painted as one facing intense backlash against not only the general rights movement but broader social equality movements as well (Faderman 2015). The strengthening of the Religious Right over the course of the 1980s into the 1990s led to the sort of "culture war" described by Buchanan (Rimmerman 2008). So, to continue increasing their leverage within the party, the LCRs' leadership disavowed as well as they could the stereotypical image of the gay community during those decades.

As Rogers and Lott (1997) explain, it's unsurprising that throughout the LCRs' lobbying Republican elites, the organization frequently drew "sharp rhetorical boundaries between themselves and those individuals deemed part of the 'gay establishment' or associated with libertine lifestyles, queer theory, or direct action, confrontational politics" (500). This shirking of the image of the sexually liberal and radical gay was seen as an advantage by many in the LCRs during the '90s. One president of the Los Angeles club noted, "when [other Republicans] see that we're sitting at the table and not wearing leather jockstraps, their whole image of gays and lesbians will shift" (Rogers and Lott 1997, 500). In a similar vein are the remarks of Andy Smith, president of the Austin, Texas club, emphasizing that the LCRs "have to educate people that we are not left-wing, earring-wearing liberals" (Rogers and Lott 1997, 500). And another member of the LCRs, Jesse Walters, remarked "I think [campaign officials] were afraid we were going to be a crowd of radical leather men or drag queens" (Rogers and Lott 1997, 500-501).

The LCRs appeared to have gained even greater victories for inclusiveness during the early 2000s and the election of President George W. Bush. As they note, then-candidate Bush met with a group of gay conservatives, expressed his admiration for

hearing their stories, and the LCRs note the lack of anti-gay rhetoric in the 2000 general election ("Our History"). Moreover, President Bush's 2003 announcement of a $15 billion commitment to combat the global AIDS epidemic was celebrated by the LCRs ("Our History"). Others have noted, however, that Bush's announcement coincided coincidentally with the launching of the Iraq war (Dietrich 2007), and that the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, or PREPFAR, included stipulations that up to a third of the $15 billion be reserved for abstinence-only prevention, a method discouraged by doctors and activists involved in the global AIDS epidemic (Cohen 2007). Regardless, Bush's launching of PREPFAR was seen as a victory among the LCRs, the LGBTQ right, and the broader queer community.

While the early years of President Bush's first term appeared somewhat fruitful for the LCRs' mission, by 2003 the optimism surrounding the compassionate conservative's agenda faded. In June 2003, The US Supreme Court struck down Texas' sodomy law in the Lawrence v. Texas case, overturning the Court's 1986 ruling upholding Georgia's similar law in Bowers v. Hardwick (Spindelman 2004). And, in 2004, the Massachusetts Supreme Court ruled in Goodridge v. Department of Public Health that the state's civil marriage laws could not discriminate based on sex, making Massachusetts the first state in the country to legalize same-sex marriage (Wegman 2015). Despite these monumental gains for the LGBTQ community, the public and political backlash was swift.

Even before the Lawrence and Goodridge cases, social conservatives sought a constitutional amendment defining marriage as being strictly between a man and a woman (Rimmerman 2008). As the LCRs describe, though President Bush sidestepped

the issue of marriage equality and a constitutional amendment in the initial months following these high-profile rulings, his appointment of very conservative federal judges like the recess appointment of anti-gay Alabama Attorney General William Pryor made it clear that Bush would endorse the Federal Marriage Amendment (FMA; "Our History"). He did just that in February 2004.

Instead of applying a purely "sameness" argument or arguing about the inherent nature of same-gender relationships, the LCRs criticized the FMA on what they believed are tenants of the Republican Party: a focus on federalism, state autonomy, and liberty ("Our History"). In response to the Amendment, the LCRs launched a $1 million lobbying and advertising campaign ("Our History"). With that funding, the LCRs conducted a national opinion poll to measure public attitudes about civil unions, same-sex marriage, and the proposed FMA. Their data culminated in an advertising campaign with a television ad featuring Vice President Cheney's rejection of a federal marriage amendment at the 2000 Vice Presidential Debate, and targeted lawmakers in Washington D.C. and key states in 2004 like Missouri, Ohio, Florida, Arizona, and Texas.

Gauging the LCRs' impact on the FMA debate is difficult. Despite spending over $1 million on the issue and claiming that the House and Senate "overwhelmingly rejected" the amendments ("Our History"), the final vote tally was 227 to 186 in the House (short of the 290 needed; Musgrave 2004) and 50 against to 48 in favor in the Senate (shy of the 60 votes needed; Allard 2004). Even though the FMA was defeated, the debate would prove highly divisive not only for the nation, but for the LCRs as well.

In what was called by many pundits a "referendum on values" (Mulligan 2008, 109), the 2004 General Election was the first major outlet for public backlash against

LGBTQ rights post-Lawrence and Goodridge. While the impact of moral issues like abortion and same-sex marriage has been contextualized and lessened by scholars since the 2004 election (Abramowitz 2004; Hillygus and Shields 2005), the electoral outcomes were clear. 11 states ratified marriage amendments to their state constitutions, and President Bush won reelection (Smith et al 2006). Just as the nation was divided on the question of same-sex marriage, so were the LCRs. For the first time since the 1992 Presidential Election, the LCRs voted not to endorse the Republican candidate (Anderson 2004).

Withholding their support for President Bush's re-election did not keep the LCRs from continuing their mission of changing attitudes both within and outside of the Republican Party. In 2008, the LCRs endorsed John McCain in that year's General Election largely because of his opposition to the FMA, and they endorsed Romney in 2012 (Jacobson 2008; "With Endorsement" 2012). The LCRs defended their endorsement of anti-LGBTQ Romney over President Obama, who had by 2012 expressed his support for same-sex marriage, by emphasizing the "gravity of the economic and national security issues currently at stake." The LCRs also noted in the press release of their endorsement their optimism would eventually support the pro-LGBTQ Employment Non-Discrimination Act (Shapiro 2012).

In 2016, the LCR leadership decided not to endorse any candidate, though their President Gregory T. Angelo has been very supportive of President Trump since his victory, with Angelo describing Trump as "the most pro-LGBT Republican president in history" (Signorile 2018). This move has understandably been met with some ire, as President Trump has proposed a ban on transgender Americans serving openly in the

armed forces and many in his cabinet like Secretary of Education Betsy DeVos and Secretary of Health and Human Services Alex Azar have invoked religious liberty arguments allowing the denial of service to individuals with beliefs or lifestyles which may go against one's religious beliefs – moves deeply concerning to the queer community (Signorile 2017).

Notably, the LCRs have consistently employed much more centrist politics than others in the Party. Rogers and Lott (1997) note that from the early days of the organization, the LCRs have professed the guiding Republican principles of a free market economy, individual liberties, and strong foreign policy. Rogers and Lott also add that, despite the "big tent" nature of the GOP and their claimed inclusiveness of multiple viewpoints, the LCRs have frequently and understandably been at odds with the Christian Right. Though the LCRs have never explicitly called the religious right their enemies, they obviously share political differences. Moreover, in 2004, then political director of the LCRs Patrick Guerriero stressed to other LCR members the importance of attending the 2004 Republican National Convention (even though they did not endorse President Bush) because they needed to "make it clear that we are loyal Republicans." Guerriero also saw the convention as an opportunity to show both the GOP and the country that there are "thoughtful, conservative gay Republicans." Yet, Guerriero also noted that if they do not do so, "the far right will be able to claim it as their convention" (Anderson 2004).

This centrism is evident also in the LCRs' approach to high-profile LGBTQ issues throughout their existence. While the LCRs state their core principles are those of the Republican party – a focus on individual liberties, small government, free market

capitalism, and a strong national defense – their lobbying and political efforts exist in a gray area between advocating staunchly for these principles while also taking actions more in the traditional center. Take the issue leading to the LCRs' founding, the Briggs Initiative. The entire basis for the LCRs' opposition to the law potentially banning LGBTQ people from teaching was a privacy argument and individual liberties argument: LGBTQ people are perfectly fit to be teachers, and what they do outside of the school walls isn't relevant to their professional ability. This argument can easily be interpreted as a classically conservative, civil liberties interpretation of one's right to privacy.

Yet, two of the most important LGBTQ issues of the 21st century, Don't Ask, Don't Tell (DADT) and the *Obergefell v. Hodges* case legalizing same-sex marriage, highlight how the LCRs have often moved to more centrist politics. The LCRs successfully argued before the federal courts in 2010 that DADT violated queer service members' First Amendment rights to free expression and Fifth Amendment rights to due process (Schwartz 2010). Additionally, the LCRs' partner think tank Liberty Education Forum filed an amicus brief for the Obergefell v. Hodges case arguing that same-sex marriage should be legalized not on the "sameness" argument of same-sex loving relationships and parenting as was commonly argued. Instead, Liberty Education Forum used discrimination evident in spousal exemptions in campaign donation laws – laws like *Citizens United* which conservative Justices at the time Alito, Thomas, and Scalia supported – to demonstrate existing discrimination against LGBTQ partners (Nelson 2015).

To be sure, the LCRs approach to these legal challenges fit within the Republican frame. Their challenge to DADT was one of furthering constitutional protections for

queer service members, and the Liberty Education Forum's brief challenged the Supreme Court to apply the decisions it had made to every partnership, hetero or homosexual. However, the DADT challenge also fits squarely within the "sameness" narrative offered by many left-leaning LGBTQ organizations, and the Liberty Education Forum decided to make their campaign donation argument to separate them from so many others making "sameness" arguments for same-sex marriage and parenting rights, a position they and the LCRs agreed with (Nelson 2015).

Yet, at its core, these challenges, as well as the LCRs' commitment to lobbying Republican elites and attempting to change the party from the inside underscore how the operationalization of a group's mission may differ from the ideological core they espouse. The LCRs challenged DADT and marriage discrimination in the courts. Many others on the right, especially religious conservatives, have lambasted the Supreme Court and other federal and state courts as being filled with activist judges creating social change without the consent of the democratic populace – though it should be noted these criticisms have been levied against conservative Supreme Court Justices as well (Young 2002; Schaller 2009). Much of the 21st century queer rights struggle has been fought in the courts instead of solely through lobbying or changing public opinion (Faderman 2015). In fighting for greater LGBTQ rights via higher courts, the LCRs have often left behind their focus on small government and states' rights in favor of sweeping change augmenting the civil rights of their queer constituency.

Finally, the LCRs have frequently been at odds with the Republican Party's platform. Despite positive words about President Trump from LCR President Gregory T. Angelo and Trump's remarks at the 2016 Republican National Convention (Johnson

2016), the Republican Party adopted many anti-LGBTQ planks to its 2016 platform including reaffirming marriage between a man and a woman, loosely supporting so-called "conversion therapy" for queer youth, and doubling down on discrimination against transgender people through the "bathroom bill" debates (Peters 2018). Moreover, the LCRs have frequently taken a neutral position on other hot button social issues like abortion ("Log Cabin" 1999; Shapiro 2012a).

This centrism has placed the LCRs in the crosshairs of queer conservatism. In 2009, Christopher R. Barron, then-national political director of the LCRs, and Jimmy LaSilva, then-director of programs and policy for the same group, left the Log Cabin to form GOProud, an organization of queer Republicans disillusioned with the centrism of the LCRs (McGurn 2009). Although GOProud folded in 2014, the group represented an important split from the LCRs, who had previously dominated queer right representation. GOProud represented a number of queer conservatives who believed that advocating for stricter tax relief and employing a similar ideology to the rising tide of Tea Party conservatism would aid both America and specifically the queer community (Shapiro 2012b).

Additionally, GOProud viewed the LCRs' platform as too focused on social issues like same-sex marriage. GOProud was supportive of same-sex marriage, but believed it to be a matter only for the states to decide, going against the more national focus of the LCRs (Zeller 2010). Moreover, whereas the LCRs have traditionally not taken a stance on other social issues like abortion, GOProud was staunchly pro-life (McGurn 2009). However, beyond a more state-level focused politics and some deviations on policy, GOProud did not have many grand splits with the LCR. Yet, despite

GOProud's relatively short existence, the organization was arguably the first among the queer right to break away from assimilationist, elite-focused actions of the LCRs. For these reasons, GOProud was an important blip and an even more important precursor to what would soon follow.

The Queer Far-Right and LGBTQ Politics

Shakespeare's adage "misery acquaints a man with strange bedfellows" is perhaps one of the most apt ways to approach queer individuals on the far right and their relationship with traditionally homophobic, transphobic, and nationalistic organizations. If one were to update Shakespeare's words, the phrase may go something like "terrorism acquaints a man with strange bedfellows," for it is almost entirely around the issue of radical Islamic terrorism that recent evolutions in queer conservatism is found. This exploration into the nationalistic evolutions among queer conservatives begins with a few caveats.

First, because voices among the radical right in queer politics have only recently gained attention on the mainstream level, finding and understanding their beliefs is a bit difficult. Additionally, the queer far-right is a small subset of an already small subset of the LGBTQ population. It is likely anywhere between 20 and 30 percent of queer people identify as conservative (Huang et al 2016). In 2017, Gallup released updated numbers on the American LGBTQ population, estimating 4.3% of adults, or 10 million Americans, identify as LGBTQ. Thus, combining these numbers with voting data places the estimated queer conservative population between 2 and 3 million Americans.

Yet, despite their size and a lack of hard data on this group, they are nonetheless important to examine, for the queer alt-right contextualizes both queer and straight

politics. What's more, the performance of one's sexuality in the political sphere within the queer far-right is as novel as it is important. So, this section will explain the queer far-right through the lens of some of its most important, popular, and impactful practitioners.

Pinning down the specifics of the queer far-right is admittedly difficult. As elements of the far-right like the alt-right have risen and popularized, the definition of the alt-right has changed as it has solidified. As the Anti-Defamation League explain, core tenants of the alt-right specifically include racism and anti-Semitism ("From Alt Right"). However, as the alt-right and its leaders like Richard Spencer rose to prominence, many who are not necessarily racist or anti-Semitic subscribed to the ideology because they viewed it as the anti-establishment conservative group. Lucian Wintrich, a prominent far-right gay journalist and White House correspondent for the Gateway Pundit, has expressed such beliefs and how he and others like Milo Yiannopoulos no longer associate with the alt-right. Instead, they fall under the category of "alt-lite" ("From Alt Right").

The major difference between the alt-right and alt-lite is that, in the words of alt-right writer and white supremacist Greg Johnson, "The alt-lite is defined by civic nationalism as opposed to racial nationalism" ("From Alt Right"). This distinction, while often difficult to nail down amongst far-right nationalists, is important to understand because the queer far-right exists in both camps. Lucian Wintrich and Milo Yiannopoulos are perhaps the most popular gay members of the alt-lite, whereas writers and activists like James J. O'Meara and Jack Donovan are popular among the white nationalist alt-right (Minkowitz 2017).

Regardless of differing beliefs on creating an American or Western ethnostate, the queer far-right shares far more in common than they do disagreements. Opposition to

immigration and Islamic extremism are strong features of this ideology (Minkowitz 2017). Additionally, many in the queer far-right take great issue with identity politics and political correctness. Indeed, so-called PC culture is Yiannopoulos' biggest target. Moreover, many in these camps, instead of labeling themselves as conservative, alt-right, or alt-lite, often don the term "cultural libertarian" (Rubin Report 2015). This ideology is often defined by the belief that people should be free from the dictates of cultural norms, thus explaining why issues of political correctness and ideologies challenged generally accepted power structures are seen as threatening. Shirking commonly understood or mainstream ideological monikers is another facet of both queer and general alt-right or alt-lite ideals.

Part of this phenomenon can be explained by the inherent anti-establishment nature of these far-right groups. However, when looking specifically to queer people in these spaces, the fluidity among these political ideals becomes starker. Yiannopoulos, while never being one to specifically label himself part of the alt-lite, expresses the exact views shared by the group. Moreover, Yiannopoulos has stated that his biggest concerns are about pop culture and free speech, but has said the only reason he talks politics is because of President Trump (Stein 2016). And in 2016, Lucian Wintrich rose to prominence over his controversial photoshoot "Twinks4Trump" which featured scantily clad, young gay men wearing Trump's "Make America Great Again" hats (Sopelsa 2017).

Discussing the ideologies of far-right queer conservatives is important, but I argue not crucial to understanding the significance and novelty of those like Yiannopoulos and Wintrich. Just as mainstream conservative queer people have always existed, so too have

those LGBTQ people more far-right inclined. What is new, different, and telling is the way many on the far-right utilize their sexuality as a political tool. Moreover, their using their sexuality as a distinct part of their politics is akin to liberationist thinking as discussed above.

Earlier, I noted that the assimilationist and liberationist frame has been widely employed through both historical and political accounts of the tension among the queer left. Such a tension, though more than likely there in some form, has never been this explicit on the queer right. The Log Cabin Republicans have always fit squarely within the assimilationist camp. By arguing for sameness and equality in civil law while also placing great importance on looking or acting nothing like the stereotypical libertine gay, the LCRs from their founding to present day have employed the same political tactics as the assimilationist, mainstream queer left (Rogers and Lott 1997; Signorile 2018). Put another way, the LCRs believe they are already in the "big tent" and are only trying to make it that much bigger.

Conversely, the queer far-right see themselves as more anti-establishment. The very fact that they use titles like alt-right and alt-lite instead of Republican is just one indication. Moreover, they frequently use their sexuality as justification and as a tool for their politics. Yiannopoulos has criticized same-sex marriage not with a religious argument or one seeking to maintain the social hierarchy of heterosexual marriage. Instead, Yiannopoulos has been against same-sex marriage because to him, being queer is a license to break away from the mainstream and live a freer lifestyle (Rubin Report 2015). Or in other words, Yiannopoulos argues for queerness, free speech, and free society as a place for gay people to live outside of heteronormative assumptions. Rather

than advocating for LGBTQ people's strict inclusion in society. Yiannopoulos and others view their queerness as defining their personhood and politics, and because society in many ways still otherizes the LGBTQ community, queer people have greater freedom to explore life, politics, and interactions with society in ways traditionally associated with being abnormal.

Lucian Wintrich also serves as an example of using one's sexuality to advocate for conservative politics. Wintrich is a staunch Trump supporter and free speech advocate who gained his notoriety through the controversial and highly sexualized "Twinks4Trump" photoshoot, a photoshoot he was later fired for (VICE News 2017). Instead of featuring gay men in the classic suit and tie – in other words, Log Cabin Republicans – Wintrich uses blatant queer overtones to advocate a political message. It is in the performance and operationalization of the queer far-right's politics that place them very much in the vein of liberationism.

The debates between assimilationism and liberationism on the left have largely defined how the LGBTQ rights struggle has operated (Rimmerman 2008). Whether it be the assimilationists lobbying political elites for change or fighting most of the legal battle in the courts, or the liberationists using more direct-action protest tactics, the history of the LGBTQ rights movement in the United States has exemplified the success of assimilationist tactics (Faderman 2015. What remains to be seen now is the ways in which the queer far-right and their more liberationist, anti-establishment views play out their political struggle. The LCRs have made inroads within the GOP through their lobbying efforts and they played a key role in overturning DADT through their legal challenge. Yet, the nascence of the queer far-right leaves more questions than predictions.

It is important to point out that, objectively, the LCRs helped open the door for queer people's acceptance in the far-right. However, because of the far-right's anti-establishment beliefs, there is much tension between the queer far-right and mainstream queer conservatives beyond core policy priorities.

The similarities between the queer liberationist left and right exist only in the ways they frame their sexuality as political and treat the idea of queer existence in society. The liberationist left like the Gay Liberation Front emerged during the explosive rise of the gay rights movement after the Stonewall Riots in 1969, and their main cause was queer liberation (Faderman 2015). The ideological priorities of the queer far-right are tied much more to their general political beliefs than on a single issue like civil protections. The alt-right and similar organizations only began courting likeminded queer conservatives after the Obergefell v. Hodges case legalizing same-sex marriage in 2015 ("Youth" 2015). Simply put, the queer far-right has risen more so after the major rights battles were won. So, while the queer far-right's main political objectives may not be solely about LGBTQ politics, they do benefit from a smaller barrier to entry and a far-right movement whose leaders at least want them in the fold.

Finally, because so much of the queer far-right's politics are wrapped in the current wave of populist nationalism, the movement generally has suffered growing pains. The split between the alt-right and the alt-lite underscores the instability still somewhat prevalent among this wing of conservatives. How long the nationalist mentality will exist in American politics is unknown. The important question when thinking about the LGBTQ people in the far-right is whether their sexual politics will

evolve as nativist debates continue raging, and if they will linger or change entirely when/if the nationalistic pendulum swings the other way?

DATA AND ANALYSIS

Analyzing the rhetoric and purported beliefs of queer conservatives is only one way to explore the range of political thought among this subgroup. Quantitative analysis of their demographic breakdowns and political opinions helps complete the picture. In this section, I will utilize the 2016 Cooperative Congressional Election Study. The CCES dataset from 2016 provides a unique insight into the LGBTQ community, as its inclusion of sexual orientation and gender identity questions lends a sample of 5,117 self-identified LGBTQ people out of the 64,600 respondents. This sample is one of the largest ever of queer people, allowing for statistical validity when one moves beyond simple demographic measures of the community. Until the 2016 CCES data, most quantitative studies surveying LGBTQ people's politics either had samples not large enough to move confidently beyond first-order questions and/or they did not include transgender respondents (Black et al 2000; Gates 2011; Lewis et al 2011; Sherrill 1996).

Therefore, the 2016 CCES set is useful, important, and insightful as researchers establish a more up-to-date picture of the LGBTQ community (specifically the conservatives) and make inferences about queer conservatism. This section begins with a description of the methods used, starting first with demographic data of both the general LGBTQ population and the queer conservative sample, then reports political attitudes among queer conservatives, before finally presenting important findings from regression and the general analyses.

As noted above, the CCES dataset includes separate questions asking about the respondent's sexual orientation and gender identity. Often, concerns can be raised about the accurate representation of LGBTQ people in survey samples, as disclosing this

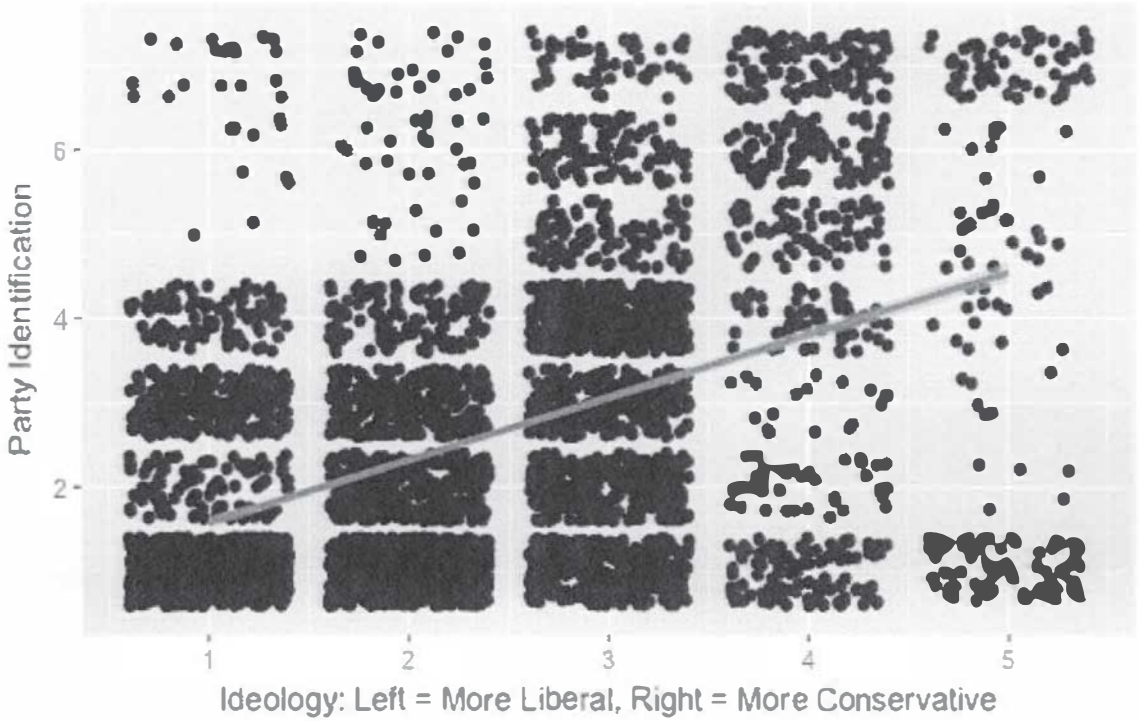
information can sometimes be risky or uncomfortable for the respondent. The Williams Institute at UCLA, which works exclusively on LGBTQ political and legal issues, has published a best practices guide for sampling LGBTQ people (Badgett 2009). The guide notes that providing secure and private environments for the survey frequently increases the rate of accurate self-identification. As Ansolabehere and Schaffner (2016) explain in the 2016 dataset's guidebook, all 64,000 respondents were sampled via the internet, thus lessening potential concerns about accurate self-reporting.

In creating a dataset for queer conservatives, a decision was made to use the CCES set's 5-point political ideology question instead of the 7-point party identification question. This decision was made for two reasons: first, there is obviously a difference been self-identified political ideology and self-identified party affiliation (Abramowitz and Saunders 1998; Greene 2004; Weinschenk 2010). One does not naturally preclude support for the other. Second, when one compares the ideology versus the party affiliation of the LGBTQ community, the results become very mixed. As Graph 1 below shows, once one moves past the expected Strong Democrat and Very Liberal correlation, there are strong pockets of independents as well as curious outliers such as Somewhat/Very Conservative and Strong Democrat (4,1 and 5,1).

Therefore, the political ideology question was utilized for consistency and because, as noted in the previous section, differences exist between the queer right's ideology and their support of the Republican Party. So, to analyze the LGBTQ respondents in the 2016 CCES dataset, three separate datasets were created. The first combined the two questions on sexual orientation and gender identity to create a set of LGBTQ respondents, totaling 5,117. Next, an independent sample of only conservative-

identifying LGBTQ respondents was created. That sample size is 745. Finally, a general data set of all respondents identifying as conservative on the political ideology scale was created for comparison, totaling 18,688 people.

Graph 1



The political ideology scale ranges from 1=very liberal to 5=very conservative, and the party identification scale ranges from 1=strong Democrat to 7=strong Republican.

To begin, simple demographic data was gathered on the conservative LGBTQ respondents. These demographics include age, race, gender, education level, family income, marital status, importance of religion, church attendance, and religious affiliation. The results are shown below in Table 1.

Table 1

Conservative LGBTQ Demographics - N = 745						
	Age		Percent		Race	Percent
18-24		88	11.8%	White	550	74.1%
25-34		176	23.8%	Black	67	9.1%
34-44		145	19.5%	Hispanic	79	10.6%
45-54		90	12.2%	Asian	17	2.3%
55-64		128	17.3%	Native American	11	1.4%
65+		114	15.4%	Middle Eastern	7	0.9%
	Gender		Percent	Mixed	10	1.3%
Male		484	65.2%	Other	2	30.0%
Female		258	34.8%		Education	Percent
	Family Income		Percent	No HS	75	10.1%
<10,000		65	10.0%	HS Graduate	221	29.8%
10k - 19,999		36	5.4%	Some College	190	25.7%
20K - 29,999		63	9.2%	2-Year	100	13.5%
30k - 39,999		96	14.1%	4-Year	99	13.4%
40k - 40,000		84	12.3%	Post-Grad	56	7.5%%
50k - 59,999		47	7.0%		Party ID	Percent
60k - 69,999		46	7.0%	Strong Dem	205	27.7%
70k - 79,999		49	7.1%	Not V Strong Dem	30	4.0%
80k - 89,999		62	9.0%	Lean Dem	24	3.2%
100k - 119,999		63	9.3%	Independent	46	6.2%
120k - 149,999		45	6.6%	Lean Rep	103	13.9%
150k - 199,999		12	1.7%	Not V Strong Rep	124	16.7%
200k +		11	2.0%	Strong Rep	201	27.1%
	Relig Importance		Percent		Religious Denom.	Percent
Very		411	55.0%	Protestant	272	36.6%
Somewhat		190	25.6%	Roman Catholic	239	32.2%
Not Very		71	9.5%	Mormon	15	2.0%
Not At All		71	9.5%	Esstn/Greek Ortho	5	0.7%
	Church Attend		Percent	Jewish	15	2.1%
>Once a Week		107	14.7%	Muslim	11	1.5%
Once a Week		215	29.4%	Buddhist	1	0.2%
1 or 2 a Month		67	9.2%	Hindu	0	0.0%
Few Times/Yr		109	15.0%	Athiest	16	2.2%
Seldom		119	16.3%	Agnostic	28	3.8%
Never		112	15.3%	Nothing Particular	103	14.0%
	Marital Status		Percent	Something Else	35	4.7%
Married		331	44.7%			
Separated		15	2.0%			
Divorced		65	8.8%			
Widowed		21	2.8%			
Single		274	36.9%			
Domestic Partnrshp		35	4.7%			

Several points on the demographic data are interesting to note. First, the sample of LGBTQ conservatives are predominantly white men, with 74% of the respondents being white and 65% male. Compared to the general conservative sample, there is more diversity among race but fewer women, as the general conservative sample is 81% white but split 51-49 male and female. When comparing these levels with the general LGBTQ population, one finds there are fewer white people in the sample, 69%, but the gender gap is also quite distinct, with 60% men and 40% women.

The age range is also interesting to note. Even accounting for the slight spike of 25-34 year olds in the conservative queer group, there is a decently even split among the age ranges. The age spread among the general LGBTQ population is fairly similar, with the same spike occurring around 25-34 year olds and remaining around 15-20% through the remaining ages. However, there notable differences between the queer and general conservative groups. The general conservative sample includes only 4.5% in the 18-24 range, 13% for both the 25-34 and 35-44 ages, a slight spike of 17% for those 45-54, and 51% of the sample makes up those 55 and older. Social attitudes against homosexuality during the lives of the older members of the conservative population could be one reason why there are so fewer older queer conservatives. Yet, collapsing the older respondents in the queer conservative set to 55 and up brings a total of 32%, creating a wider age gap similar to the general conservative sample.

Turning next to the religion statistics, it is unsurprising to find the majority of queer conservatives reporting Christian denominations. Both the importance of religion and church attendance rates are added to measure the religiosity of the sample. Church attendance is especially important to include, as it is often a better explainer of the impact

of religion on a person's politics (Malka et al 2012). Interestingly, the level of the importance of religion in queer conservatives' lives is significantly higher than that reported by the general LGBTQ population, with 80% of conservative queers reporting very or somewhat importance whereas only 50% of the general LGBTQ population rank religious importance similarly. But when we compare the queer conservatives with the general conservative sample, significantly similar results emerge. 82% of the general conservative sample rate religion as very or somewhat important in their lives.

Finally, the fascinating mix of conservative political ideologies and Democratic Party affiliation is shown in the party identification scale. 27% of this sample identifies as a strong Democrat, compared to the almost identical rate for those identifying as a strong Republican. Expectedly, more respondents identify as some level of Republican. But, the number of those identifying as strong Democrats is even slightly stronger than those identifying as strong Republican. Attempting to establish a reason for this phenomenon is beyond the scope of this research, though an early assumption would be those identifying as both conservative and strong Democrats perhaps treat LGBTQ issues as their single issue, therefore identifying with the Democrats and their more pro-LGBTQ platform than the Republicans.

Also included in the CCES data set are opinion questions asked of every respondent. Though they are only in a favor/oppose format, they cover several controversial political issues. Out of the 24 questions covering gun control, immigration, social issues, and environmental regulations, seven were chosen. These seven were selected for both their relevance in the 2016 election cycle and because they are frequently major departure points among liberals and conservatives. The questions as

well as the responses from the conservative LGBTQ respondents are detailed in Table 2 below.

Table 2

Queer Conservatives: Favor/Oppose... - N = 745			Gen. Conservatives: Favor/Oppose... - N = 18,688		
	Background Checks for All Gun Purchases	Percent		Background Checks for All Gun Purchases	Percent
Favor	635	86%	Favor	15044	81%
Oppose	99	13%	Oppose	3558	19%
	Banning Assault Rifles	Percent		Banning Assault Rifles	Percent
Favor	357	49%	Favor	8075	44%
Oppose	380	51%	Oppose	10459	56%
	Grant Legal Status to DREAMERS	Percent		Grant Legal Status to DREAMERS	Percent
Favor	257	35%	Favor	5082	27%
Oppose	485	65%	Oppose	13606	72%
	ID and Deport Illegal Immigrants	Percent		ID and Deport Illegal Immigrants	Percent
Favor	411	55%	Favor	12226	65%
Oppose	330	45%	Oppose	6462	35%
	Abortion Always Legal	Percent		Abortion Always Legal	Percent
Favor	384	52%	Favor	5946	32%
Oppose	358	48%	Oppose	12723	68%
	Abortion Only Legal in Cases of Rape, Incest, Life of Mother	Percent		Abortion Only Legal in Cases of Rape, Incest, Life of Mother	Percent
Favor	492	66%	Favor	11329	61%
Oppose	248	33%	Oppose	7328	39%
	Same-Sex Marriage	Percent		Same-Sex Marriage	Percent
Favor	451	61%	Favor	6083	34%
Oppose	287	39%	Oppose	12418	66%

"Do you favor/oppose the following proposals?" Responses are of the conservative LGBTQ sample and general conservative sample.

Like the demographic data of the queer conservative sample, there are similarities and some stark differences between this sample, the LGBTQ, and the general conservative respondents. Taking all questions into account, the queer conservative sample appears somewhat centrist to liberal on strict social issues like abortion and same-sex marriage, but also shows their conservative lean regarding immigration. The support

among queer conservatives for requiring background checks on all gun purchases is fairly consistent with other respondents in the CCES data set, as well as national polling. 92% of the LGBTQ sample favors background checks, as do 81% of the general conservative sample. And in 2017, the Pew Research Center found 84% of Americans favor background checks for private sales and at gun shows (Igielnek and Brown 2017).

Also on guns, queer conservatives do not differ much from straight conservatives when it comes to banning assault rifles. 43% of the latter group favor such weapons versus the 56% opposed. The Pew Research Center notes 68% of Americans favor banning assault weapons. The general LGBTQ populace, however, highly favors banning these weapons with 73% supporting the proposal.

On immigration, only 27% of the general conservative sample supports granting legal status to undocumented immigrants who were brought to the United States as minors, also known as DREAMers after the proposed DREAM Act to grant them a path to citizenship. Conservative LGBTQ people are only a few points more in favor of this proposal, and 55% are in favor of identifying and deporting undocumented immigrants, while 65% of heterosexual conservatives support such a proposal. The general LGBTQ sample shows the highest support for undocumented migrants, with 60% favoring granting legal status to DREAMers and only 27% support identifying and deporting undocumented immigrants.

It is on the issues of abortion and same-sex marriage where queer conservatives differentiate greatly from both the general LGBTQ population and the general conservative sample. Only 32% of heterosexual conservatives support always allowing abortion as a matter of choice, versus 52% of the queer conservatives and 77% of the

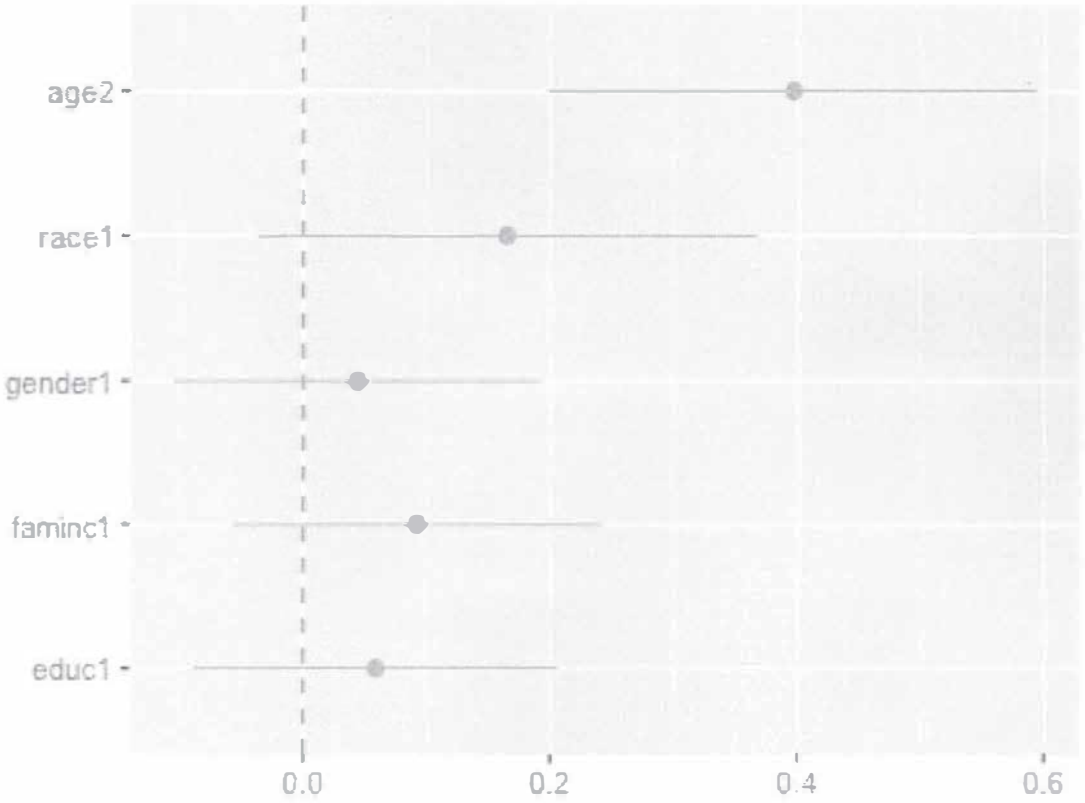
general queer sample. Similarly, 61% of straight conservatives support abortion only in cases of rape, incest, and concerns for the mother's life, whereas 66% of queer conservatives support such a proposal but only 37% of the LGBTQ sample do. The opposition from the general LGBTQ sample may be because the question asks if they support abortion *only* in the instance of rape, incest, and the life of the mother.

The most startling statistic of the opinion questions, however, is the queer conservative response to same-sex marriage support. 39% oppose such a proposal. There does exist among LGBTQ folk some opposition to same-sex marriage, largely because they either care more about the legal benefits of the unions, or because they view marriage as patriarchal and heteronormative (Geoghegan 2013). The former argument could be at the root of many of those conservative LGBTQ people opposed to same-sex marriage, as respect for marriage as a foundation of society is often an accepted tenant of conservatism. Indeed, this argument has been used to support same-sex marriage from a conservative viewpoint (Angelo 2015; Rauch 2013). Similarly, Geoghegan notes that many gay couples are concerned more with some form of legal recognition to take advantage of spousal tax and legal benefits, making civil unions just as useful (2013). It seems unlikely, however, that one would find arguments against marriage as patriarchal, misogynistic, and heteronormative among queer conservatives as such an argument has largely only been found among more radical, liberationist, left-wing queer activists (Rimmerman 2008).

To derive a possible explanation for this opposition, a simple linear regression was conducted, the results of which are detailed in Graph 2. The support/oppose same-sex marriage question was tested against common demographic factors often associated

with political beliefs such as age, race, gender, education, and income levels. Interestingly, age is the only statistically significant independent variable. Given that the age range among the conservative queer sample is decently stratified with strong spikes among both younger and older members of the group, this outcome is especially curious. This range is highlighted in Graph 3. With 74% of the sample being white, it makes sense race would not be significant in the model. Yet, the spreads among gender, education, and income are more like the age spread than the racial demographics.

Graph 2

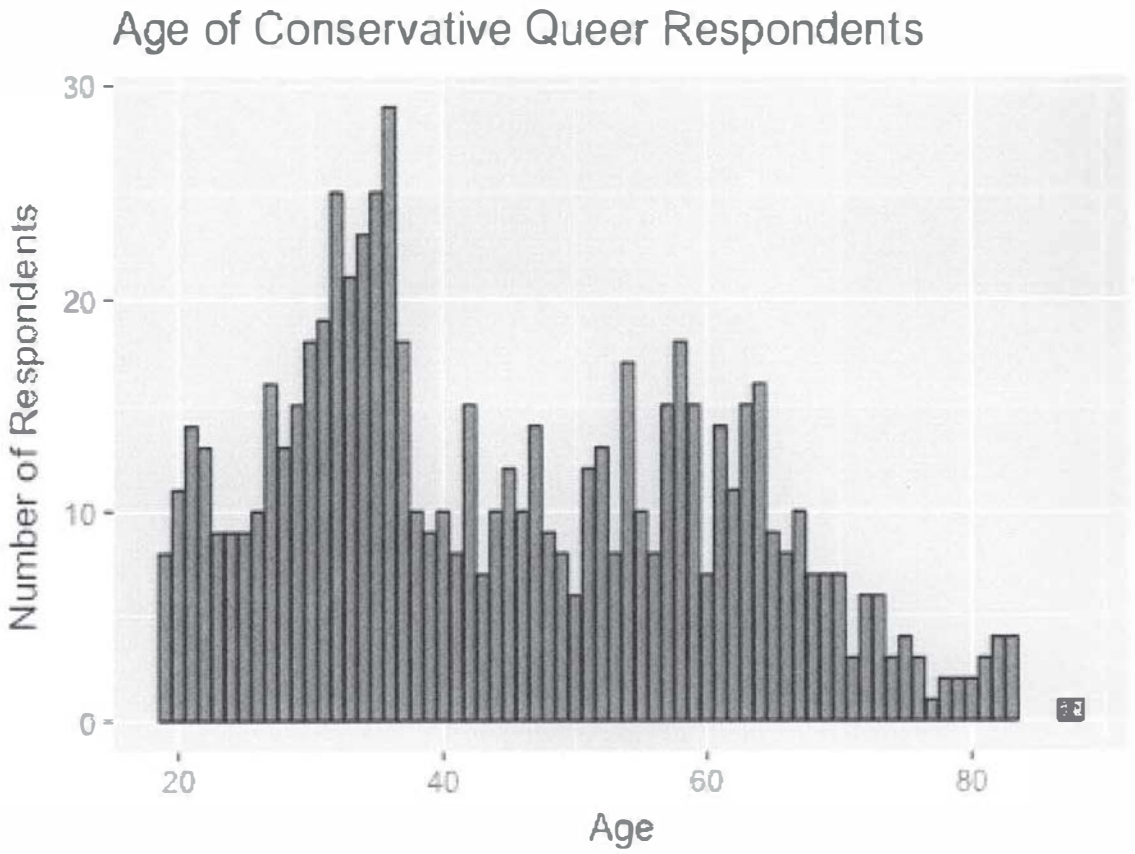


Each variable is numbered to signify its scaling for regression analysis. "Faminc" is family income, and "educ" is highest level of education achieved.

The magnitude of increase on the age variable is also worth mentioning. Not only is the variable very significant, but its increase shows that as one moves up in age the

more likely they are to oppose same-sex marriage. By identifying as either somewhat or strongly conservative, the queer right-wing in this dataset are likely to be more inclined already to oppose same-sex marriage, possibly for reasons explained above like states' rights issues or redefining marriage. Augmenting these political beliefs are the societal attitudes towards queer people as the older generations of queer conservatives were coming of age and being socialized politically, to say nothing of attitudes towards same-sex marriage.

Graph 3



Unfortunately, because the CCES dataset was not designed specifically for queer respondents, we have little hard data to explain in further detail why conservative queer folk believe what they do. This is a limitation to address in future studies. However, what

the data do present is a larger picture than ever of conservative LGBTQ people's demographics and political beliefs. On aggregate, they look similar in many ways to both the LGBTQ population and straight conservatives. Intellectually, it is not hard to wrap one's head around the notion that not all queer people think the same and that the mainstream left-leaning LGBTQ rights movement is not a monolith. This data offers for one of the first times quantifiable justification to believe there are important similarities and differences between queer conservatives, the general queer community, heterosexual conservatives, and the American population at large.

HOMONATIONALISM AND THE QUEER CONSERVATIVE

As has been argued throughout this study, the queer community does not exist nor think like a monolith. Simply because many LGBTQ people identify as liberal and as Democrats does not mean that the entire community agrees. Yet, when trying to ascertain the reasoning behind queer conservatism or explain the rise of far-right beliefs within the queer community, shrugging off the phenomenon as stemming from a simple diversity of political opinion does not suffice. As has been noted previously, the evolutions among the queer right are as important and consequential as the debates existing among the queer left, and no change in political socialization or attitude happens in a vacuum.

Therefore, a broader explanation is necessary to truly attempt to understand the queer conservative, especially in a post-Obergefell America. To answer, I suggest Jasbir Puar's theory of homonationalism (2007). At its core, homonationalism describes the favorable relationship between nationalistic, specifically Islamophobic, ideologies and the LGBTQ community. One of the keys to this broader theme is the intersection between the queer community, post-9/11 foreign policy and national defense, and anti-Islamic conservative politics.

Since the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001, right-wing advocates, politicians, and pundits have been using the threat of radical Islamic terrorism to bridge historic divides between the LGBTQ community and the right, and to gain more supporters from the queer community. Specifically, these advocates are among groups like the alt-right and other white supremacist and nationalistic organizations. Since 2015, founder of the alt-right Richard Spencer has been making specific overtures to the LGBTQ community, and these efforts have only increased since the Pulse shooting

(Falvey 2016; "Youth" 2015). Additionally, both the leaders of these movements and their supporters cite the killings of LGBTQ people at the hands of radical groups like the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL and those affiliated with radical Islamic terrorist organizations as evidence that Islam is incompatible with Western values like protecting LGBTQ rights (Greenwald 2016).

However, while tragedies like the killing of LGBTQ people at the hands of ISIS and the Pulse nightclub shooting are jarring and emotionally compelling, these incidents, with hindsight, have proven to be more exaggerated and sensationalist than originally assumed. OutRight Action International, one of the leading international LGBTQ human rights organizations, tracked the number of ISIL confirmed killings of queer people from 2014 to 2016. Their research found that 90 LGBTQ people were killed by ISIS fighters in that two-year span, though it should be noted that they included in their findings the 49 people killed in the Pulse shooting ("Timeline" 2016). Removing the Pulse shooting brings their total to 41. While the killing of anyone is tragic, 90 murders over the span of two years does not strike this researcher as actual evidence for an epidemic.

Meanwhile, the Pulse shooting itself provides still greater context to the difference between compelling political and emotional narratives and the reality of these events. In the immediate aftermath of the shooting, media pundits, activists, and politicians whipped up a flurry of theories and explanations for the shooting. Within hours, a cohesive narrative immerged: because the shooter allied himself with ISIL, and because Pulse is an LGBTQ club, the shooter purposefully chose to target queer people. Simply put, the shooting was a hate crime (Greenwald 2016).

Additional speculation came in the form of the common trope of the sexually confused and frustrated closeted gay man. Patrons of Pulse claimed to have seen the shooter at the nightclub on a few occasions (Brinkmann 2017). And, the shooter's ex-wife claimed she had wondered about the shooter's sexuality while they were married, saying: "He would take a long time in front of the mirror, he would often take pictures of himself, and he made little movements with his body that definitely made me question things" (Alter 2016).

And yet, despite these theories becoming the assumed motive of the shooter, recent findings have proven these theories to be more conspiratorial than fact. During the trial for the shooter's second wife (she was accused of knowing about the attack days before it happened), evidence from the FBI revealed there to be no factual evidence that any of the suggested motives were genuine (Greenwald and Hussain 2018). The FBI revealed that at no point during the hours-long standoff at Pulse did the shooter ever spout homophobic justifications, nor is it believed the shooter even knew Pulse to be a queer club prior to the attack (Fitzsimons 2018). Rather, the shooter cited US military affairs in the Middle East as his main justification. And, evidence from the night of the assault confirmed the shooter had originally intended to attack Disney resorts, only to find them too well protected (Greenwald and Hussain 2018).

As noted above, the Pulse massacre has been one of the most widely cited incidents of radical Islamic terrorism used as a form of propaganda to bring queer people into the right-wing fold. President Trump's high profile remarks on protecting LGBTQ Americans stems entirely from this line of thinking, as does the

justification for greater restrictions on Muslims in America and Western Europe. Alice Weidel, the openly-lesbian leader of the far-right Alternative for Deutschland (AfD) party in Germany referenced the attack in her campaign rallies and as justification for a lesbian leading a party whose members are generally anti-LGBTQ (Vlad 2017). Additionally, leader of the French far-right party the National Front Marine Le Pen has employed the same anti-Muslim rhetoric in overtures to the French LGBTQ community (Wildman 2017).

Puar defines homonationalism as the "transition under way in how queer subjects are relating to nation-states, particularly the United States, from being figures of death (i.e., the AIDS epidemic) to becoming tied to ideas of life and productivity (i.e., gay marriage and families)" (2007, xii). In other words, homonationalism describes how political and power interests align with general LGBTQ equality to advance xenophobic positions under the guise that foreigners, specifically Muslims, are supposedly homophobic and are thus incompatible with the superior egalitarianism of the West.

Recall President Trump's overtures to the LGBTQ community during his nomination acceptance speech: "As your president, I will do everything in my power to protect our LGBTQ citizens from the violence and oppression of a hateful foreign ideology" (Johnson 2016). Trump's rhetoric, like that of far-right leaders and polemicists like Richard Spencer, Jack Donovan, and Milo Yiannopoulos, bases his support for the queer community as entirely against a foreign ideology. While he never explicitly mentions Islam, remember also that Trump's nomination came only weeks after the Pulse shooting.

Of course, homonationalist overtures to the queer community have existed prior to the Pulse shooting. Chavez (2015) notes that queer support for immigration reform via the 1990 Immigration Act spearheaded by the openly gay Congressman Barney Frank led some on the right to blame Frank and the "gay agenda" for the September 11th attacks (Chavez 2015). However, a combination of increased LGBTQ rights (and thus greater inclusion of queer people in American society), the rise of extreme terrorist groups like ISIS, and the Pulse shooting have pushed homonationalist justifications to the fore.

Puar explains in her foundational book *Terrorist Assemblages* that as queer people move from being maligned in society for their personhood or because of reactions to the AIDS epidemic, they will naturally take a more mainstream hold in society (2007). With increasing inclusion in the military (the main defense against terrorism), greater civil protections, and the right to marry and adopt children, queer people have moved to this position postulated by Puar. Thus, as Puar argues, as queer people, especially those of privilege like white gay men, are included more in society, they will naturally become more concerned with the wellbeing of the state and the society in which they have adopted and has adopted them.

As pointed out in the previous section, the overwhelming majority of queer conservatives are white men. Not only are they the first to be included in the political society which once excluded them (Schotten 2016), but they are the perfect candidates for nationalist politics either explicitly or implicitly advocating for white supremacy at most, and Western/American exceptionalism at best. The

synthesis of increasing queer rights and backlash against the replacement outgroup for the LGBTQ community, Muslims, is exemplified in the remarks expanded upon previously by both queer far-right conservatives and heterosexual nationalists appealing only to a queer person's right to life.

Of course, homonationalism has its faults. It is not a catch-all theory for every queer conservative. However, as I have argued, queer conservatism has always existed, and even when it finally became public with the advent of the Log Cabin Republicans, it has existed solidly in traditional conservative thinking. The novelty of the evolving far-right queer conservative is best explained through homonationalism, and the many ways increasing populist nationalism has influenced American political thought is also exemplified through the queer far-right conservative.

Unfortunately, the interplay between homonationalism and queer conservatism is difficult to document. However, since the Pulse shooting, there has been enough evidence to apply this theory originating from queer theorists to political science interpretations of changing political beliefs. I argue it is only through an intersectional approach of traditionally understood demographic influences on political ideologies and the broader national conversation surrounding conservatism, terrorism, queer rights, and the inclusivity of all in a broader American society can we truly understand the origins and influences of queer conservatism.

CONCLUSION

Despite the increasing influence of queer Americans on the political landscape and the growing research explaining these political phenomenon, I have argued that not enough attention has been paid to queer conservatism. Tracing its organizational lineage through the Log Cabin Republicans to growing numbers of far-right LGBTQ conservatives, this study has documented the many shades of queer conservatism. Furthermore, data analysis has provided with some of the best data available a detailed snapshot of not only the general makeup of LGBTQ conservatives, but some of their political beliefs as well. Finally, a broader explanation of rising far-right queer conservatism was offered through the theory of homonationalism.

This research has not been an attempt to describe in every way queer conservatism or act as a historical analysis. Rather, the guiding purpose behind blurring this spectrum is to chip away at a segment of the queer community often less explored but still critical to the understanding of queer politics. Findings from this research underscore two important, though perhaps obvious conclusions. First, queer conservatives share many similarities between both the general (that is to say, left-leaning) LGBTQ population as well as the mainstream conservative movement. Second, queer conservatism, like queer politics generally, are quite complex and thus deserving of greater exploration.

These complexities and this research offer important implications. One of the most frequent criticism heard from queer conservatives is that it is harder to come out as queer and conservative than it is to come out as queer ("Gay

Journalist" 2017). If it appears this study has been overly critical of the current state of research on the full spectrum of sexuality politics, it is unintentional. Instead, the criticisms and arguments offered here are meant to shed light on a part of queer politics needed in every level of research into sexuality politics.

Second, queer conservatism cuts to the core of our understanding of political socialization. Though not previously discussed, some researchers believe the "coming out" process may be its own form of political socialization – or in many cases, re-socialization. Coming out as queer can lend itself to a recalibration not only of political beliefs but also the communities in which queer people find support (Avery 2002; Egan 2012). Additionally, it's believed the process of a queer person finding support within their conception of the queer community may reorient their political compass to be more like those in their community, thus possibly explaining why so many in the queer community are left-leaning besides simple party identification. However, if we understand queer conservatives to go through the same coming out process, how does the coming out process, and political socialization generally, account for the noticeable number of queer conservatives?

Above all, however, the interactions between the queer community and far-right political ideologies highlights the extent to which ideologies, especially reactionary ones, can influence the politics of a society. If anything, this research underscores the importance of taking the politics and influences of sexuality – both heterosexual and queer – into general and specific accounts of changing political trends. The political clout of the queer community is well documented

(Black et al. 2000; Faderman 2015; Gates 2011; Huang et al 2016). If we are to better understand the intersections impacting the political sphere of human behavior, it is imperative we include every stop along that road.

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