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CISGENDER FRAGILITY

by

Zachariah Graydon Oaster

A thesis submitted to the Graduate College
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Master of Arts
Sociology
Western Michigan University
August 2019

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My deepest thanks extend to my thesis chair, Dr. Paul Ciccantell, whose mentorship, patience, and encouragement were needed and well received on many occasions throughout the process of producing this work.

Additionally, my thanks to my committee members, Dr. Elena Gapova and Dr. Jesse Smith, whose graduate instruction in the areas of gender research and qualitative methods, respectively, produced fertile soil in which to grow and tend this idea of Cisgender Fragility. All of my committee members' commitments of time and expertise have made this thesis a professional work that I am proud of.

I have been taught, encouraged, and enabled by many fellow academics and activists along the way whose names here are the least I can offer in honor of their contributions to my professional life (in alphabetical order): Anna Bailey, Taryn Borst, Dr. Rachel Campbell, Dr. Mary DeYoung, Dr. Rebecca Farnum, Dr. Hermann Kurthen, Dr. Michael Macaluso, Dr. Dennis Malaret, Bill Mefford, Scot Miller, Dr. Michael Ott, Ian Pearson, Jeff Smith, Dr. Jennifer Stewart, Ashes Ravel, Kristine Skippergosh, Marilynn Springman, Dr. Joel Stillerman, and Zachary Trank-Zelewicz.

Longsuffering and charitable has been my spouse, Lindsay Oaster, who has come alongside me many times whenever life struggles threw up blocks to progress on this thesis. Invariably, Lindsay has offered professional assistance in editing, proofreading, and formatting. The culmination of this thesis is in great part thanks to Lindsay's years of encouragement and confidence in me. I am humbled and grateful.

Zachariah Graydon Oaster

CISGENDER FRAGILITY

Zachariah Graydon Oaster, M.A.

Western Michigan University, 2019

Cisgender people in the United States are socialized in an environment that shields them from gender-identity-based stress. Like the construct of white fragility (DiAngelo, 2011), cisgender persons exhibit defensive behavior in response to encountering any gender-identity-based discomfort. Once triggered, defensive acts and false claims are deployed in an attempt to return to a state of comfort and normalcy. The stress that cisgender persons feel, and the defensive actions that they take upon encountering such gender-identity-based discomfort is what I refer to herein as Cisgender Fragility.

This theoretical construct of Cisgender Fragility is nuanced through intersectional synthesis of queer and race theory. Transgender and gender non-conforming persons are castigated in public and private spaces as being a danger to individuals as well as being a danger to social systems, such as the economy, sports, education, and the military. Further, transgender persons in the United States are viewed as being outside moral and market conformity. These attitudes are reproduced, in part, through the rhetoric of conservative media such as Fox News. Balancing the interests of moral conservatives and business conservatives, their discourse reverses the actual direction of danger and vilifies transgender persons as dangerous.

Using ethnographic content analysis, this study tests the Cisgender Fragility theory through coding and analysis of FoxNews.com articles pertaining to transgender persons during the first year of the Donald Trump presidency. These exploratory findings support the theory and provide a platform for future research. This thesis elucidates Cisgender Fragility.

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Cisgender people in the United States are socialized in an environment that cushions and screens them from gender-identity-based stress. These words mirror those of DiAngelo (2011) who makes the parallel argument in the context of race: describing white persons' defensive triggers in response to the slightest race-based discomfort. Once triggered, defensive acts and false claims are deployed in the attempt to return the situation to a state of comfort and normalcy. It is my contention that DiAngelo's concept of white fragility is paralleled in the discourse and rhetoric of cisgender persons when encountering transgender and gender non-conforming-based stress – cisgender fragility. This can be nuanced and demonstrated through careful theoretical synthesis and then tested through exploratory ethnographic content analysis of articles about transgender politics in the populist conservative news outlet, Fox News.

There is not yet a specific definition of cisgender fragility, nor a foundational study seeking to enhance or improve upon such a definition. It is the intent of this inquiry to fill this gap in the literature by engaging past researchers' definitions of fragility – White Fragility, per DiAngelo, and Masculine Fragility, per Watkins & Blazina – and then seek to begin a nuanced discussion of how the definition of cisgender fragility may have its own unique characteristics. As Watkins and Blazina showed, not all expressions of dominant-group fragility express themselves in the same way. Masculine fragility tends to show up in various forms of fear and self-loathing in men (Watkins & Blazina, 2010) – which rests in the power dynamic set in the social construct of the masculine/feminine gender binary. White fragility, as DiAngelo (2011) explains, is a series of outwardly defensive mechanisms that attempt to push away even the mention of race. Masculine discomfort over gender-based discussions is thus largely

internalized, whereas white discomfort is often externalized – causing reactions that seek to shape and control the social space. Both of these expressions, however, share a root in the dominant group’s desire to return to a sense of normalcy and comfort. This is the foundation of fragility – a desperation for status quo where the dominant group member no longer must even think about the target group, a return to the naiveté of privilege.

What is needed is a theoretical synthesis of existing materials that point this research and future research in a direction that will hone the definition of cisgender fragility. That is the first contribution of this thesis. This theoretical exposition will shed light on many questions born of the contemporary social discourse on transgender public rights and treatment. These include: why are transgender and gender non-conforming persons often castigated in the U.S. public and political discourse under the banner of public safety? What role does moral-conservative and neoliberal market conformity play in this formulation of rhetoric? How has the rise of populist rhetoric contributed to the public’s view of transgender persons and their citizenship? Why do we see the advancement of so-called “transgender bathroom bills,” the framing of transgender soldiers as an expensive, burdensome group, as well as other political moves that seek to cast transgender and gender non-conforming persons as threats to public systems such as the military, education, housing, and sports?

The second contribution to the literature is an exploratory ethnographic content analysis of articles found on the populist conservative news website, Fox News.com. This news outlet has been repeatedly heralded as a favorite by the populist Republican President Donald Trump.

In a tweet dated December 21, 2017 Trump (@realDonaldTrump) wrote:

Was @foxandfriends just named the most influential show in news? You deserve it - three great people! The many Fake News Hate Shows should study your formula for success!

Trump's tweet was in reference to the fact that Mediaite.com, another conservative gossip site, had "named [Fox and Friends] co-hosts, Steve Doocy, Brian Kilmeade and Ainsley Earhardt, the 'most influential in media' because they have captured and held Trump's attention" (Anapol, 2017).

While one could mine President Trump's tweets as a primary source for studying cisgender fragility (alongside other examples of dominant-group fragility), the news outlet that supplies that president with his information and worldview -- the news outlet that predates him, and likely will persist after he is no longer president -- offers this researcher a better source for examination due to its trust as a source among those who espouse broad-spectrum conservative political ideology in the United States. It seems that while Trump's tweets may be inconsistent and effuse, Fox News has been a mainstay in the American socio-political landscape for over 20 years.

An exploratory ethnographic content analysis of articles referring to transgender persons during 2017 on the Fox News website will seek to create and hone a codebook that will be useful in identifying modes of fragility in their reporting, and differentiate the various viewpoints found within conservatism toward transgender persons.

While it is important to recognize that cisgender fragility likely exists in some form in all cisgender persons, its public expressions in the form of public policymaking and political rhetoric are most often found and fed in conservative circles. Research shows that political, religious, and social conservatives are more likely to believe the world around them is more dangerous, and as such, tend to credulously believe that threats lie within nearly any ambiguity -- that dangerousness is within nearly any group or person they do not readily understand (Holbrook, Lopez-Redriguez, Fessler, & Gomez, 2016; Fessler, Pisor, & Holbrook, 2017).

One is likely to ask why this exploratory study focuses only on conservative responses to transgender persons. American conservative media and political discourse sets the conversational tone for ordinary people (Gamson, 1992). In the preliminary process of identifying and coding this low-hanging fruit of conservative expressions of transgender antagonism and cisgender fragility – via their most trusted form of mainstream media -- it is this researcher's hope that future efforts can identify the pervasive and closely-held versions of cisgender fragility that may exist across the cisgender culture, including dog whistle terminology potentially found widely across U.S. media, and amidst those who hold liberal political sentiments. As with previously identified forms of fragility, the most publicly-normative expressions of this phenomenon, and their related outward antagonisms, tend to occur within conservative politics, yet to some degree affects nearly all persons within a given privileged group.

To look only, for the moment, at one conservative news source should yield a wealth of preliminary data. Conservatives in the U.S. are not a monolithic group. Conservative streams of thought do not always agree, and previous research in the field of queer theory have shown that the issue of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, and Asexual (henceforth 'LGBTQIA' or 'queer') social concerns can vary in expressions of opposition or support. Business conservatives, who choose to prioritize the politics of the Republican Party as a means to preserve and reinforce neoliberal capitalism (Hacker, 2006; Kidder, 2015), and moral conservatives, those who base their political and social beliefs largely on religious morality, are the two general divisions among conservatives found in the scholarly literature. As Marzullo (2011) found, each has its own specific articulation of the social meaning of marriage that shapes its position on the issue of same-sex marriage – another recent political battleground in LGBTQIA rights. On one hand, business conservatives often go along with the morality politics

of moral conservatives when those positions are advantageous to business. However, same-sex marriage and transgender rights are both issues in the contemporary discourse where business conservatives have shifted in their views, as supporting those traditional homo-antagonistic and trans-antagonistic moral stances has been economically unwise.

Much like with issues of divorce, birth control, and abortion before them, business conservatives have sided both with and against moral conservatives. Most recently in the Hobby Lobby supreme court case, one can observe the syncretism of Christian moral belief with business practice through the court's upholding of Hobby Lobby's right to deny women in their employ access to insurance for certain types of contraceptives (Mandell, 2016; Denbow, 2017). However, in cases of disagreement, moral conservatives maintain their opposition, as they believe that their moral stance is more important than economic gains.

In the case of liberalizing abortion law, Williams (2013) explains that the liberalizing wave of support for on-demand abortion came alongside a change in understanding of the biological stages of fetal development. In this same era the U.S. Supreme Court made the historic *Roe v. Wade* ruling, effectively overruling legislative prohibitions on abortion nationwide. It was not until after this ruling that the general public received extensive exposure to the polarized positions we now know as "pro-life" and "pro-choice." Williams argues that the polarization happened after the liberalization of the law, thus galvanizing the moral conservative resistance at the same time that society was widely integrating abortion options into medical practice. In the case of business conservatives, much like in the Hobby Lobby example, it has been the practice of business to take a middle road – often castigating the morality of abortion, while yet not directly penalizing employees for seeking abortion services. Moral conservatives maintain their

opposition to abortion, now nearly five decades later, as they believe their moral stance is absolute, and that there is to be no political compromise.

Not surprisingly, researchers consistently find that socially/culturally conservative, Republican, male persons with low levels of education and high religiosity is the group most likely to espouse bigoted and discriminatory attitudes toward queer communities and their pursuit of human rights and equal standing under the law in the United States (Brewer & Wilcox, 2005; Barth & Parry, 2009; Becker, 2014; Kreitzer, Hamilton, & Tolbert, 2014). However, not all Republicans are poorly educated religious men. Which, in part, explains the major divisions described above between the business and moral streams of conservatism.

Neoliberal business interests have at times pushed back against moral conservative positions of transphobia. Most notably, during the transgender bathroom bill controversy of 2016 and 2017 (Tracy, 2017), a law was passed in North Carolina mandating that students use the bathroom denoted by their biological sex. Soon after, public outcry led the NCAA to refuse to hold its basketball tournament there – an act of corporate activism known to scholars as “corporate exit” (Kuo & Means, 2018). Six months later, the law was repealed, and quickly, the boycott of North Carolina by the NCAA was “reluctantly lifted” (Tracy, 2017). Moral conservatives, already galvanized in their transphobic viewpoints, did not budge in their position, although the legislature of North Carolina, largely Republican, and the Republican governor of the state, were swayed by business conservative interests to repeal the law and allow for the economic benefits brought by the NCAA Tournament to resume.

Divisions are common in nearly all political ideologies, and understanding them gives us a deeper insight into the nuance behind the discourse. To give an example from within the Democratic political party in the United States, left-leaning supporters of democratic socialist

Bernie Sanders emerged clearly as a separate group distinct from establishment liberals supporting Hillary Clinton during the 2016 Democratic presidential primary season over issues such as #BlackLivesMatter, economic inequality, and student debt relief. Similar lines were drawn between liberal neoliberal business interests (Clinton) and those advocating for a radically moral revision to capitalism (Sanders). Likewise, the ideological differences between types of conservatives can be examined through the lens of the rift over same-sex marriage and general attitudes toward LGBTQIA persons. Neoliberals across the political spectrum, including business conservatives espousing neoliberal global free market ideology, tend to support same-sex marriage far more often than religious-moral conservatives who hold to the notion that any support for LGBTQIA concerns is immoral. After all, to a neoliberal, queer people are customers who have lavish weddings, buy houses, establish family units, get insurance, and in doing so, generate profits, too.

In terms of the politicization of transgender persons, this rift between conservatives was illustrated in 2016 when moral-conservative anti-transgender so-called “bathroom bills” were being introduced and passed in legislatures across the United States -- attempting to block business owners, schools, and public buildings from instituting gender-neutral restroom facilities and from allowing persons to use the bathroom that best fit their gender identity, rather than their birth-assigned sex. Many large corporations in the business community rejected these proposed laws and acted, creating welcoming space by declaring their bathrooms accessible to transgender persons. For example, “Target announced on its website that it would allow transgender employees and customers to choose the restroom and fitting room that corresponded with their gender identities” (Abrams, 2016). Moral conservatives were outraged and, beyond political action, threatened to police public bathrooms with the intent to cause physical harm to any

transgender people they might find. They organized boycotts of transgender-supportive businesses. With this in mind, business conservatives and moral conservatives have overlapping uses and meanings of discourse about queer-affecting issues that at times agree and other times disagree – each pushing and pulling to create a splintered American conservative position on the social and economic value of transgender, and other queer persons.

Chapter II examines the discourse on fragility, queer theory as it pertains to the framing of transgender, gender non-conforming, and more generally, queer persons in the U.S. by conservative groups, and highlights the theories upon which the codebook for this study will be built. Chapter III details the methods of this study. Chapter IV offers a summary of the key findings of this preliminary exploration. Further, Chapter IV draws conclusions regarding how the findings compare to the theoretical literature found in Chapter II, makes recommendations for future research, and describes the limitations of this study.

CHAPTER II: THEORY

Cisgender people in the United States are socialized in an environment that cushions and screens them from gender-identity-based stress. These words mirror those of DiAngelo (2011) who makes the parallel argument in the context of race: describing white persons' defensive triggers in response to the slightest race-based discomfort. Once triggered, defensive acts and false claims are deployed in the attempt to return the situation to a state of comfort and normalcy. Why are transgender and gender non-conforming persons often castigated in the U.S. public discourse under the banner of public safety? What role does moral conservative and, sometimes in contrast, neoliberal capitalist market conformity play in this formulation of rhetoric? Why do we see the advancement of so-called "transgender bathroom bills" as well as other conservative political moves that seek to cast transgender and gender non-conforming persons as threats to public systems such as the military, education, housing, and sports? It is my contention in this theoretical exposition that DiAngelo's concept of white fragility is mirrored in the discourse and rhetoric of cisgender persons – cisgender fragility.

While certainly a type of fragility can be observed in dominant gendered interactions in general, such as the masculine fragility demonstrated through fear and self-loathing in men (Watkins & Blazina, 2010), cisgender fragility seems to more closely resemble race-based expressions of fragility due to the way that transgender and gender non-conforming persons are framed as criminal, dangerous to women, and outside the bounds of business conservative and moral conservative definitions of citizenship (Marzullo, 2011; Peterson, 2011; Westbrook & Schilt, 2014). Cisgender fragility may span mainstream political ideologies in the United States to varying degrees, but like many other examples of anti-LGBTQ discourse in U.S. media, it is

exemplified and found in its most overt forms through the study of conservative political discourse found in conservative-sympathetic media outlets such as Fox News.

The organization of this paper will first offer a brief window into how transgender or gender non-conforming person self-define and offer brief insight into the differences between gender and race as those similarities and differences may apply to this research. Then, the chapter will introduce the reader to DiAngelo's (2011) concept of white fragility and proceed to link it to what we know from critical discourse scholar, Van Dijk (1992), about how defensive mechanisms are deployed in rhetoric. Like DiAngelo, Van Dijk's arguments are couched in racial analysis, yet are instrumental across examinations of dominant power expressions in discourse. Proceeding from there, Marzullo (2011), Peterson (2011), and Westbrook and Schilt (2014) will provide the vital connections to synthesize how the notion of white fragility can be linked to similarly-fragile cisgender behaviors. This will include an examination of how social institutions – namely those linked to moral conservative ideology and conservative streams of neoliberal economic ideology (henceforth “business conservatives”), and their notions of citizenship – contribute to the media and popular conceptions of interactions between cisgender and transgender persons in shared public and private spaces.

Westbrook and Schilt (2014) offer two ideologies for interpreting gender. The first is biology-based, where chromosomal sex determines gender, and the second is identity-based. For the sake of this research, the identity-based approach will be used. In this paradigm, the gender of the individual is determined not only in the way the transgender or gender non-conforming person thinks about themselves, but also within the context of the way that the social world around them – family, friends, and the medical community -- accepts and validates their identity. Thus, Westbrook and Schilt argue that this is both a process of ‘doing gender’ as the individual,

but also ‘determining gender’ from a community perspective. As we see later, this same social process of determining gender can be used as a means to police public spaces and enforce expectations for transgender people to change their biological body to conform to gender-binary-based social norms. However, this concept of determining gender can also be found in affirming contexts, where communities come to avow the identity-based gender of individuals, amidst their various sexual and non-sexual interactions, and form supportive systems and opportunities for growth.

Thus, for the sake of this research, it is unhelpful to look at gender from a biological perspective, where reproductive capabilities and chromosomes – biological sex -- become the basis for gender definitions. For transgender and gender-non-conforming persons in the United States, ‘doing gender,’ and how society contributes to their ability to exercise their identity-based gender (‘determining gender’) becomes the basis for how bigotry, ant-transgender policymaking, and cisgender fragility take personal effect. This is regardless of whether the transgender person is biologically capable of reproducing (as many indeed are), or whether they are heterosexual, homosexual, asexual, or identify in some other way along the sexuality spectrum (Galupo, Hanise, & Mercer, 2016). In terms of an individual ‘doing gender’, the onus is on self-definition and one’s ability to live that identity in day to day life amidst a complex social world. In terms of ‘determining gender’, one’s reproductive ability, sexual orientation, or biological sex (genitals and/or chromosomes) often regresses into the background when other factors, e.g. an individual’s ability to “pass” as a member of a binary, or an individual’s connection to an affirming community (or not), may have a much deeper effect on their ability to live that day to day life free of harassment and violence. So, for example, if a transgender man was pregnant, it

would be unlikely that their demonstration of ability to biologically reproduce would assuage cisgender fragility, or bigots seeking to harass or harm.

Therefore, I would argue that in the context of fragility, race and gender identity have a great deal in common and can be used for theoretical comparison and contrast. As we know from Omi and Winant's classic (1994) formulation, race is not ultimately the result of some unchangeable biological blood root. Rather, it is a social category – a construct – rooted in the social: lawmaking, science, social interactions, history, place, and the many things that make meaning. For the sake of cisgender fragility, the Westbrook and Schilt (2014) formulation acts in a similar way – defining the construct of gender identity as situated amidst that same social world, rather than being the result of some biological sex, reproductive, chromosomal, hormonal, brain chemical, or other root. These constructs – race and gender identity – are not the same, but what is similar is how social interactions and structures serve as mediators to those who are categorized based on these constructs.

In the theoretical tradition of Bourdieu, DiAngelo (2011:58) argues that White fragility is a “product of the habitus”... a “condition” brought about by the “white structural position.” White people want to seek an equilibrium once it has been disrupted by a racial challenge to their state of normalcy, and as a result, engage in mechanisms to deflect the discomfort. In the case of race, this often manifests in the form of any mention of race. Thus, any discussion of race, or even the presence of black persons in white spaces, is enough to trigger feelings of intense discomfort and defensiveness among white persons.

In the context of transgender issues in the contemporary discourse, it seems that DiAngelo's arguments can extend beyond race. Anti-trans groups and politicians often cite unfounded safety and security concerns as a means to castigate trans persons. In this way,

cisgender persons are discursively set up as victims of the so-called perversion and potential for violence within any and all transgender persons. This false victim narrative is parallel to DiAngelo's (2011) analysis of white victim narratives. This is a phenomenon that she labels "self-defense claims" (p. 64). White people, like many other dominant groups, are found to employ narratives of being "victimized, slammed, blamed, attacked, and being used as punching bags" – when in fact they are merely coping with discomfort rather than experiencing any real oppression. The author explains how this discourse "perverts the actual direction of danger that exists between whites and others" (p. 65). Real oppression becomes "profoundly trivialized" when whites are offended or insecure at "merely talking." At the same time, DiAngelo (2011: 64) argues that this discourse of (false) victimization also serves to "position the speakers as morally superior while obscuring the true power of their social locations," serving to "blame others with less social power for their discomfort" and "falsely position that discomfort as dangerous."

Cisgender groups often argue that transgender persons who use the bathroom most befitting their gender identity are a threat to (cisgender) women – increasing the risk for rape and other bad acts. Evidence shows that such claims are erroneous: "There has never been a verifiable reported instance of a trans person harassing a cisgender person, nor have there been any confirmed reports of male predators 'pretending' to be transgender to gain access to women's spaces and commit crimes against them" (Bianco, 2015). So the alternative explanation is that these false claims are rhetoric used to construct a gendered challenge to the state of cisgender normalcy. These claims are used to deflect discomfort over the mere presence of transgender persons in public, dominantly cisgender, spaces.

Van Dijk (1992) uses the example of racial discourse in the United States to point out how discourse and rhetoric are deployed as a means of reifying oppressive institutional social practices and castigating oppressed groups through the use of false victim narratives. He gives several racial examples of how dominant groups claim “reverse racism” (p. 103) and make the claim that someone needs to “protect the white majority” from freeloaders, criminals, and those who might take advantage of the goodwill of a tolerant society in a way that would destroy that very society. This is a folk hero narrative where those who maintain the status quo are standing up against the “real racists” -- those accusing society of racism (p. 104). This ideology posits that anti-racists are just censors in disguise, or the “loony left” who seek to undermine venerable institutions – like police or democratic government. The author observes the uses of terms like “fair” and “balance” in light of how they can be employed in political rhetoric to dispel idealism and posit instead “realism” that altruistically argues away humanitarianism (p. 111). Van Dijk states that worry and manufactured security issues can be forms of attack that reinforce bias and hegemony through creating moral panics.

To extend Van Dijk’s theory to observe our contemporary culture colloquially, often cisgender pundits and politicians argue that they merely seek to protect the cisgender majority from the potentially perverted and misguided dangers presented by transgender persons (Abrams, 2016; Tracy, 2017). Further, these spokespeople regularly suggest that “bleeding heart liberals” and other tolerance- and inclusion-based organizers are unable to see the criminal potential of transgender persons. Thus, in this false-victim paradigm, anti-trans apologists are presumably realistic, even-minded folk heroes who only seek to balance out the destructive force posed by transgender activists and advocates.

Westbrook and Schilt (2014) explain that in the daily lives of transgender and gender non-conforming persons, social systems are not only oppressive, but that oppression is made more complex by varying systems of criteria that at times require transgender persons to participate in society in different ways based in the acceptance or denial of their biology or identity – depending on the type of space and social situation. These are concerns unknown to cisgender persons, who never are required to consider such shifts, often referred to as code-switching. The inability for cisgender people to determine the gender of a transgender or gender non-conforming person results in “panics” where “biology-based gender ideologies reign” (p. 50).

Westbrook and Schilt (2014) argue that in the course of doing gender there is also this secondary social act which they call “determining gender.” It is in this process of placing people into gender categories that society shows its inconsistencies across social spaces regarding gender identities and norms. This is especially made evident through contemporary discourses about transgender rights in public spaces, such as bathrooms, school environments, and in processes like employment and sports. Gender-segregated spaces are more likely to use gender as a biological absolute (genitals), whereas integrated spaces tend toward acceptance of identity. They argue that men’s and women’s spaces are not policed equally by society, thus women’s spaces – such as public bathrooms – become the spaces subject to the most public scrutiny and proposals for social control.

The connection between transgender identity and social response, especially as it pertains to the arguments that anti-transgender laws and efforts to protect women and children, thus are billed as justified, as is the reification of the gender binary and the maintenance of the status quo system of sex, gender, and sexuality. Upholding the gender binary and reifying notions of

acceptable determination of gender return equilibrium to a system that is upset by the mere existence of transgender persons, to use the language of DiAngelo.

How Definitions of Citizenship Marginalize Transgender and Gender Non-Conforming Persons

To look at how transgender and gender non-conforming identities are othered and castigated by society, Marzullo (2011) argues that one must look at the uneasy interplay between moral conservative (which Marzullo calls “neoconservative”) and business conservative (which Marzullo calls “neoliberal”) perspectives in order to see how normative notions about LGBTQ persons and their rights to citizenship are socially constructed in the United States. Marzullo uses the case study of same-sex marriage to model examples of this interplay.

Marzullo (2011) examines the marriage equality discourse in the United States using Critical Discourse Analysis of ethnography, and points out how neoliberal values and norms impact the way in which marriage discourse is framed. Namely, the author posits that globalized free market neoliberalism emphasizes three concepts: autonomy, individualism, and responsibility, through which marriage – including same-sex marriage – can play a role in reinforcing neoliberal social ideals and expectations, especially in the context of conservative business streams of neoliberalism. At times the author also posits how moral conservative ideology can overlap and/or conflict with this business-conservative framework. It seems that when moral-conservative ideology overlaps favorably with market neoliberalism it is because certain moral narratives can reinforce normative behaviors that also reify market and consumer ideals. For example, marriage can be a moral arrangement. But, marriage also sustains class structures while acting as a market force to contractually limit and entitle certain people with rights and responsibilities. Meanwhile, marriage acts as a social institution, excluding others who

do not choose to conform to certain social expectations that might warrant those rights. Marzullo uses college education as one example of a prerequisite to access to marriage, as those who are not college educated find it harder to secure marriage (Marzullo, 2011; Torr, 2011).

Marzullo warns against seeing neoliberalism as a stable hegemonic force, rather she encourages us to see how (N/n)eoliberalism and moral conservatism “are often seen moving together: disarticulating then rearticulating the uses and meanings of marriage and thus creating disjunctive and contradictory impulses on the subject” (Marzullo, 2011: 762). In this same way, ideas like ‘freedom’ and ‘activism’ are recast in the mold of market and consumerism, choice and consumption. So, put another way, as business conservatives take up free market neoliberal capitalism, they interact with moral conservatives. These are groups continually moving alongside each other due to the common political ties they share in the United States (namely, the Republican Party), bumping against one another in both complementary and challenging ways. These points of contact often result in changes in the ideology of both groups, thus instead of thinking of these groups as stable and unchanging, Marzullo urges us to see how they continually shape each other, not always in agreement with one another.

It is the very example of ‘freedom’ through which Marzullo explains that autonomy is a core tenet of neoliberalism. Freedom is “the autonomous ability to participate in the marketplace,” not “the freedom to be protected by certain basic human rights or citizenship rules” (Marzullo, 2011: 763). After all, neoliberalism is at root an economic ideology with political and social ties, not a socio-political ideology unto itself. In this way, autonomy only offers access to those who conform to the norms and ideals of the market: e.g. participation in higher education, detachment from and obscuring of “historical and socioeconomic contexts,”

participating in the normative construct of marriage (so that one may secure their position in the market system), etc.

There is a connecting point where race, class, gender, and sexuality all appear to be treated similarly by neoliberal ideology. Namely, that autonomy, individualism, and responsibility, as elaborated by Marzullo, are the tools by which the market ideology of neoliberalism as free market governance becomes the tool for political and social validation and recognition of groups and identities (Brown, 2005; Foucault, 2008; Marzullo, 2011; Ferguson & Hong, 2012).

Individualism emphasizes the role of the individual under the guise of being one's own person ('autonomy') but negates the classic liberal notion of a responsibility to the commons. Therefore, personal responsibility for one's self is total, and "social risk (poverty, unemployment, disease prevention, etc)" are disassembled from the social sphere (Marzullo, 2011: 765). It is in this same narrative that responsibility itself becomes a tool wielded in the matrix of domination by neoliberalism through marriage to "uphold status quo inequalities, especially in regards to a racialized class stratification" (Marzullo, 2011: 768). The author points out that this narrative of marriage obscures ongoing injustices that are suffered by LGBTQ persons – especially in intersections with race and class. It is in this way that marriage, once 'given' to LGBTQ persons, can be used as a state excuse to erase responsibility to citizens and instead appeal to the personal responsibility of individuals: e.g. through denial of social injustices/inequalities, assertion of equal rights under the law, an appeal to "universal diversity and cultural inclusiveness through marriage as a way for individuals to prosper by turning to our families for support and away from the state, and each other, for help" (Marzullo, 2011: 770). It is in this way that the privileged "white and/or middle class may simultaneously argue that

marriage should be for them, while unintentionally supporting the more negative sides of the institution.”

Legitimacy in the social world -- access to social capital, political capital, and as expected, economic capital -- all flow from conformation to neoliberal interpretations of values. Groups are told to conform to these conservative economic and political hegemonic values, and in exchange, they are offered legitimacy and validation. However, as Ferguson and Hong (2012: 1060) show in this example from across the pond, “a hegemonic deployment of sexuality and gay rights by nations within the European Union facilitates the persecution of people of color communities, generally, and Muslim communities, increasingly.” They go on to argue that neoliberalism manipulates this access to political and social legitimacy to leverage one identity or group against another, cover over racist and colonial histories, or obscure conservative persecution of one group while claiming progressive favoritism of another.

Conservative political ideology in the United States is shaped largely by the discourse purveyed via conservative news outlets, such as Fox News. The following explanation of the connection between conservatism as an ideology, and conservatism as purveyed by news media knits together later in this theory to show how these systems affect marginalized persons in gender-queer and transgender communities.

Conservative media outlets cater to both moral conservative and business conservative audiences. They walk a tightrope between discourses which bolster the primacy of markets, business, and consumerism while simultaneously attempting to assert a moral conservative ethic of normative behaviors and identities. Peck (2014) argues that Fox News posits itself as the representative of the downtrodden, yet it achieves this by representing its spokespersons as “protectors and advocates of traditional moral-economic principles” (Peck, 2014: 528), rather

than advocating for policies that actually benefit the working class. Thus, it appears that Fox News is no stranger to the idea of claiming to be representative of a viewpoint (e.g. speaking up for victims), who they then have no trouble redefining as whatever they wish (e.g. positing powerful dominant groups as victims, and their pundits as the protectors and advocates of those victims and the upstanding principles they represent). This is entirely consistent with the neoliberal legitimacy manipulation offered by Ferguson and Hong. It is this way in which Fox can draw lines between the whitewashed words and advocacy of Martin Luther King Jr. and those who shame persons of color for speaking out today against racial injustice by doing it ‘the wrong way’ – such as by not adhering to elite white social boundaries and civility standards. Previously these ideas would represent “divergent material interests,” but by evoking and modifying populist rhetorical traditions, Fox News can “give viewers compelling moral logic” (Peck, 2014: 528).

Peck (2014: 528-529) offers that “all populist discourses... dichotomize society into two opposing camps.” In its coverage of the Great Recession, this author proposes that Fox used populist discourse to “protect and strengthen the hegemonic hold of conservative economic ideas in the face of crisis.” They posited working people as victims, drew lines between working people and ownership-class persons, and then posited all of them together as victims in the same boat. Thus the hegemony was not the problem, the conservative economic principles were not the problem, and even the elite ownership class was not the problem – rather, the problem was the welfare queens, the “takers.” The author posits that this is a “moral rationale” (Peck: 2014: 529). This method of false victim narratives is “fraught with profound contradictions.” Discursive redirection and concealment is deployed in order to make this new creation of the “producing class” look as both the successful many, but also the marginalized/victimized few

fighting against the many who presumably wish to undermine them. Business figures are presented as unbiased and a-political (Peck, 2014: 532). Terms like “successful” are used instead of “rich.” Thus, successful people are the hardest workers and the most moral. Thus, “punishing” the successful by taxing them is both immoral and worthy of the defense of the (actual) working class (Peck, 2014: 530). Using terms like “silent majority” also works in this way.

In analysis of Peck’s work, it seems that Fox News is able to link together previously disparate class and market stances in order to recraft and elevate conservative ideological positions. Neoliberal language of productivity reinforces the business conservative bootstrap narrative of personally responsible behavior, and validates meritocracy ideology, erasing attention to class inequalities. Moral conservative language validates this productivity narrative as moral, and thus links normative behavior as a participant in the market as an act of civil religion. In these frames also reside entrenched ‘moral’ cisnormative and heterosexual identity and privilege, as seen earlier in Marzullo. The deployment of this veiled business-conservative and moral-conservative-reconfigured rhetoric mitigates the audience’s sensitivities to overtly bigoted and homophobic discursive strategies in favor of civil business and religious discursive frames.

The public’s capacity to humanize LGBTQIA persons diminishes when business conservative and moral conservative discourses are deployed and reinforced through media. Peterson (2011) explains the social context of homophobic rhetoric, and how the neoliberal ideology within business-conservative economic and social framework enables groups such as the Family Research Council (American evangelical James Dobson’s political lobby) to deploy dog-whistle politics and discourse to create homophobic narratives and produce governance claims. Peterson (2011: 745) posits business conservative homophobic discourse as representing

“a powerful and destructive exclusionary technology that we must not ignore.” He offers that the FRC very deliberately frames lesbian and gay people as non-citizens/subjects. They are “direct threats” to the “heteronormative nuclear family” (Peterson, 2011: 746), thus this ‘family’ becomes a victim of the lesbian and gay “alternative family forms” (Peterson, 2011: 749).

Peterson illustrates these castigating framing stories using a variety of examples: The FRC does not use lesbian and gay frames in the same sentence with the word ‘family’ in order to depersonalize and dehumanize lesbian and gay family relationships. Queer researchers argue that capitalism has been the force largely responsible for destabilizing families (Marzullo, 2011; Peterson, 2011), yet Peterson argues that groups like the FRC scapegoat lesbian and gay families as the cause of social instability. The FRC uses quotation marks in their documents to ironize and mock lesbian and gay legitimacy. Peterson says that “under the rhetorics of privatization and responsibilization, citizenship is maintained not through appeal to one’s status as a citizen of a nation or territory and its constitutional guarantees but through proper self-management or proper self-regulation, which, in turn, grants the individual access to citizenship and rights as a reward for responsible action” (Peterson, 2011: 750). In the neoliberal business conservative paradigm, knowledge and skills are viewed as commodities among adoptive parents, and one’s conformity to prescribed conservative social roles are prerequisites to the granting of familial responsibility governed by state and religious agencies, such as adoption.

In agreement with Peck, Peterson posits that anti-queer rhetoric is going through a transition where it is no longer acceptable to use purely biblical references to justify homophobic values. Rather, now changes are being made to deploy neoliberal rhetoric to homophobic ends. Thus, business conservative rhetoric has become a tool of dog-whistle politics, in the same way that discussions of state benefits (like social welfare, food stamps, etc.) have been used in the

past as thinly veiled racist critiques. Business conservative rhetoric is now used to reinforce homophobic propagandas of fear, religious narratives, and the positing of dominant groups as victims (e.g. heterosexual couples, cisnormative individuals, etc.).

Conservative news outlets such as Fox News cater to both moral conservative and business conservative principles. They walk a tightrope between discourses which bolster the primacy of markets, business, and consumerism while simultaneously attempting to assert a moral conservative ethic of normative behaviors and identities. So, to return to the example of same-sex marriage for a moment, it is apparent that businesses largely support same sex marriage as a function of neoliberal market ideology. On the other hand, moral conservatives oppose same sex marriage on religious and/or moral grounds, which is at times in conflict with business conservatives. Neoliberalist social, economic, and political privileges are being mediated to lesbian and gay couples by business conservatives, who, while seeming supportive of same sex marriage, also desire to sell marriage equality as a “final frontier” of LGBT citizenship. This obscures ongoing injustice and oppression (like the fact that LGBTQ persons can still be fired or denied housing, or difficulties in access to healthcare, or increased poverty among certain populations, structural violences, etc.), and seeks to recast such accusations as mere breaches of personal responsibility on the part of individuals. This then fits into moral conservative notions that people in marginalized groups deserve their life positions and that their circumstances are of their own creation, likely due to their moral degeneracy, rather than, again, systemic social inequalities. All of this is useful as it helps to explain the complexity of the conservative discourse that any reader is likely to encounter in media articles reporting on transgender bathroom bills, President Trump’s ban on transgender persons in the military, and

the queer community's struggle to retain civil rights to employment, housing, education, and other structural systems.

These conservative groups' approaches to citizenship are important takeaways, as moral conservative citizenship is "maintained not through appeal to one's status as a citizen of a nation or territory, and its constitutional guarantees but through proper self-management or proper self-regulation, which, in turn, grants the individual access to citizenship and rights as a reward for responsible action" (Peterson, 2011:750). In the moral conservative paradigm, citizenship is afforded to those who adhere to their religio-moral logic. For business conservatives, citizenship is based on participation in the market, granting adherents citizenship. Adherence to social conventions opens doors to these marketplaces. Conventions reify social institutions, and conversely exclude others who do not choose to conform to certain social expectations that might warrant those rights. Together, these constructions of citizenship form the basis of exclusion of gender non-conforming and transgender persons in ways that allow for cisgender fragility to paint them as evil others – and simultaneously bolstering their claims to cisgender victimhood and terror. This is why it was an easy sell for President Trump to propose that transgender persons were creating an over-burdening drain on military costs. This is an obvious appeal to the business conservative ideologues who are highly sensitive to these types of economic appeal.

This approach to citizenship has an effect that cuts both ways. As stated earlier, neoliberalism becomes the tool for political and social validation and recognition of groups and identities (Brown, 2005; Foucault, 2008; Marzullo, 2011; Ferguson & Hong, 2012). In one context, this invalidates those who are deemed outside the religio-moral and market-conventional paradigms. For these persons, citizenship may be withheld or partially doled out as the group conforms to varying degrees of the conventional interests. Looking intersectionally and

historically, marginalized identity groups find themselves being granted access to the market and access to human rights not all at once, but piecemeal.

It is in this way that white fragility still appeals to colorblind ideology, which in turn continues to deny the human rights concerns of people of color in contemporary society – a society that proclaims the explicit interest in having people of color have equal access to the marketplace. In this same way, same-sex marriage and other conventional advances made in access to markets and participation by LGBT persons becomes cover for the latent human rights problems still facing the LGBTQIA community.

Sports managers can make a fuss about the passage of an anti-trans bathroom bill, perhaps, but the news media covering it may talk more about the economic fallout than the human rights violations being inflicted on the transgender community. Media articles might discuss a specific ‘controversial’ bill or law, but the context – a long history of bigoted and discriminatory laws -- is left out of the analysis. Instead, the focus may remain entirely on the political fallout, or the economic losses the state may suffer, or the politicians themselves and how difficult it is for them to do their work in a world where ‘both sides’ are in such disagreement.

However, there are other contexts in which the neoliberal citizenship paradigm opens doors for those deemed to be inside the normative structures. Thus, if a business owner wishes to post bigoted anti-transgender signage, their actions, depending on their region, customer base, and the local social context, may be seen as ‘controversial’ yet not unacceptable or overtly bigoted. Media articles covering these issues may present the facts such that the ‘two sides’ are merely differences of opinion – even when the sides are a bigoted business owner placing overtly anti-transgender signage in their storefronts, or encouraging violence against transgender people

who may use their restaurant's toilet, and the other 'side' being transgender persons and their allies seeking to end such bigotry and denounce the owner's actions as unacceptable. In such cases, the business owner, who has been granted full citizenship by the neoliberal and religio-moral paradigm, may see the benefit of the doubt far more easily, as the default, with their bigotry (and its effects, like its potential to incite violence) being presented as a mere difference of opinion, a 'controversy.' Those in the margins, granted only partial citizenship (marriage rights, but not job security, housing security, etc.) are not granted such a default. This default becomes the basis for the latent content of analysis of such media -- as what is left unsaid or assumed becomes the basis on which hegemony is left unacknowledged and uncriticized.

And so, this chapter has come full circle in theoretically explaining the circumstances faced by transgender and gender non-conforming persons in the United States when confronted with cisgender fragility. This chapter has also made an effort to synthesize a number of different theoretical perspectives from other areas of specialization in order to construct a plausible basis for future research. This basis, in the most straightforward terms, is to suggest that DiAngelo's notions of White Fragility are an adequate framework to begin examining a similar phenomenon among cisgender persons. I have added the context of interplay between moral conservative and business conservative ideological agendas in order to equip the reader with a deeper understanding of the discursive means by which these ideologies persist and replicate intersectionally in U.S. media and politics. It is the hope of this author that researchers might take up this theoretical challenge, beyond this present study, and address the original questions posed in the introduction, alongside the additional challenge of acknowledging the role of the oppressors. So often the dominant group's behavior is left largely unexamined by researchers. Cisgender persons, like white persons for DiAngelo, are worthy of scrutiny -- as it is within the

examination of their defensive behaviors that we begin to see the way that oppressive practices persist and are reified through lawmaking and political platform building.

CHAPTER III: METHOD AND METHODOLOGY

In this chapter I will explain the method and methodology of this exploratory study of cisgender fragility. The method chosen for this study is ethnographic content analysis, henceforth referred to as ‘ECA.’ This technique was developed by Altheide (1987:65) who argues that ECA offers a useful alternative to traditional quantitative content analysis or other forms of qualitative content analysis, as it is oriented toward “reflexive analysis of documents.” This reflexivity comes in the form of embracing the fieldwork principles of ethnography-- that is, treating content analysis as a form of field-work research, placing documents in context. Altheide (1987: 66) describes that context in this way:

In general, ethnography refers to the description of people and their culture (cf. Schwartz and Jacobs, 1979). In this sense, the subject matter-human beings engaged in meaningful behavior- guide the mode of inquiry and orientation of the investigator. However, if the meaning of an activity remains paramount, ethnography can also be considered a methodological orientation independently of a specific subject matter. Products of social interaction, for example, can also be studied reflexively, looking at one feature in the context of what is understood about other features, allowing for the constant comparison suggested by Glaser and Strauss (1967).

What is of particular interest here is the way in which this method can be applied to a particular people and their culture. The inquiry is centered around this notion of how that people and their culture create and maintain meaning, and then through that shared meaning engage in certain types of behaviors and interactions.

It is in this way that ECA offers this particular study a means of placing the qualitative content analysis of the documents I will find on the Fox News website within the cultural meaning structures of American conservative discourses. As elaborated in Chapter II, researchers using the method of critical discourse analysis (‘CDA’) have already done the heavy lifting of

establishing a differentiation of conservative cultures, and then identifying a number of patterns and rhetorical devices that are common within these cultures. ECA is well-suited to begin with those preconceived themes, which present in the form of research questions. Emerging themes can then be examined throughout the circular process of open coding and analysis. New and/or revised research questions emerge and evolve through this reflexive process, and then eventually, discussion and the answering of questions (Altheide 1987, 1996).

ECA is defined by its connectedness to theory and purposive sampling. Rather than seeking a quantitative randomized/stratified sample, ECA “is used to document and understand the communication of meaning, as well as to verify theoretical relationships” (Altheide, 1987: 68). This method thus relies on the intuition and interactivity of the researcher. Some themes are present at the beginning of the study, derived from theory, and yet additional themes are investigated and allowed to emerge in order to verify, test, nuance, and dispute theory. ECA strives toward both an analytical approach and toward what Altheide (1987: 69) calls, “good descriptive information.”

One might ask why I do not carry on the method of CDA in this study, as much of my theory has derived from its methodological use? I argue that CDA, as seen through the methods of the authors in Chapter II, has some extraordinary benefits in terms of the depth of its qualitative analysis. It is exceptionally suited for examining every level of text, from the most minute word choices upwards to overarching themes (Van Dijk, 1992). However, it does not lend itself well to small scale exploratory studies. CDA deploys a level of depth that may be better oriented toward later explanatory testing of this notion of cisgender fragility, or the substantive differences between manifestations of varying types of fragility.

ECA is best suited to explore at the level of themes – identifying known rhetorical devices, taking notice of emerging or unexpected devices -- and then locating the discussion of these themes within the cultural meaning structures of established political and social groups for the sake of an adequate description. My hope is that this description can be the groundwork for additional multi-level inquiry, testing, and theory development.

ECA in the Context of News Analysis

ECA been used to great effect in studying conservative expressions of discourse in the mass media. Gormly (2004) used ECA to show how The 700 Club, a nationally popular evangelical news and propaganda program, framed the whole of Islam as militant, radical, and terrorists during the years following the September 11, 2001 attacks. Pat Robertson, the show's host, would regularly take on different roles – prophet, news anchor, charismatic leader, and pastoral guide in order to convince watchers that Islam is a “heretical threat” (Gormly, 2004: 231) where every adherent is a terrorist and consumed by Satan. Likewise, Robertson argued regularly that the United States is a Christian nation and that as such, God would bless or curse the whole of the nation based in our collective behaviors. Behaviors that did not fully embrace his bigoted anti-Muslim worldview would be evidence of the “End Times,” signaling the return of Christ, the reward of the faithful, and the retributive punishment of everyone else. In this way, Robertson serves as the conduit for his audience to make sense of the secular world through the lens of their shared Evangelical beliefs. Thus, Gormly shows how ECA is effectively deployed within the setting of conservative media and discourse analysis in order to evaluate previous theoretical claims and clarify emerging themes.

Islam was the subject of study by Laird, de Marrais, and Barnes (2007) when they evaluated how Muslims were portrayed by U.S. and Western European medical professionals, as represented by abstracts found in the MEDLINE academic journal index. Laird et. al show how ECA can be effectively deployed to observe, extrapolate, and evaluate both the manifest (explicit) and latent (implied) views, meanings, and themes found in these abstracts. They showed that the way that medical professionals refer to Muslims can often indicate a worldview that asserts manifest western interpretations of Islamic beliefs, practices, and tenets. They also showed that medical professionals' latent views often castigated Muslim practices as a risk to their health and wellbeing and that Islam presents an obstacle between ideal Westernized biomedical healthcare and the patients who practice the religion.

This nuance to observing both manifest and latest content is important in the study of Fox News as it relates to cisgender fragility, especially as it pertains to the contrast between the stated values of the outlet – such as their slogans touting being “fair and balanced,” and their latent castigation of transgender persons as being synonymous with pedophiles and sexual predators. Neither of these latter claims can be substantiated by a “fair and balanced” evaluation of the evidence (Bianco, 2015; Samar, 2016). It is through identifying such contrasts that one can begin to illustrate the wider theoretical construct of fragility. Fragility is illustrated by the juxtaposition of a relatively benign reality with the moral panic and disproportionate defensiveness taken up by the dominant group. It is in the same latent way that dog whistle terms have been used to castigate marginalized groups by politicians and journalists for decades.

ECA was used by Lemke and Chala (2016) to show how Senegal's and Ethiopia's journalists used social media (Twitter) to interact with readers. Of particular note in these authors' work is the importance of digital context. Different news outlets use the digital frames

around their content in varying ways and to varying ends. These uses of digital content are intentionally deployed to direct the reader toward certain underlying priorities that can be observed by researchers. For example, the authors showed that some outlets would avoid live tweeting an event, as that drives traffic only to the tweets themselves. Instead, journalists would tweet links to articles on their website – driving traffic to the website and away from the social interactivity of Twitter. To extrapolate, this is to say that when I am looking at articles on the Fox News website, it is important to observe the digital frames – the design of the article, the multimedia content, the links, and the interactivity – in order to take in the additional context and priorities that are being expressed by the site’s designers and owners.

Stock (2007) uses ECA to illustrate the power that media editors have in the creation of pervasive and hurtful social myths. Searching the term “anarchy” alongside news of Hurricane Katrina, Stock found that the term anarchy was misused to convey other intended meanings (colloquial meanings of anarchy, anarchy as chaos and lawlessness), but also to construct harmful mythical narratives about the disaster survivors, such as to describe war zone imagery of looting, violence, and social breakdown. These myths pervaded U.S. national coverage of the event and likely impacted the way in which the disaster was handled by government responders and political leaders. Stock’s research undergirds the importance of ECA as a tool illuminating the connection between media’s chosen frames and the resulting political/public perception, response, or lack of response. These media frames and media myths have the power to construct a social idea of reality that can cause harm and misunderstanding.

Finally, Altheide and Grimes (2005) use ECA to argue that media organizations were key in uncritically perpetuating the G.W. Bush Administration’s incorrect myths about Saddam Hussein and Iraq in order to push forward with the Iraq war. They label this concerted series of

events a “War Program, or a sequence of reports that blends imagery and language of the current conflict with previous wars, and incorporates critiques of war policy within the news frame about movement toward war” (Altheide and Grimes, 2005: 618). On page 620 they go on to say, “especially network TV news organizations, chose not to present important contextual and background information about the Middle East, and especially Iraq, because it was not consistent with other news themes nor was it as entertaining.” They argue that media tends to uncritically accept the narratives and frames put forward by certain highly influential bodies (think tanks, political entities), based mostly in the availability of popular narratives alongside entertaining themes. These authors urge others using this methodology to look for overarching ‘programs’ such as the war program to help identify and explain contemporary propaganda campaigns and the related media logic.

Beyond common manifestations of homophobic and transphobic rhetoric, the overarching propaganda narrative set forth by conservative media organizations, such as Fox News, seems to reach for such a ‘program’ as defined by Altheide and Grimes (2005). General cultural evidence points to the colloquial conclusion that there is some concerted effort to frame transgender and gender-binary-non-conforming individuals as the sometimes-conflicting notions that they are a danger to themselves and others, a drain on U.S. resources (such as military budgets), and victims of their own self-generated confusion. As discussed in Chapters I-II, all three of these notions are unsubstantiated and rely on the uncritical audience as well as the uncritical journalist to succeed. Indeed, throughout coding I will be looking for such links to think tanks and dominant political logic in order to establish or verify theoretical claims that certain organizations have influenced and pressed these positions. Altheide and Grimes (2005) state that news organizations accept these types of ‘program’ positions and simultaneously subvert or

ignore alternative explanations and themes. Certainly, the notions that transgender people are bathroom voyeurs and predators or that transgender people are bankrupting the U.S. military are both ‘man bites dog’ stories that serve very specific overarching framing stories. In the hypothetical context of a yet-to-be-found Anti-Transgender Program, these would fit very well into the categories of being consistent with previously held (transphobic) public views on the transgender identity, alongside providing a moral-panic-driven form of entertainment – very similar to the threat of ‘terrorism’ within the War Program.

Data Collection

As shown in Chapter II, I came to the topic of cisgender fragility through reviewing the CDA queer studies literature on types of conservative rhetoric and their connections with reinforcing power structures through various discursive techniques, e.g. dog whistle terminology. The theoretical idea of White Fragility, an explanatory concept found in the study of the social construction of race, showed a resemblance to these discursive techniques. Seeing that connection, my goal then was to design a small-scale exploratory study to test if these common themes presented in the evaluation of a definitive mainstream conservative news network. The obvious choice was to observe Fox News, as they are widely viewed as a mainstream source of news for the broad base of U.S. conservatives. As described earlier in this current chapter, ECA was identified as the ideal choice to take up such a study. Of particular interest is the way in which Fox News constructs the idea and archetype of “transgender” – especially as it translates to their perceptions of how these persons should have access to services, civil rights, and how the public should respond to the perceived dangers presented by those who identify as transgender in the U.S. Thus, my unit of analysis will be each chosen article, as noted below in the sampling

section, with the full inclusion of all surrounding non-advertising visual content in the archived page. Thus, not only will the article text/photos be observed and coded, but also attention will be paid to the non-sponsored article links that relate to the transgender social discussion. Upon preliminary observation, this would often include the device of large highlighted text, pop-up videos from broadcast interviews/reports, and upon rare occasion, a relevant article link. Non-relevant article links, videos, and advertisements will be ignored.

The exploratory questions under consideration in this research were: why are transgender and gender non-conforming persons often castigated in the U.S. public and political discourse under the banner of public safety? What role does moral-conservative and neoliberal market conformity play in this formulation of rhetoric? How has the rise of populist rhetoric contributed to the public's view of transgender persons and their citizenship? Why do we see the advancement of so-called "transgender bathroom bills," the framing of transgender soldiers as an expensive, burdensome group, as well as other political moves that seek to cast transgender and gender non-conforming persons as threats to public systems such as the military, education, housing, and sports? These questions will be translated into coding themes as outlined below in the "Themes from the literature" section. Motifs and elements, as well as my open coding categories, will also be outlined in the "Procedure" section.

Sampling

Because news coverage on any one issue tends to ebb and flow, and this cycle is often consistent with waves of political interest, or particular socio-political events that reinvigorate the discourse, sampling is best carried out on a basis of seeking content in clusters contingent on these cycles. This is advantageous, as atheoretical statistical samples would miss these clusters (Altheide, 1987). This is why I chose to embrace a cluster sampling approach, aiming toward the combination of theoretical and saturation sampling. Contemporary internet search engines enhance this ability, as one can search for key terms, such as in my case, “transgender,” and see these clustered cycles and events.

I designed my search using the FoxNews.com homepage search engine. My search term was “transgender.” Given the options in the website’s advanced search tools, I made the following limitations to the search:

- Limited my search to the first year of the Donald J. Trump presidency, January 20th, 2017 through January 20th, 2018.
- Limited my search to the “Fox News” category (excluded their auxiliary Business and Latino sites),
- Limited it to “stories” (excluding video, slideshows, lists, and recipes),
- Limited story selection to only include stories pertaining to the United States. The last of these tasks required manual sorting based on the tags used on each article by the website manager, and visual inspection of the article.

The total population of articles in the search was 919. Upon visual inspection, this search contained multiple duplicate articles (same article posted in different areas of the website but with identical content), and numerous articles not authored by Fox News. Fox News authors

relatively few articles that fit this criteria, in fact. Using manual sorting for U.S.-related articles containing sufficient content to be coded for this research, and authored by Fox News (or FoxSports) rather than articles reposted from wire services (such as the Associated Press) or solely authored/reposted by other websites, the population of relevant articles was 125.

Theoretical saturation was being achieved after coding around 20 articles. This process started by going in chronological order (oldest to newest) from the population of articles for the first 15 articles. From this point, I switched to cluster sampling to see how the themes and frames changed, if at all, over time within the same topic cluster, and examined new clusters that appeared later. At least 2-3 additional articles were evaluated and coded from each cluster for confirmation of continued saturation, and inclusion of any new themes, frames, or motifs/elements. Saturation was measured as seeing the same themes, motifs/elements, and content presentation repeatedly with no novel additions.

All 125 articles in the population were carefully read. Around 15 articles were coded in-depth at the themes and motifs/elements (discourse) level using the cover sheet plus detained in-line notes. An additional 37 articles were coded using the coding sheet with occasional in-line notations. A total of 52 articles were coded from the population of 125 articles. These coding clusters include President Trump's decision to rescind Title IX protections based on gender identity for students and athletics, coverage of the so-called 'bathroom bills' in North Carolina, Texas, and elsewhere, the decision by the Boy Scouts of America to include transgender boys in scouting programs, and the clemency granted to Chelsea Manning by President Obama, the soldier who leaked classified documents to the public via WikiLeaks and later while in prison identified publicly as transgender and began her medical transition. Chelsea Manning seemed to be an ongoing person of interest, as Fox continued to cover her life throughout the year,

including her appointment as a guest lecturer at Harvard, and whether or not the Pentagon was to financially cover her medical transition. The last cluster was President Trump's decision to ban transgender troops in the U.S. Military.

Sorting the search results, reading, evaluating the authorship, and printing the relevant articles in the population took around 700 minutes. Coding each article took from 10 to 30 minutes. Initial coding took around 450 minutes to code, analyze, and compare on the initial pass, and then additional iterative re-evaluation, identification of clusters, recoding of earlier articles, and saturation confirmation took at least another 700 minutes. Total time spent gathering and coding data was around 1850 minutes, conservatively.

Procedure

Using Altheide's (1987, 1996) example, I began viewing the articles on the website in a chronological order and worked toward creating a topical guide. I would view a few articles, assess the messaging and categories that each would fit into, and then revisit my previous materials to see if modifications were necessary.

As part of the reflexive process in ECA, I maintained ethnographic journaling throughout the coding and analysis. This process kept track of the search terms, their total results, and provided additional qualitative data helpful in reframing the research questions as I proceeded. Journaling was recorded in a combination of typed notes using windows notepad, handwritten notes on post-it notes, coding cover sheets, and in-line notes in the margins of printed articles. Where needed, I used the Google search engine to keep track of basic facts about certain events, incidents, or pieces of legislation (dates, locations, etc.).

I used themes, frames, and discourse as levels to evaluate the content. Explaining these coding and analysis levels, Gormly (2004: 223) writes:

Themes are the recurring typical theses that run through multiple reports. Frames are the focus—a parameter or boundary—for discussing a particular event. Frames focus the reader of the text on what will be discussed, how it will be discussed, and how it will not be discussed; themes comprise the treatment of the topics as well as the topics themselves. Finally, discourse is the actual symbolic interchange, the words and images used to communicate the themes. Discourse conveys the themes that exist in a given frame or set of frames.

Thus, I adopted these levels of coding and analysis in my ECA evaluation of cisgender fragility. Gormly also deploys the use of “motifs,” which are descriptively similar to the discursive practices identified by CDA (Van Dijk, 1992). These motifs are the elements of discourse manifest within each of these coding and analysis categories. Each article reviewed presented a number of areas of interest, depending on the choices of the article’s author and the website’s design and implementation. Areas of interest could include (but are not limited to) the article properties of: article title, article body, accompanying photo or video, photo or video caption, the article’s categorization on the website, and non-advertising recommended or linked content. The review of linked content will be limited to the transgender discussion, but other patterns may be observed.

Giving attention to the interactivity of the web page content is important to taking in digital content. Unlike print journalism, digital content is hyperlinked (connected to other stories), enmeshed with multimedia (how the story is presented is variable and adaptable based on available media and how it can best be seen as impacting the reader), and interactive (readers can respond through comments, likes, shares, etc.) (Dueze, 1998; Lemke & Chala, 2016). Taken together, all of these components – the themes, frames, and discourse, alongside the digital

environment -- can situate the article under review within the context of both the host website itself, but also the cultural and historical themes, frames, and discourse.

The codebook (and coding cover sheet) for this research, therefore, begins with the themes, motifs, and elements listed below. Open iterative coding categories will take note of the presentation of the digital frames described above per Lemke and Chala, seek "programs" (propaganda narratives; references to think tanks, research institutes, etc.) per Altheide and Grimes, and continuously search for other preconceived themes, good descriptive information, and emerging or unexpected devices per Altheide.

Themes From the Literature

- Transgender people as threats to the public and/or private safety of individuals.
- Transgender people as threats to public systems, e.g. the military, education, housing, sports, economics.
- Transgender persons as outside moral conformity.
- Transgender persons as outside market conformity.

Motifs and Elements From the Literature

Within the four research areas of inquiry posed in the introduction, and simplified above as themes, were a number of motifs and elements to be sought based on the theoretical research on cisgender fragility. These have been synthesized from a number of sources (Van Dijk, 1992; Diangelo, 2011; Marzullo, 2011; Peterson, 2011; Peck, 2014; Westbrook and Schilt, 2014) to provide the basis for the conservative worldview toward transgender and gender non-conforming persons.

- *Transgender perversion and the potential for violence in all transgender persons:* The moral-conservative notion that being transgender is inherently perverse and an affront to creation/God. Sexual perversion is particularly repulsive and abnormal, and many conservative Christians believe that sexual perversion is a more serious type of sin than others. This type of perversion requires upstanding persons to be on guard (self-defense claim), since it contains within it the potential for violence. In this paradigm, sexual perversions of one type are often linked to sexual perversions of another type, e.g. an adherent may argue that a transgender person is also likely a rapist, pedophile, or practitioner of bestiality.
- *Self defense claim by cisgender person/group:* When transgender persons are labeled dangerous, this provokes cisgender people to take the defensive posture. Self-defense claims can be accompanied by a reversal of the real direction of danger – claims which assert that transgender people are dangerous, when in fact most violence between these groups is cisgender violence against transgender persons.
- *Cisgender discomfort:* Discomfort at the mention of transgender persons or related social issues.
- *Folk hero narrative:* Cisgender person or group as the protector against the violent transgender threat.
- *Realism:* Using arguments of realism to argue away humanitarianism – e.g. castigating ‘bleeding-heart’ liberals and other allies of transgender persons, labeling of activists as destructive to social fabric or morals. This is often seen alongside folk hero narratives.

- *Determining gender*: The inability for a cisgender person to clearly identify (or acknowledge) the gender of a transgender or gender non-conforming person causes discomfort and defensive moves to uphold the gender binary.
- *Autonomy*: Part of neoliberal market ideology, autonomy is used by business conservatives as a means to suggest that conformity to market norms is the way that transgender people may be afforded human rights and/or citizenship.
- *Individualism*: Part of neoliberal market ideology, individualism is used as an argument to ignore social and historical circumstances that create and sustain inequalities.
- *Responsibility*: Part of neoliberal market ideology, personal responsibility comes alongside individualism and autonomy to reify a bootstrap narrative and is used by business conservatives to erase systemic inequalities and systems of domination. Individuals are blamed for their own circumstances, or are successful only because of their own full participation in the meritocracy.
- *Fox as protector/advocate*: Fox News as the protector and advocate of traditional moral-economic principles.
- *Fox as victim advocate*: Fox News as the protector of victims.
- *Fox decides victims/villains*: Fox News casts cisgender persons as victims and transgender person as villains. Framing transgender persons as villains caters to the populist discourse, and states the transgender people are the enemy of the producing class (a contrived “class” of people that urges a class-blind form of “solidarity” between workers, middle, and upper class, but excludes the “takers”).
- *Civil/business dog whistle*: A civil or business frame being deployed as a dog whistle stand in for otherwise overtly bigoted anti-transgender ideas or policies, e.g. conservative

arguments that transgender people are a source of social or market instability, or exorbitant costs to taxpayers/public.

- *Religious dog whistle*: A religious frame being deployed as a dog whistle stand in for otherwise overtly bigoted anti-transgender ideas or policies, e.g. Transgender persons as undeserving of the rights of other citizens due to perversion, transgender persons as a direct threat to families, heteronormative nuclear families as the victims of transgender persons, use of moral degeneracy argument as substitute for social explanations (such as ignoring inequalities and oppressive systems and instead suggesting that transgender suffering is the result of their immoral choices and resulting consequences).
- *Mocking legitimacy*: Conservative person or group casts transgender and gender non-conforming persons as an illegitimate or undeserving group by using diminutive or dismissive language, or through use of quotation marks (as a form of sarcasm, in place of saying “so-called”).

Chapter IV offers a summary of the key findings of this preliminary exploration. Further, Chapter IV draws conclusions regarding how the findings compare to the theoretical literature found in Chapter II, makes recommendations for future research, and describes the limitations of this study.

CHAPTER IV: FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

Those on the side of human rights and equal protection under the law can benefit from well-considered theory and analysis of qualitative aspects of the positions held by their opponents, who often come from dominant and privileged social positions. The public opinion literature also shows that the discussion and adoption of legislation and/or court decisions in favor of LGBTQIA human rights, such as same-sex marriage, have a positive effect on public attitudes toward persons with LGBTQIA identities (Becker, 2014; Kreitzer, Hamilton, & Tolbert, 2014). This reinforces the need to deploy sound social science analysis in arenas of politics and lobbying to enact social change in favor of LGBTQIA rights and recognition.

This findings and conclusions section will begin by presenting the numerical totals of the findings, followed by exploring the themes one by one. Next, a discussion of the motifs and elements will be included, alongside the introduction of new motifs and elements that were emergent during coding. Then, conclusions and additional discussion will be offered with an eye toward synthesis of the findings and suggestions for future research on this topic. Last, this chapter will explore the challenges and limitations, researcher bias, validity, and reliability in this study.

The themes identified in the theoretical literature were as follows:

- Transgender people as threats to the public and/or private safety of individuals.
- Transgender people as threats to public systems. E.g. the military, education, housing, sports, economics.
- Transgender persons as outside moral conformity.
- Transgender persons as outside market conformity.

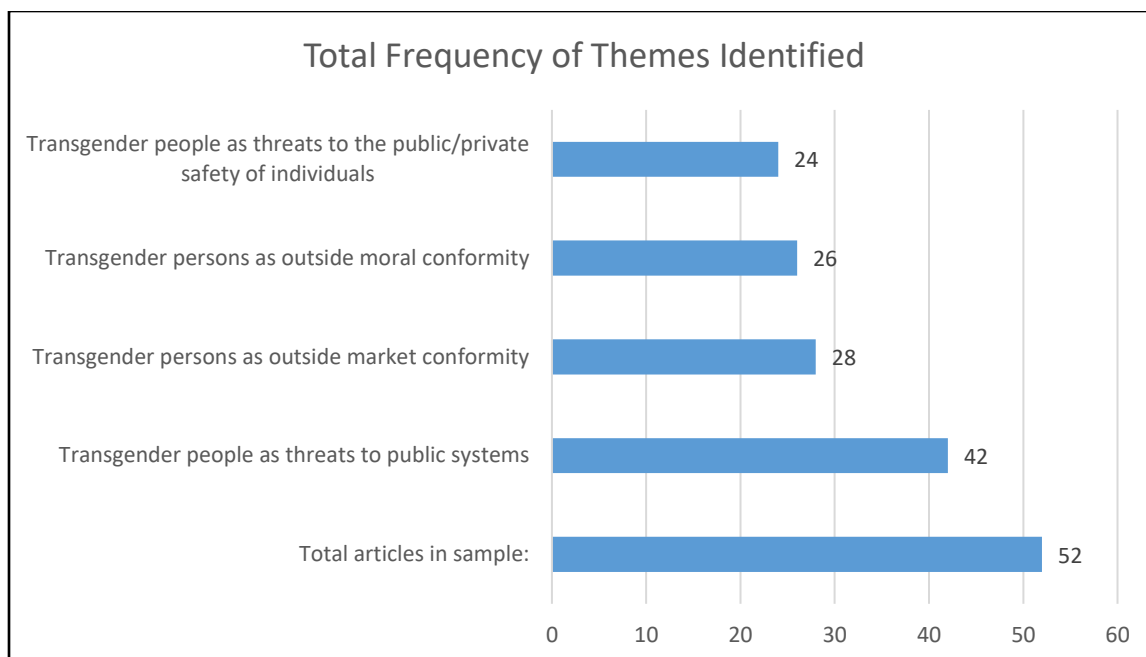


Figure 1: Total frequency of themes identified

As seen in Figure 1, the most common theme identified was Transgender people as threats to public systems, with 42 of the 52 articles containing this theme. This was followed by Transgender persons as outside market conformity in 28 of 52 articles, Transgender persons as outside moral conformity in 26 of 52 articles, and Transgender people as threats to public/private safety of individuals as a theme identified in 24 of the 52 sampled articles. These themes are not mutually exclusive, and so it was common to find multiple themes while coding an article. Looking at these themes one by one offers insight into the substance of how they were manifest in the articles I coded.

Theme: Transgender people as threats to the public and/or private safety of individuals

This theme was contextually common in the articles I coded. The discussion of so-called transgender bathroom bills – the anti-transgender legislation put forth by a number of U.S. states,

but, most notably and sensationally, North Carolina, which required that all persons use the gendered bathroom and/or locker room that matched the sex on the person's birth certificate – was a regular forum for this theme. During the sampling window, North Carolina was dealing with the aftermath of having passed their version of this law (including its eventual partial repeal), and other states were in the midst of considering such bills, notably Texas. The other most common reference to this came in articles related to the Boy Scouts of America allowing boys who are transgender to participate.

The most common use of this theme came in the form of some version of the folk hero notion that lawmakers must protect women and children.

What was interesting about the deployment of this theme was that the notion of protection of “our” women and children was often notably bereft of the overt mention of a perpetrator. If a perpetrator was mentioned, it would be men, with the implication that transgender persons were men in women's clothing. Take this exemplary quote from Phil Berger – the president of the state senate of North Carolina – who made this statement, cited in an opinion piece by John Moody on 2/16/17 entitled, “Basketball or bathrooms: The Tar Heel state is stuck”:

The vast majority of people in North Carolina don't believe that women and girls should have to share restrooms and locker rooms with people who clearly are men.

A similar appeal was made by those rallied by the Texas Republican Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick, described by FoxSports as “popular with social conservatives who drive Texas politics.” The article, entitled “Texas bathroom bill may pose big test for sports leagues,” published on 2/3/17, cited that Patrick's followers' rallied under the “No men in women's bathroom”

campaign. These types of overtly transphobic quotes were found more brazenly in opinion pieces by Fox News pundits but were not as common in stories that were published as news articles.

In regular political news articles, such as when a representative was being interviewed for a news article, the politician would simply insert this so-called need for protection into the discussion, adjacent the discussion of the bill, law, or proposal itself. It was not a common strategy for the news article authors to include direct accusations that transgender people were potentially the perpetrators of violence. News articles were far more likely to use the second theme, which was to frame persons who are transgender as being a threat to public systems.

That said, it is important to note the role of opinion pieces on the Fox News website. Whenever there were major events related to transgender political and social concerns, the Fox News website does not seem to make it a habit to extensively cover these events with their own staff writers. Instead, they repost articles from the Associated Press and other news wire services, and then have various staff writers write opinion pieces (labeled clearly as “opinion”) which reflect the positions of moral conservative and business conservative readers. These opinion articles form or reform the rhetoric that is used elsewhere. The reform angle is particularly notable. While regular news articles avoid overt transphobic statements (often to the extent of treating the discussion of these laws and court decisions as mere political disagreements – see the section on the new motif of “political territory”), the opinion pieces do not hesitate to deploy tropes and accusations. They also take additional steps to connect the dog whistles to these plain language statements. First, these authors say the dog whistle statement, followed closely by what they really mean. Second, these opinion articles often contain links to other articles and organizations in line with the paragraphs of the article. These links are carefully chosen to be relevant to the author’s content. It was common to see an opinion piece discussing the

transgender bathroom bills -- in an overtly transphobic way, or in a way that set up a clear reversal of danger argument -- contain links inline to other non-opinion news articles where the more subtle dog whistles were deployed.

Another example of this rhetoric formation/linking formula comes vividly in an article published on 1/13/17 by Todd Starnes, a radio talk show host for Fox News. This article was entitled, “It’s time for churches to sever ties with the Boy Scouts.” This article came in the wake of the decision made by the Boy Scouts of America (BSA) to allow boys who are transgender to participate in Boy Scouts and Cub Scouts – or, as Starnes transphobically describes these children, “girls who identify as boys” (an example of the motif of mocking the legitimacy of persons who are transgender). He quotes the Family Research Council president Tony Perkins as calling this “sexual anarchy” (an example of the motif of transgender perversion and the potential for violence in all transgender persons). He states that this move by the BSA was driven by “militant social justice warriors,” and later implies that the BSA is likely to allow boys and girls to shower together, use the same dressing rooms, and cause “further youth protection problems.” Starnes offers his readers an alternative organization to patronize – Trail Life USA (the folk hero in this narrative) – whose tenets are extolled as being “committed to biblical traditional values affirmed in [their] statement of faith and values” (which in this context is exemplary of the religious dog whistle motif). Starnes repeatedly quotes the chairman of this organization, John Sternberger, who warns that this move by the BSA will confuse boys and impair their psychological development. Sternberger argues that the BSA is no longer protecting people’s children and ceding their ethics and morals to “political activists” (realism motif, self-defense motif). He appeals to “common sense best practices for child protection,” which presumably include transphobic and homophobic policies which are core to Trail Life USA’s

alternative model. Starnes finishes the article by quipping, “Besides, how can the Boy Scouts of America teach ethics and morals when its adult leaders can’t muster the courage to stand morally straight in the face of militant gender revolutionaries?” Amidst these paragraphs are multiple reference links to Starnes’ own book and links to Trail Life USA’s website.

This technique of using opinion pieces to form, reform, and define the rhetorical meaning behind the latent and dog whistle terms more common in news pieces is deployed regularly in examples from all four of the themes I had identified in the literature. It is unclear to this researcher whether this should be its own theme, or rather seen as a strategy that augments the other themes. Further research may certainly build a better case for the role this strategy holds.

Theme: Transgender people as threats to public systems

This theme was the most common overall in the Fox News website articles, where most of the articles authored by Fox News included this theme in some fashion. When articles raised the issue of the transgender bathroom bills, the given state (or the state’s economy), such as North Carolina or Texas, was seen as threatened. For example, when President Donald Trump was interviewed by Sean Hannity during an April 2016 interview, he stated:

I love North Carolina, and they have a law, and it’s a law that, you know, unfortunately is causing them some problems. -- 2/22/17 – “Trump administration working on new transgender bathroom directive,” Ryan Gados, Fox News

In the article, “Church sponsored Boy Scout Troops won’t be forced into transgender membership policy” published 2/10/17 and authored by Fox News and ChristianPost.com, the opening sentence reads:

Boy Scout troops sponsored by Catholic churches won’t be required to adhere to the organizations new policy of allowing girls who identify as boys to become troop members.

Not only is this sentence an excellent example of the motifs of mocking legitimacy and religious dog whistle, but it shows how a broad claim in the title of the article acts as clickbait for a larger moral conservative target demographic (“church-sponsored”), and then immediately gets narrowed to only talking about Catholic churches. Further, they use the word “forced” in the title, even though no force was threatened. The article goes on to make a number of self-defense claims using transphobic phrases and latently implies that transgender youth are a threat to not only scouting programs, but the church itself. All of this is amidst an article whose manifest content is to inform readers that the BSA is *not* requiring the Catholic church to conform to their new inclusive policies.

Prior to leaving office, President Barack Obama had granted clemency to Chelsea Manning, a former intelligence officer who had leaked classified documents to the public via WikiLeaks. Fox News seemed particularly interested in this story and its ongoing process as Manning was released during May 2017. In each article, Manning’s transgender status becomes the focus, particularly the theme of whether Manning would be allowed to use her military serviceperson insurance to continue her medical transition. Manning’s lawyer made public statements such as this one on 5/17/17 in an article titled “Chelsea Manning freed from Kansas military prison” by Fox News:

Because of the nature of her circumstances and the experience of confinement, she is very committed to living her life as free from the government as possible and taking care of her own health benefits and financial needs...

Nevertheless, many articles, including the one above, questioned whether taxpayers would “foot the bill for gender reassignment.” Only two days prior, on May 15, 2017, one such Fox headline read, “Chelsea Manning to remain in Army, receive health care benefits after

prison release.” These articles also regularly dead named Manning (used the name she was assigned at birth), and quoted Republican lawmakers expressing great disdain for Manning. These articles mock the legitimacy of Manning’s identity as a transgender person, and cast her as a villain – focusing on her identity as a criminal transgender woman, potentially using taxpayer resources to transition, as part of the reason for that villain label. Manning is seen by Fox News authors as a threat to both the military and the economy based on her identity as a transgender person.

This theme was also evident in the cluster of articles relating to President Trump’s executive decision to ban transgender troops from serving in the military. By June, 2017 the Trump administration, via Defense Secretary Jim Mattis, was already showing evidence that they had plans to block transgender enlistment and service – as evidenced by the article title from June 30, 2017 by Fox News, “Pentagon delays enlistment of transgender recruits.” By this point, transgender people had been openly serving in the military since 2016.

Less than a month later, President Trump “issued a ban on transgender people serving in the military” via a series of three early morning tweets, as documented by the first Fox News authored article on the subject. This article is of particular note, since it is a prime example of the motif of mocking legitimacy, which is demonstrated here through Fox New’s response strategy. Fox News chose to allow Associated Press articles explain the mundane details of the tweet-based ban, and instead its first news article, written by Diana Falzone on July 26, 2017 entitled, “Trump bans transgender military members; celebrities react,” delivers on its title promise. The article consists of a series of random snarky tweets from celebrities ranging George Takei, to Mia Farrow, Seth Rogan, James Corden, and others, ending with a quote from a statement

condemning Trump's decision made in a press statement by GLAAD (formerly known as the Gay and Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation).

Similarly, the very next article in the population, published on the same date by author Chris Ciaccia, is entitled, "Trump's transgender military ban slammed by tech execs." It was not until much later in the day that Fox News released articles which spoke to the substance of the Presidential ban, and covered the White House press conference on the issue, hosted by Sarah Huckabee Sanders (see "White House defends reversal of 'Obama policy' on transgender military service" by Brooke Singman, and "ACLU vows lawsuit against President Trump's transgender policy for military" by William Mears). It was not until the next day that Fox News included feedback from military sources (see "Defense Department to Trump on transgender ban: Not so fast" by Barnini Chakraborty on July 27, 2017). This strategy of making light of a major Executive policy decision by relegating it to the realm of mere entertainment -- minutia of snarky celebrity response tweets and the opinions of tech executives -- seems to display a latent disregard for the gravity of the Presidential tweets and the human effects that they have. However, the tweets themselves intend the same latent effect of mocking legitimacy, relegating a major military policy decision to a series of three brief tweets wherein the President blames transgender people, and says that "our military... cannot be burdened with the tremendous medical costs and disruption that transgender <sic> in the military would entail." See the tweets in full via the screen capture in Figure 2 (source: Twitter).



Figure 2: Trump tweets, banning transgender participation in military

Theme: Transgender persons as outside moral conformity

This theme was often linked to religious appeals, as could be expected from the theoretical literature (Marzullo, 2011; Peterson, 2011; Peck, 2014). Examples abound in the articles surrounding the Boy Scouts of America opening their programs to boys who are transgender. Some examples are found in the transgender bathroom bill articles, but most often limited to the opinion pieces, or to quotes in news articles from conservative politicians. A few examples were found related to the morality of Chelsea Manning, which is where I will start.

One of the first articles I coded was 1/26/17, “Trump rips ungrateful Chelsea Manning after Obama criticism” by Fox News. In this article, it opens with the sentence, “President Trump

ripped leaker Chelsea Manning as an ‘ungrateful TRAITOR’...” Trump becomes Fox News’ folk hero as the article explains that Manning had publicly written that she was concerned for queer and trans people after the election of Trump and criticized President Obama for compromising during his terms in office. The article sets up a moral argument for how Manning is a “leaker”, a “traitor”, “ungrateful”, and “troubling.” This article also demonstrated early on that Fox News authors use the strategy of using quotations from authority figures in order to say the unpopular things that the article authors themselves would prefer not to say – such as blatantly transphobic statements, or criticisms. Context, however, often belies that the author of the article agrees with these statements and is using the quotes to advance the story in a way which can be derived from analysis of latent content.

Another example of how article titles are used to convey a message different from the article content, demonizing transgender persons, is the article from 4/14/17 titled “Transgender immigrant sentenced in Texas for illegal reentry” by Ray Bogan, Fox News. The article itself explains that Gonzalez, a person arrested, detained, and sentenced by the federal courts for entering the U.S. from Mexico illegally, was facing deportation. The article has nothing to do with her status as a transgender person, yet this identifier is the first word in the title of the article, seemingly the most important descriptor for this “illegal immigrant,” as the web category header for this article denotes. It seems clear that to this author, Gonzalez’s status as a transgender person further contributes to her lack of morality as a criminal.

I choose to highlight these examples, in addition to the highlights in earlier sections related to morality claims surrounding bathroom bills and BSA policy changes, in order to show how morality claims are often intersectionally linked by Fox News authors to other pejorative identifiers. So, in the case of both Manning and Gonzalez, they are criminal not just because of

their unlawful acts and subsequent convictions, but also they are outside moral conformity by identifying as transgender – which becomes a further excuse to mock the legitimacy of their identity, bolsters the claims that there is perversion and violence in transgender persons, and justifies the label of villain.

Theme: Transgender persons as outside market conformity

Transgender bathroom bills are often the prime example during the sampling window of the theme of placing transgender persons as outside market conformity. This theme most often manifested itself by what was left unsaid in articles more than what was written. By this, I mean that nearly every Fox News ‘news’ article written about the topic of North Carolina’s HB2, and other similar pieces of state level legislation, was framed in a way that centered the state, or the sports league, under the (often unspoken) specter of transgender persons and their allies -- looming over these economies and organizations, potentially wreaking havoc on their economies, tourism, and eligibility for hosting sporting events.

These bathroom bill laws limit “LGBT non-discrimination protections and requires transgender people to use public restrooms corresponding to the sex on their birth certificate,” according to the 3/30/17 article by Fox News entitled “North Carolina lawmakers announce plan to repeal ‘bathroom bill’.” Notably absent from this entire article is the mention of transgender persons beyond the above quote. The article talks at length about the decision of the NBA to relocate its All-Star game. It mentions an estimated cost of \$3.76 billion dollars to business in the state. It mentions the difficulty that lawmakers in the state had to undergo to realize their error and work out an appeal. It does not mention the harm done by this law to transgender persons, or the human rights considerations. It does not mention the history of these types of exclusive and

bigoted laws and how they have been used to control and exclude minority groups since the inception of the state (North Carolina and elsewhere).

What seems important to the author of the above cited article, and many like it in the cluster, is the political consequences and economic costs seemingly inflicted on these states by transgender persons and their allies.

When the NBA moved its All-Star game to New Orleans, FoxSports authored an article on 2/14/17 titled, “NBA All-Star game spotlights LGBT oasis in the South.” In this article, both New Orleans and the NBA take center stage as the protectors and includers of LGB, and especially transgender persons. The article is full of neoliberal autonomy claims that paint the inclusion of transgender persons – including allowing access to the bathroom of their choice – as the pro-equality, pro-business thing to do. The article’s author downplays past police raids and oppression of LGBT persons in New Orleans as mere “challenges” and paints them as far in the city’s past – despite the severity of the one cited example, which was when 32 people were killed in a 1973 arson at a club. For this FoxSports author, transgender people are valuable to some states, cities, and corporations because prestige and profits can be gained when those municipalities and corporations appear inclusive to transgender persons. Little consideration in these instances is given to the effects this type of leveraging has on the transgender persons involved – such as persons who are transgender already living in New Orleans, or the actual lived experience of transgender or gender non-conforming people who might travel to New Orleans for the All-Star game.

As explained in the theory chapter (Brown, 2005; Foucault, 2008; Marzullo, 2011; Peterson, 2011; Peck, 2014), articles like this downplay the history of oppression in favor of an a-historical back patting for the area’s current progressive viewpoints. In this way, (presumably

wealthy) transgender persons are invited to engage in tourism, travel to see a sports event, spend, and consume -- and pat the NBA and New Orleans on the back for welcoming them without questioning the wider social or historical circumstances. One can speculate that it would still be unwelcome in this environment for a person who is transgender to question whether past transgender-rights activists, often harmed or killed, were being honored in the NBA's ceremonies, or if mention would be made of past oppressions and crimes against the humanity of transgender persons. Such acts could be labeled as resistance to market conformity, and result in social sanctions to the individual for threatening the autonomy claims made by those in power.

What is deemed as market-conforming behavior for transgender persons seems to still be up for debate. In an article published 3/20/17 titled "Restaurant's transgender bathroom sign garners support, angers others" by Fox News, the author explains how the owner of an Oklahoma City restaurant posted a threatening bathroom sign that read, "We do not have a transgender bathroom. So, don't be caught in the wrong one." The owner of this business says that transgender guests are welcome "if they were dressed appropriately," although the author notes that the owner was not willing to clarify what he meant by that.

Similarly, when an article entitled "Transgender boy wins high school girls' wrestling tournament" by Fox News on 2/27/17 highlights a transgender boy who, while preferring to wrestle boys, was forced by a Texas state board to wrestle based on the gender on his birth certificate. As the title of the article states, he won the state tournament -- undefeated -- and young women wrestlers in the tournament felt unfairly treated. At the time of the publication, lawsuits were being filed by parents trying to ban the student from competing.

All of the above was situated amidst the Trump administration revoking Obama-era guidelines to include transgender students (gender identity) under Title IX protection from sex

discrimination. In the 2/22/17 article by Fox News, “Trump to revoke Obama-era transgender bathroom guidance for schools, source says,” the author explains that the Trump administration frames gender identity protections as a states’ rights issue, and insists that it should not be decided or enforced at the federal level. Trump, who made campaign promises to support the LGBT community, upset well known transgender and ally supporters, including Olympian Caitlyn Jenner and Trump’s pick to sing the national anthem at his inauguration, Jackie Evancho -- who has a sister who is transgender. These criticisms were elaborated in a Fox News authored article on 2/24/17 called, “Caitlyn Jenner slams Trump over transgender bathroom stance; President could meet with Jackie Evancho.”

In addition to the articles in a previous theme that highlighted the Presidential ban on transgender persons’ service in the military, these last four articles have been highlighted as they demonstrate the confusing social environment and mixed messages that are lobbed at transgender and gender non-conforming persons in contemporary market society. While on one hand, some businesses, municipalities, and nationwide sports organizations go out of their way to include access and participation for transgender persons in the marketplace, it is still commonplace for threats to persist, institutional policies to present no-win situations, and even for the self-described business-savvy POTUS to indicate a lack of support by withdrawing legal protections under the law based on gender identity – both in removing Title IX protections, and in castigating transgender servicemembers as costly and disruptive. In neoliberal business terms, especially for business conservatives, persons who are transgender seem often cast as a thorn in the side of the system – presenting legal and economic challenges that are costly, laborious, and fraught with reputational pitfalls for the ownership and political classes. When transgender people are highlighted in relationship to the marketplace, my findings show in a preliminary way

that Fox News does not find them to be contributors to society, rather obstacles to the free movement of money and power.

Motifs and Elements

Within the four research areas of inquiry posed in the introduction, and simplified above as themes, were a number of motifs and elements to be sought based on the theoretical research on cisgender fragility. These motifs and elements often combine to form what Gormly (2004) called frames. Frames show us the message(s) that the authors of the article intend to frame the arguments. They use the individual motifs and elements at the discourse level to focus the attention of the reader. It was my experience in this research that Fox News website authors used a assortment of these motifs/elements in each article to set a tone, the frame. The frame was often pointing toward one of the themes I have identified, but also at times seeks to highlight one of the motifs/elements as being its own prominent theme. Thus, I have found that motifs and elements can also be the framing story used by the author to focus the reader's attention. They are interchangeable based on context.

Figure 3 illustrates the total count findings for each motif/element across all sampled articles. Figures 4-7 illustrate how these motifs and elements fit into each theme visited in the previous section. One can see that the most common motifs vary a bit based on theme, yet, overall, realism, self-defense claims by cisgender persons, mocking legitimacy, and civil/business dog whistles tend to be most commonly found in all themes and across more than half of the sampled articles. While these quantitative representations can only speak to this dataset, and offer no generalizable statistical usefulness, it is still notable to this researcher how

common and engrained some of these techniques are in the day to day output of Fox News, across authors, time, and topic.

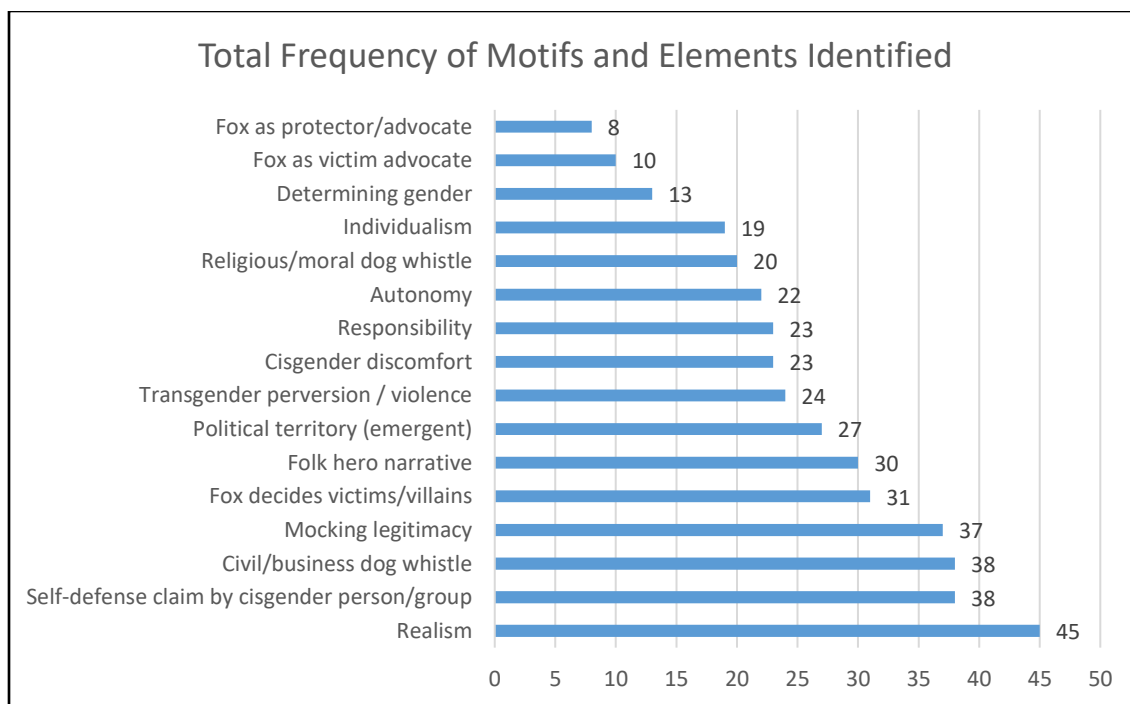


Figure 3: Total frequency of motifs and elements identified

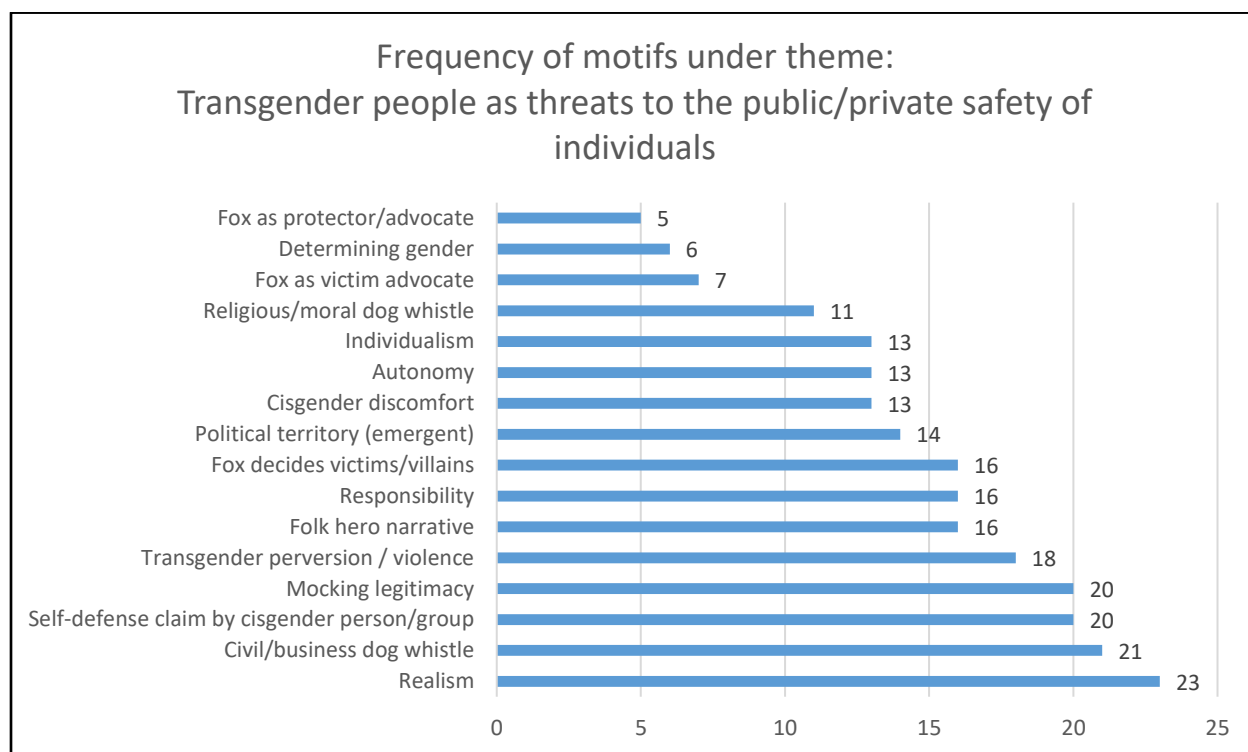


Figure 4: Frequency of motifs under theme: Transgender people as threats to the public/private safety of individuals

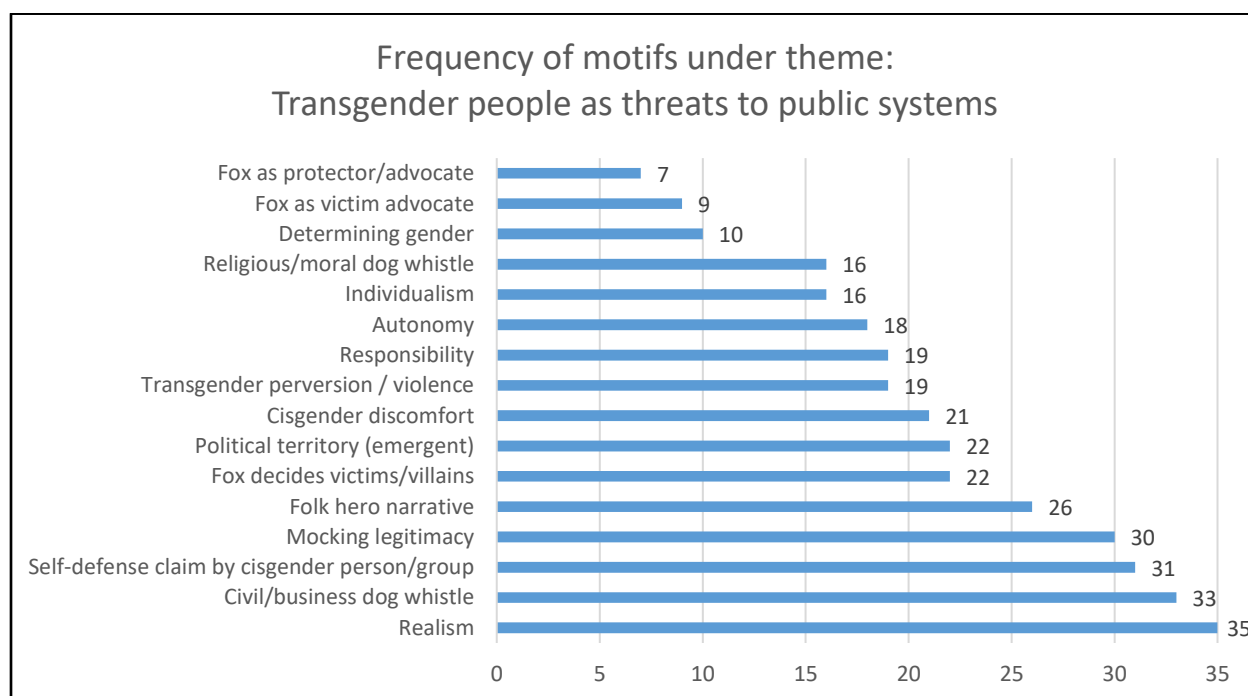


Figure 5: Frequency of motifs under theme: Transgender people as threats to public systems

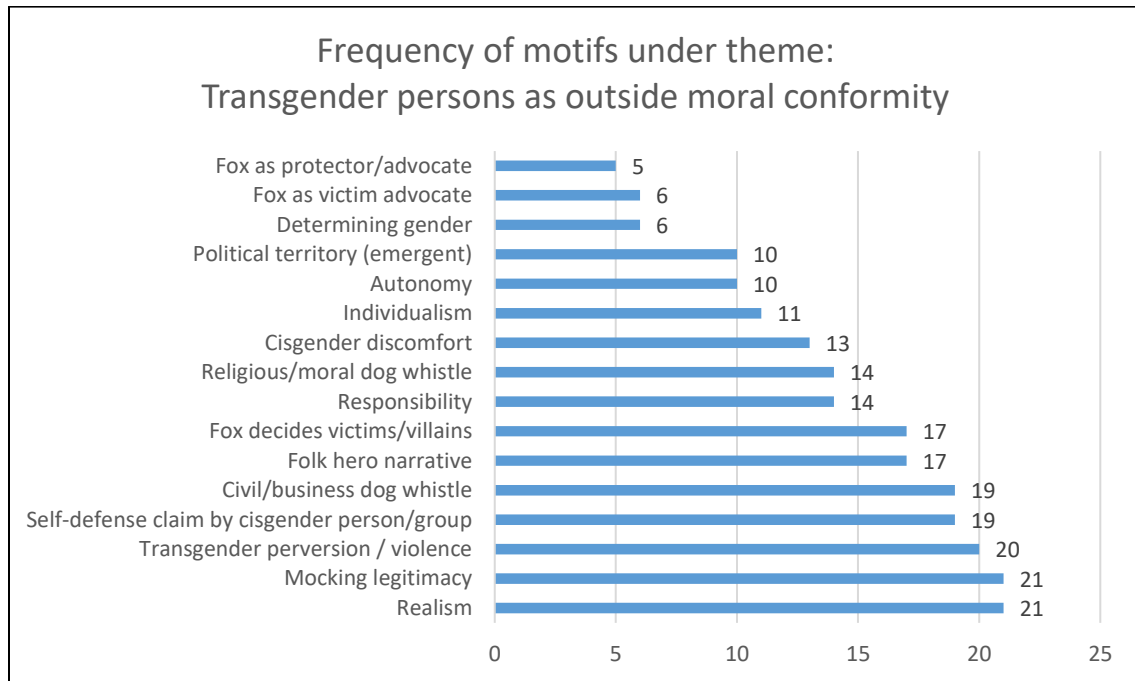


Figure 6: Frequency of motifs under theme: Transgender persons as outside moral conformity

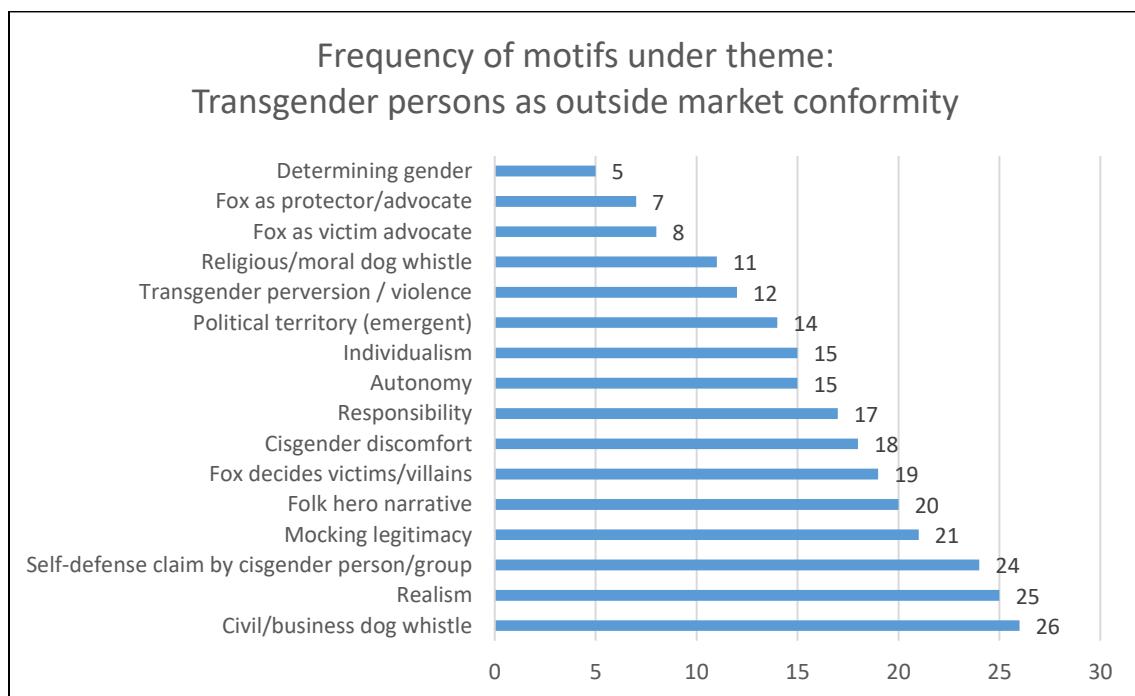


Figure 7: Frequency of motifs under theme: Transgender persons as outside market conformity

Again, these motifs/elements are not mutually exclusive to any one theme or article, and so each motif/element could be found potentially in each article, and at times, multiple times in an article (yet only counted once per article). As the theme by theme breakout Figures 4-7 illustrate, any of these motifs can be used alongside any one of the four themes, and indeed alongside multiple simultaneous themes, to provide building blocks for the journalist.

To revisit, these motifs and elements have been synthesized from a number of sources (Van Dijk, 1992; Diangelo, 2011; Marzullo, 2011; Peterson, 2011; Peck, 2014; Westbrook and Schilt, 2014) to provide the basis for the conservative worldview toward transgender and gender non-conforming persons.

- *Transgender perversion and the potential for violence in all transgender persons:* The moral-conservative notion that being transgender is inherently perverse and an affront to creation/God. Sexual perversion is particularly repulsive and abnormal, and many conservative Christians believe that sexual perversion is a more serious type of sin than others. This type of perversion requires upstanding persons to be on guard (self-defense claim), since it contains within it the potential for violence. In this paradigm, sexual perversions of one type are often linked to sexual perversions of another type, e.g. an adherent may argue that a transgender person is also likely a rapist, pedophile, or practitioner of bestiality.

The two most common clusters that showed this motif were the coverage of Chelsea Manning's clemency and release from prison, and the story of a transgender undocumented immigrant, Gonzales, who was arrested and criminally charged at both federal and state levels.

In both of these cases the transgender identity of the lead character was essentialized as part of their criminality.

This is evidenced in sentences that are constructed like the following, found in an article by Fox News on 1/19/17 entitled, “Manning to reportedly lose transgender benefits with dishonorable discharge:”

Manning was known as Bradley Manning at the time of her 2010 arrest, but revealed after being convicted of espionage that she identifies as a woman.

Not only does this author dead name Manning, but also introduces Manning’s public self-identification as a woman as a feature of her identity as a criminal. In the next short paragraph, the author similarly links Manning’s experience with gender dysphoria as being a companion to her act of leaking classified documents. Even the title of the article includes the phrase “transgender benefits” as if Manning is receiving some kind of premium healthcare benefits as a feature of her transgender identity – not simply the same healthcare that all soldiers have access to under their military health care benefits. This phrase is next to the phrase “dishonorable discharge.” Thus, the title links these special “transgender benefits” to being lost due to Manning’s criminality and “dishonorable discharge.” The headline without the pejoratives could have more aptly read something similar to, ‘Manning to reportedly lose military health care benefits, despite commutation.’ Despite being framed as a factual news article, it turns out that this article was merely speculating at potential outcomes.

On May 5, 2018 Fox News ran an article with the title, “Chelsea Manning to remain in the Army, receive health care benefits after prison release.” Yet, while the title of this article seems more apt to describe the actual circumstances, the frame of the article still leads the reader to pay attention to the criminality of Manning’s acts (despite the granting of clemency), and that

Manning is “eligible for sex reassignment surgery – and the government would pay for it.” The article waits until the last paragraph to mention that Manning had been “subjected to violence in prison,” had been placed in an all-male prison, and had been restricted in access to “physical and mental health care.” The article has nine paragraphs dedicated to the criminality of Manning, and only one sentence dedicated to acknowledging the injustices inflicted on Manning due to her transgender personhood.

On January 14, 2018 Fox News author Joseph Weber penned the article “Chelsea Manning confirms Senate bid, says ‘Yup, we’re running.’” This article, now speaking of a candidate running for U.S. Senate, still deadnames Chelsea by the fifth short paragraph, and outlines her full criminal history. A few days later opinion author Jim Hanson writes an article entitled “Sen. Chelsea Manning? To even think about rewarding this criminal with a Senate seat is beyond absurd.” This article deadnames Manning by the third sentence of the article (and again later in the article), and as is common with Fox opinion articles that I reviewed, goes to great length to connect the dots for the reader who may not be explicitly clear on the meaning of all of the dog whistle arguments: making clear the dual identity of Manning – criminal (traitor, leaker, oath-breaker, “backstabber”) and her transgender personhood.

As mentioned in a previous theme discussion of how article titles are used to convey an intersectionally-pejorative message (even sometimes different from the article content), I used the example of the article from 4/14/17 titled “Transgender immigrant sentenced in Texas for illegal reentry” by Ray Bogan, Fox News. The article itself explains that Gonzalez, a person arrested, detained, and sentenced by the federal courts for entering the U.S. from Mexico illegally, was facing deportation. The article has nothing to do with her status as a transgender person, yet this identifier is the first word in the title of the article, seemingly the most important

descriptor for this “illegal immigrant,” as the category header for this article denotes. It seems clear that to this author, Gonzalez’s status as a transgender person further contributes to her lack of morality as a criminal.

An earlier article from March 2, 2017 authored by Ray Bogan and Fox News entitled, “Transgender woman arrested by Border Patrol admitted to money scheme, has criminal record,” displays a similar intersectional-pejorative strategy. The opening volley of the article reads:

A transgender woman arrested by immigration agents while at a courthouse for a protective order hearing had admitted to a money order scheme weeks before, an affidavit shows. Irvin Gonzalez, an undocumented immigrant from Mexico, was arrested on Feb. 9 in El Paso County Courthouse.

While there is no evidence presented that this person’s transgender identity has a connection to their alleged crimes, it is mentioned in both the title and the first sentence. The title falsely states that border patrol arrested Gonzalez – because as the above quote reads, it was in fact immigration agents in a courthouse, not on a border. Gonzalez was acting lawfully in the courthouse by appearing for a protective order hearing. The author’s argument toward the inherent criminality of Gonzalez is bolstered by references to financial crimes, being undocumented, being from Mexico, and being transgender. All of these intersectional identities are latently meant to be seen as evidence of her perversion, potential for violence (dangerousness), and inherent criminality – a criminality that resides in her personhood, not due merely to the unlawful acts that are cited. It is in this way that this motif/element of transgender perversion and the potential for violence in all transgender persons can be used as a component for the slightly wider intersectional frame of inherent criminality in minority groups – immigrants, queer persons, and people of color, to name a few common tropes seen earlier in the theoretical literature.

- *Self defense claim by cisgender person/group*: When transgender persons are labeled dangerous, this provokes cisgender people to take the defensive posture. Self-defense claims can be accompanied by a reversal of the real direction of danger – claims which assert that transgender people are dangerous, when in fact most violence between these groups is cisgender violence against transgender persons.

Cisgender group claims of self-defense arose in the sampled articles in ways that were consistent with the theoretical literature (VanDijk, 1992; Peterson, 2011). Reversal of danger is common alongside the political discussion of transgender rights in public spaces (see the later discussion on the emergent “political territory” motif). Additional examples include claims of so-called “religious liberty” and “religious freedom” (see “Trump administration bolsters protections for doctors, nurses who oppose abortion” by Doug McKelway and Fox News on 1/18/18), where claimants say they were rejected from jobs for their religious beliefs, or forced to give medical treatment to people with whom they disagree on issues of sexuality, gender identity, and abortion. The article does quote one Mara Kiesling of the National Center for Transgender Equality who responds in ways consistent with the cisgender fragility theoretical literature, saying:

They say it is for religious liberty. What we know is that it discriminates against LGBT people and women. Religious freedom is so important, but that’s not what this is about. This is about pediatricians refusing to treat children with gay parents. This is about transgender people turned away from emergency rooms and doctor’s offices.

McKelway, however, frames this quote from Kiesling in the context of political territory – referring to such claims as “problematic in such a polarized country where one citizen’s civil rights is often seen as another’s injustice.” This type of discursive turn serves at least two functions. It frames all claims as being equal -- erasing the power differential between the

marginalized group (LGBT people, women), and the powerful (moral conservatives in U.S. politics). Second, it contributes to the realism motif, which will be discussed further below – in this case, describing Kiesling as “problematic” and polarizing.

Self defense claims justify the narrative that state officials serve to protect the cisgender majority. Again, this is seen when politicians claim that bathrooms and locker rooms need laws ensuring their occupants are safe (from transgender persons, not for transgender persons). But this also is seen in narratives like the one given in the previous motif where law enforcement is deployed against transgender persons (such as in the case of Gonzalez). The discourse framing the articles in the sample rarely challenges the overarching narrative that agents of the state – both political and law enforcement – exist to protect the vulnerable majority from transgender persons and their political and social allies.

- *Cisgender discomfort*: Discomfort at the mention of transgender persons or related social issues.

This motif was difficult to assess in coding journalistic writing and may better be assessed through a different research method, such as interviews. What seemed as latent evidence of cisgender discomfort, within the context of the Fox News website articles, was when politicians would recast the issue of transgender persons’ human rights as a mere political issue (see the political territory emergent motif), or when opinion articles would take up the most benign of social changes related to transgender inclusiveness in society.

For example, in the opinion article “‘Ladies and gentlemen’ no longer welcome on NYC subways” by Todd Starnes and Fox News on 11/10/17, Starnes references a New York Post report that “the Metropolitan Transit Authority has ordered all subway personnel to refrain from

addressing riders as ‘ladies and gentlemen’,” instead, suggesting inclusive language like “riders, passengers” and other gender neutral words. Starnes labels this “confusing,” “politically correct,” and makes hyperbolic statements like:

Heaven help the poor cis-gender train conductor who inadvertently mis-genders a gender-fluid passenger. Gender fluidity, by the way, is the latest fad in the sex and gender revolution. Followers ascribe to a belief that there’s really no such thing as male or female. For example, you could be a male passenger on the B Train... but you could identify as a female passenger by the time you reach Rockefeller Center. I know, it’s all very confusing, ladies and gentlemen (my apologies).

Referring to subway users as “passengers” or “riders” is far from confusing. Given that this was an employee memo, the realism claim that this is political correctness run amok and the self-defense claim that train conductors are now somehow at risk are hyperbolic. Starnes evokes imagery of train conductors having their jobs threatened, with no evidence of enforcement of this memo, let alone consequences to employees. He follows the reversal of danger self-defense claim with a litany of bigoted and sarcastic remarks -- an overt example of mocking legitimacy -- claiming diminutively that gender fluidity is a “fad,” and continuing for five paragraphs about it. It should be noted that he quotes a subway worker earlier in the post who rightly describes that this change was merely because “[the transit authority] are acknowledging that they have some transgender riders” (and it should be noted, the article makes no mention that the transit authority addressed gender fluid persons at all in the memo). Thus, the mere mention that the subway is acknowledging that they have transgender passengers causes Fox’s Todd Starnes to become upset and defensive such that he describes the entire subway system as being “derailed.” He uses the platform to sarcastically introduce his readers to another gender identity – gender fluidity, and then builds a case for fear and loathing of those individuals as well. Surely, transgender persons (and gender fluid persons) have been subway passengers for a very long time. However,

the bigoted and hyperbolic nature of this article (and others like it, especially, it seems, via opinion pieces on the Fox News website) also may begin to explain how the motif of cisgender discomfort gets passed along through news media, and seeps into cisgender persons' socialization toward everyday discomfort with the existence and mention of transgender persons.

- *Folk hero narrative:* Cisgender person or group as the protector against the violent transgender threat.

There are several latent ways in which this motif can be examined in the articles from Fox News, and a few notable examples in which it is found in manifest ways. Latent examples of the folk hero narrative are found often when politicians claim to be protecting women and children from predatory behavior, or when the opinion piece authors claim that they are standing up for everyday citizens (such as the example in the previous motif where Todd Starnes was making a stand on behalf of potentially victimized subway conductors). In these latent cases, the politician or opinion piece writer rarely directly posits themselves as the hero, or the solution. Rather, they speak using discursive techniques that pose them as the spokesperson for the everyday person, the “silent majority” as the Family Research Council was seen using in the theoretical literature (Peterson, 2011). Therefore, the morality of the ideas being held up by these authors/politicians become the folk hero. This is ideological legitimization of the status quo of transphobic and cisnormative views through the commodification of myths about the depravity of transgender and gender non-conforming persons, and the threat they pose. As with any dominant ideology, it is easy for these politicians to hold up the idea without accountability for its origins. They themselves do not have to accept responsibility for the idea, or for its impact. It is just a story they ‘know.’

There are, however, examples of overt folk heroes in the sample. In the article, “After Trump remarks, Alabama Senate hopefuls make latest pitches to voters” by Dom Calicchio and Fox News on 11/22/17, Republican candidate Roy Moore, a former Alabama Supreme Court judge, held himself up against his opponent, Doug Jones, as being a true folk hero. He says to the reporter:

If you ask me the difference between myself and Doug Jones? Everything. I want a wall. I wanna stop illegal aliens. I believe in rights. They believe in transgender rights. We’re talking about women’s rights here. Who stands for women’s rights? Those who stand for transgender rights, same-sex marriage? That’s undermining women. And that’s violating children’s rights. And I believe in those things. I believe in the traditional values that Alabamians stand for. And I’ll take these to Washington D.C., and I’ll stand for them.

Moore also represents a case of reversal of danger, as this article and others in the sample point out, he was accused during this time by nine women (some minors at the time) of sexual assault and misconduct. Moore was dismissive of these claims and threatening to sue the women and the Washington Post, which had made the initial report. So, while Moore touts himself the true protector of women and children from transgender persons, he himself is accused of being a threat to those very groups. Despite support from President Trump in his denials of the assaults, Moore lost his bid for the Senate.

Another Trump-endorsed pick for U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Texas was highlighted in an article by Christopher Carbone and Fox News entitled, “LGBT groups demand withdrawal of judicial nominee who called trans kids ‘Satan’s plan’.” This nominee judge, Jeff Mateer, “said that transgender children were evidence of ‘how Satan’s plan is working and the destruction that’s going on’.” The article also states, “during that same speech, Mateer said same-sex marriage would open the door to ‘people marrying their pets’.” Mateer’s nomination was withdrawn quietly, and Fox news did not cover the withdrawal of the

nomination – opting to post an Associated Press article. Mateer, still the First Assistant Attorney General of Texas, was featured by Fox News as recently as 3/29/19 (see “Todd Starnes and Jeff Mateer” video interview).

Populist discursive techniques were also notably on display in nearly any article referring to President Donald Trump, as his actions were journalistically and/or critically left unexamined in most cases. Most articles talking about the President’s decisions, tweets, or his administration’s doings were stated as fact of the matter. This was especially true when there was a Trump quote in the paragraph. The quote was left unexamined by the journalist, even if facts seemed readily available to dispute the quote. Trump’s quotes, when contextualized as the deciding factor, and void of discussion or dispute, posit Trump as a folk hero – making proclamations and setting the country in motion, and in the right direction. As seen in the theoretical literature, populist discourse arises from media’s acceptance of certain programs, and when these programs are uncritically accepted from a populist folk hero, there is no criticism in the flow of populist leadership. This would certainly be an area of interest for future research, as this sample gives only a glimpse at what might be examined in terms of President Trump’s acceptance as a populist leader being related to Fox News’ acceptance and uncritical publication of Trump’s folk hero narratives.

- *Realism*: Using arguments of realism to argue away humanitarianism – e.g. castigating ‘bleeding-heart’ liberals and other allies of transgender persons, labeling of activists as destructive to social fabric or morals. This is often seen alongside folk hero narratives.

As found with many of the other motifs, Fox News journalists rarely engaged in realism labeling themselves. Instead, the authors would often opt to quote a politician, think tank

spokesperson, or other member of the public to express disdain and concern for the destructive nature of progressive ideas, citing “liberals,” “leftist slant,” or “political correctness.” Republican Senate nominee Roy Moore liked to make a list of people “...they are the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender who want to change our culture... they are socialists who want to change our way of life and put man above God and the government is our God” (see “Roy Moore and Jimmy Kimmel spar after film crew crashes campaign speech at church” by Alex Pappas and Fox News on 11/30/17).

On occasion Fox News would run an entertainment style piece that would opt toward directly engaging in realism. In the case of “Most bizarre college courses 2017: ‘Hooking up,’ ‘Queer Religion’ and ‘sexy’ vampires” authored by Caleb Parke and Fox News on 12/13/17, the author expounds on the “new norm” of classes found on college campuses. As seen in many opinion pieces (but notably not labeled an opinion piece), this article singles out a number of classes with ideas containing a “leftist slant.” Among them being “intersectionality,” a number of classes using the words “queer” or “queering...” in the title, and an assortment of sociology, women and gender studies, and critical religion classes. The article makes great use of quotation marks to imply absurdity and sarcasm (an example of the mocking legitimacy motif). But ultimately, as almost a theme rather than a motif, the article serves to point the reader toward the manifest point that college campuses are running amok with these new “bizarre courses” with Ivy Leagues leading the list. The final paragraph illustrates the tenor of the article:

Perhaps the most bizarre examples come from the University of Kentucky, where students can study “Vampires: Evolution of a Sexy Monster” answering such questions as “What is a vampire? Where do they come from?” At DePaul University students can continue the undead trend with “Zombies: Modern Myths, Race, and Capitalism,” examining “the development of the zombie myth as a reflection of US societal concerns while using the lenses of Post-Colonial and Post-Marxist theory.

The author's latent intent is clear, which is to link any article that questions capitalism or links intersectionality or queer studies to the wider culture is bizarre and threatening to the norms that the author would prefer to see remain in place. The article completely glosses over the intent of many of these craftily-titled classes, which is to inform students about social problems concerns and injustices alongside offering connections to material culture and contemporary trends in a way that might help them creatively envision solutions and a better future. Thus, the article becomes a means to mock these efforts rather than highlight them as a means to humanitarianism.

In a similar way, Fox News writes an article entitled "Trump administration reportedly prohibits CDC from using words like 'transgender,' 'fetus' on 12/16/17. In this article, Fox parrots a Washington Post report that "said the forbidden words," in the CDC's 2019 budget, "are 'vulnerable, entitlement, diversity, transgender, fetus, evidence-based, and science-based'." An analyst is quoted in this article as saying that they "could not recall a previous time when words were banned from budget documents due to ideology." It seems to this researcher that nearly all of those terms are common in discussions of marginalized groups and social justice -- humanitarianism. Instead, these analysts were often given "substitutions." When looking at the world through the lens of realism, apparently the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention is no place for words like "vulnerable" or "science-based."

An opinion article by Lauren DeBellis Appell and Fox News on 12/12/17 entitled "Senate tax bill could be a game changer for parents frustrated with the public school system" offers a glimpse into the overt forms of realism that, as we have seen before, inform later news article uses of civil and religious dog whistles. Appell touts an amendment to the tax bill proposed by Sen. Cruz that would have allowed parents to divert monies from their 529 college

savings accounts to be used toward private K-12 schools. She argues for the need for this based on one or two choice examples given regarding school districts voting to “add ‘gender identity’ to its nondiscrimination policy.” The term gender identity is always in quotes, mocking legitimacy. The point of the article is to argue that wealthy parents, with the means to save sufficient money for their kids’ college and have extra for private K-12 schooling, should use that surplus to divert their child to a private school that discriminated against transgender students. In doing so, it will intentionally hurt the public school system which has been treating transgender persons as a protected class – where “any attempt by a parent to opt a child out of a class with a transgender teacher is the same as opting a child out of a class because the teacher is African American, Asian, or Latino.” Quotes like that one connects the direct discriminatory nature of these efforts to the dog whistles. The author is openly acknowledging that they would like the power to do any and all of these discriminatory things (opt out due to gender identity or, say, race/ethnicity of the teacher), alas, the system of fairness and humanitarianism is conspiring against her right to discriminate. The article contains realism phrases like:

The amendment is a huge win for families and a huge wake up call for politically correct politicians on local school boards with extreme political agendas.

And:

This is where extreme overreach of an extracurricular political agenda, which has no business driving decisions made on behalf of our kids, slams into a brick wall of fiscal reality.

As these quotes state, the political agenda of so-called “politically correct politicians” is inherently an “extreme agenda” and thus such things as (quoted earlier in the article) students “using locker rooms and bathrooms of their choosing” and rooming with other students while on

the road for sports and field trips – effectively quelling the parents’ ability to discriminatorily remove their child from a class when “a second grade teacher leaves school for the weekend on Friday afternoon as a female, and walks in Monday morning as a male.”

- *Determining gender:* The inability for a cisgender person to clearly identify (or acknowledge) the gender of a transgender or gender non-conforming person causes discomfort and defensive moves to uphold the gender binary.

Determining gender is a theoretical aspect of cisgender fragility that I found difficult to test in examining news texts. As noted earlier in the themes, it was common for Fox News articles to misgender Chelsea Manning in the articles written about her clemency and subsequent U.S. Senate run. The articles regularly deadnamed her and were unable to separate her transgender identity from her other identities, often mentioning her transgender identity as if it were part of the list of criminal offenses she had committed. This regular practice of deadnaming seems to be latent evidence that Fox News authors refuse to fully acknowledge the identity of transgender individuals, and instead opt to sensationalize their pre-transition and transition story. It is difficult to ascertain whether or not this was due to discomfort due to not being able to clearly identify their gender, as found in the theoretical literature (Westbrook and Schilt, 2014), or for other reasons. Due to the nature of the media being examined -- print article where interpersonal interactions are unable to be observed -- this motif was not found often in the sample, even though previous research has shown that it is a common occurrence in cisgender/transgender social interactions.

- *Autonomy*: Part of neoliberal market ideology, autonomy is used by business conservatives as a means to suggest that conformity to market norms is the way that transgender people may be afforded human rights and/or citizenship.

Fox News articles were found to use autonomy alongside expectations that businesses and organizations conform to market norms in the face of their transition toward transgender inclusiveness. For example, in an opinion article highlighted earlier, “Its time for churches to sever ties with Boy Scouts” by Todd Starnes and Fox News on 1/31/17, Starnes makes this autonomy charge:

The BSA is going to face some logistical issues. Will boys and girls be allowed to shower together? Will they be allowed to use the same camp dressing rooms? What sort of restroom accommodations will be provided for transgender scouts?

In this case, Starnes is not looking for an answer. Instead, as context denotes, this question is meant as a scary rhetorical statement and an appeal to autonomy and individualism. The “scare” aside, the appeal to autonomy comes in the form of suggesting that the BSA is not ready for this change, and that they have tough decisions to make that will force them to conform to the expectations of the market (presumably parents and communities, as expounded elsewhere in the article). As we saw in the theoretical literature (Marzullo, 2011), the neoliberal paradigms of autonomy, individualism, and responsibility in terms of what an organization or company ‘owes’ the market (its customers, shareholders, and other constituents) is set into motion by conformation to social norms that are often set forth by moral conservatives. Thus, Starnes offers some very pointed questions that are not unpractical, from a logistical perspective. How will the BSA choose to implement policies about showering, changing rooms, or restrooms? Indeed these are reasonable logistical questions. However, Starnes uses such market-related questions to provoke a different response from his readers – the fear that these questions are even in play in

the first place. Here we see that uneasy interplay between moral conservatives and business conservatives, and how the reasonable concerns of one group is being leveraged as fearmongering to the other.

Further, the appeal to individualism in this article erases the social and historical circumstances that girls and transgender kids are far more likely to be at risk around boys and adult men than the reverse. Thus, Starnes, along with the more “traditional” scouting program Trail Life USA (which you will recall is offered as the only reasonable alternative), who advocate that boys will be harmed by these “logistical issues,” are in fact ignoring social and historical circumstances that create and sustain inequalities. In the very next paragraph when they cite the need for “protection of children” they are not referring to transgender children, the group who is demonstrably marginalized; rather, they are arguing for the protection of cisgender boys and anyone else who would be outraged by the idea of transgender children participating in scouting. Starnes is accusing the BSA of not conforming to the autonomy standards of the moral conservatives.

A different type of autonomy claim was also found on occasion in the sample, as exemplified by an article entitled “NBA All-Star game spotlights LGBT oasis in the South” by FoxSports on 2/14/17. In this article the author cites a number of autonomy claims on the part of sports promoters and city officials who tout that Louisiana is a diverse state that fits well with the NBA’s “commitment to communities that value fairness and inclusion.” This is an autonomy claim that seeks to situate the NBA as an organization that is leading the social and market expectation to be inclusive and welcoming. This was in the immediate wake of states like North Carolina passing so-called transgender bathroom bills, and the response by the NCAA to cancel its championship games hosted there. The NBA was also making such a move, choosing to hold

the All-Star game in New Orleans instead of Charlotte, NC. NBA representative Kathy Behrens is quoted as saying:

It's important for us to have our All-Star game in a city that's welcoming to all of our participants and guests. [New Orleans and Louisiana] know how to manage and put on great big fun events and welcome everyone and treat everyone fairly and equally.

The article's author does go on to vet the claim that New Orleans is an inclusive city. The author explains that in the most recent several decades that LGBT persons have been welcome and "hasn't faced challenges." The author does account previous "challenges" in the form of police raids on gay bars in the 1950s and 1960s, and an arson event at a gay club in 1973 that killed 32 people. The author posits New Orleans as a surrogate home, of sorts, for gay people during those same decades.

- *Individualism*: Part of neoliberal market ideology, individualism is used as an argument to ignore social and historical circumstances that create and sustain inequalities.

As Van Dijk (1992) explored in the theoretical literature, it is common to see autonomy, individualism, and responsibility claims appear side by side. We can see one such clear example of individualism next to autonomy in the example given in the previous motif about the inclusion of transgender kids in the BSA. Another clear example of the individualism motif came in the form of President Trump's initial tweets banning transgender persons' participation in the military, and the subsequent coverage of these tweets. The tweets claim economic and social burdens for taxpayers and imply pejoratively that the victory of the armed services is suffering at the hands of transgender soldiers. Thus, President Trump's tweets declare a decision that is steeped in appeals to authority and personal responsibility – appeals to authority in that he claims

to have consulted his “experts,” and then personal responsibility that he is making the decision on behalf of the whole U.S. Government. These claims, however, do not at all question the historical circumstances that made the military inhospitable to transgender persons (and until recently, the entire LGBTQIA community). These claims, and the discussion thereafter found in Fox News discourse do not at all challenge this assumption that transgender soldiers cost more money and are less effective soldiers in whatever ways that cause the President to offer implied blame toward them for a lack of “decisive and overwhelming victory.” Here is a reminder of President Trump’s tweets:

After consultation with my Generals and military experts, please be advised that the United States Government will not accept or allow.....

— Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump) July 26, 2017

....Transgender individuals to serve in any capacity in the U.S. Military. Our military must be focused on decisive and overwhelming.....

— Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump) July 26, 2017

....victory and cannot be burdened with the tremendous medical costs and disruption that transgender in the military would entail. Thank you

— Donald J. Trump (@realDonaldTrump) July 26, 2017

- *Responsibility:* Part of neoliberal market ideology, personal responsibility comes alongside individualism and autonomy to reify a bootstrap narrative and is used by business conservatives to erase systemic inequalities and systems of domination. Individuals are blamed for their own circumstances, or successful only because of their own full participation in the meritocracy.

Continuing the theme, an article that clearly shows the overlap between the individualism motif and the responsibility motif is entitled “Restaurant’s transgender bathroom sign garners support, angers others” by Fox News on 3/20/17. In this article the unnamed author tells the story of how a restaurant in Oklahoma City, OK put up a sign on the outside door saying “We do

not have a transgender bathroom. So don't get caught in the wrong one. Thank you, Bob." Bob

Warner, the owner of the restaurant, makes these declarations in defense of his policy:

I got to thinking, I have a lot of redneck guys that weigh 250 pounds or more, and if somebody that was dressed like a man when their wife was in there or their little girl, I would not have a restaurant left... because that guy would go in there and tear my restaurant to pieces.

The article goes on to say that:

Warner also said that he could only afford two bathrooms and couldn't budget construction of a third for transgender guests. But he did say that they would be welcome in the establishment if they were "dressed appropriately." The owner has not clarified what he meant by appropriate clothing for transgender women or men.

So, here we have the owner posing a hypothetical and hyperbolic "what if" statement about a group of people who he likely has never personally encountered, judging from the way he speaks about these hypothetical "dressed like a man" people. Nevertheless, he sees himself a folk hero, taking personal responsibility for the safety of his guests and his own property by placing a sign on the exterior door of his establishment that implies a threat to any transgender person.

As he continues checking the boxes of cisgender fragility, Warner makes an effort to defensively dog whistle that he is not a bigot by offering a "welcome" if only people would come "dressed appropriately." This is a charge to transgender people that they must take personal responsibility for any violence that might befall them, since they are responsible for preparing properly (dressing properly, behaving according to the norms he expects) to enter his establishment in a way that does not invite violence. The fact that Warner does not clarify these

expectations is in line with the responsibility motif, as conformation to social norms and expectations are the default expectation of the market.

These norms and expectations are reified in society through the discourse that people like Warner imbibe through their socialization and media consumption. Take his false assumption that transgender people expect him to construct a third bathroom, where would he get such an idea? As the theoretical literature stated, this man is likely hearing and interpreting these hyperbolic claims from his various media sources (Van Dijk, 1992; Peterson, 2011; Peck, 2014), and then forming an internal narrative that causes him to be defensive at the mere thought of transgender people (DiAngelo, 2011). And that defensive posture is externally manifest. He is not just scared or avoiding transgender people. Instead, he is taking action through signage, and talking with journalists, and defending his choice to single out and threaten transgender people.

Signs like Warner's, reminiscent of anti-black signage of the past in the U.S., are evidence of the age-old technique by white and cisgender business owners to weaponize their role as business owner. They are leveraging market conformity to exhibit their moral conservatism – and in doing so, they disavow any of the consequences. Thus, if some transgender customer gets hurt (thanks to the latent permission the owner gives on the sign on the door), then the owner needs only suggest that he gave adequate warning of (market) expectations, and that it was the customer's own fault that they were outside market conformity (thus moral conformity), and deserving of the violence.

In an article titled “Car rams into protesters in St. Louis during march for slain transgender woman, injuring 3” by Fox News on 8/24/17, the unnamed author decontextualizes the acts of the car driver who is described as having driven into an area of road that had been closed by police for the protest, and then commenced to ignore police instructions to stop,

honked his horn, gave the middle finger to the protesters, and then drove through them injuring three people. The driver fled and was arrested a block away.

In the writing of this story, the author does not explore the man's motive, nor the contemporary context that this was one of several such incidents by white cisgender men since Trump's rise to power where they were weaponizing their vehicles and driving into crowds of #BlackLivesMatter, #MeToo, and other protests and vigils. No mention is made, nor any Fox-authored follow up on the Fox News site within the sampling period, that this was not an isolated incident, and that many such incidents were happening across the U.S., perpetrated often by known or suspected white supremacists. Instead, the driver is seen as responsible for his own actions, an individual, and acting a-historically. This alleviates the reader of this article from ever needing to get defensive that this man's violent actions might be linked to wider social circumstances, or an ideology that provokes and encourages such violence – an ideology that the readers themselves may subscribe to.

Thus, the responsibility narrative, alongside individualism and autonomy, as demonstrated earlier, often cuts both ways. It is used against those in the marginalized group as a discursive means to suggest they should take individual responsibility for their circumstances, since any negative life circumstances they may be suffering is likely the result of their own non-conforming actions and personal choices. This was well explored in the theoretical literature (Van Dijk, 1992; Peterson, 2011). But additionally, the personal responsibility narrative operates as a shield for those in the dominant group – giving them an a-historical and decontextualized default existence. If they commit a wrongdoing, they are a lone wolf, not ever placed within a terror group, or a supremacist/bigoted group, or within a political ideology that openly encourages violence toward those who protest injustice -- as documented repeatedly at Trump

presidential campaign rallies (Keneally, 2018). Thus, the man ramming his car into a crowd of people protesting police violence against a transgender person of color is merely a suspect, not a white supremacist terrorist. The business owner who places threatening anti-transgender signage on his business entrance is not a bigot in a long history of bigots and racists, he is just a guy making common sense decisions to protect his business and customers in a controversial age.

- *Fox as protector/advocate*: Fox News as the protector and advocate of traditional moral-economic principles.

In text articles, it seems that Fox News is not commonly self-referencing in the manner found by researchers watching their news broadcasts, as seen in the theoretical research (Peck, 2014). The exception to this is the opinion piece authors, who regularly posit themselves or, more commonly, their ideological principles – their outrage-- as being the protector and bastion of traditional values, more often moral than economic.

Thus, Fox as protector/advocate was not found as a coded item frequently enough to offer any firm conclusions that Fox News website authors see themselves or the site as a protector/advocate. That said, it is worth noting the latent observation that the stories that the site chooses to cover (with its own authors) do tend to follow certain streams of manufactured outrage. For example, an opinion writer like Todd Starnes or Jeff Moody will write an outrage article about some event (e.g. NBA pulling their All-Star Game from NC, BSA including transgender kids, Chelsea Manning granted clemency and possibly getting medical care through her armed services benefits, President Trump getting pushback in courts for his ban on transgender persons in the military, etc.) and then the ‘news’ side of the site follows the story, with staff writers writing regular articles throughout the lifespan of the story. It seems that Fox

News chooses these certain streams for whatever reason they deem important, and then follows them more closely. During the same time period other transgender-related newsworthy things were happening, and Fox simply reposted Associated Press (and other news services) articles, not authoring anything themselves. Certainly, this showed a pattern, but due to what motivation is difficult to ascertain beyond conjecture. Given the evidence found in the theoretical literature, I feel some conjecture may be warranted.

- *Fox as victim advocate*: Fox News as the protector of victims.

The findings regarding this motif are the same as represented in the previous motif (Fox as protector/advocate). Opinion pieces certainly reflected this motif, but regular news articles were not found to consistently make this type of appeal. Opinion authors would outline clearly for the reader who the victims and villains were in the same way that these articles served to connect the overt transphobic definitions with their equivalent dog whistle phrases. Using opinion authors this way surely allows for plausible deniability that the Fox organization itself holds or advocates those views. However, it is apparent that the dog whistles and framing stories used by opinion authors carry through to the conventional framing and discourse used in the news articles. The news articles simply limit themselves to the dog whistles rather than the overt transphobic discourse.

- *Fox decides victims/villains*: Fox News casts cisgender persons as victims and transgender person as villains. Framing transgender persons as villains caters to the populist discourse, and states that the transgender people are the enemy of the producing class (a contrived

“class” of people that urges a class-blind form of “solidarity” between working class, middle class, and upper class, but excludes the “takers”).

As noted in the previous two motifs, Fox appears to use a well-planned latent system to introduce its readers to the victims and villains of the overarching story. These overarching stories are singled out from the wider list of newsworthy stories, and then often followed for weeks or months with multiple stories spanning the lifetime of the arc. This generally starts with an initial outrage opinion article that sets the tone for all/most following Fox authored news stories related to that story arc.

For example, an opinion writer like Todd Starnes will write an outrage opinion article about the “First grader sent to office for ‘misgendering’ fellow student” (By Todd Starnes and Fox News, 8/25/17) where he argues that a child was traumatized by being asked to use different pronouns for a fellow student, and how children in general are being exposed to classroom materials on gender identity, which he sees as a violation of parents’ rights. Then, in the coming days, weeks, or months, the ‘news’ side of the site follows the story, or a variant, with staff writers producing regular articles throughout the lifespan of the story or topic. Examples of such ‘news’ stories can be seen in titles such as: “California school board will allow transgender books in elementary schools” (Fox News, 9/20/17), “Georgia mom upset about sexual ‘identity definitions’ quiz at school” (Fox News, 10/9/17), and “Transgender lesson gets New York 7th-grade teacher suspended” (Fox News, 11/5/17).

Included in this latent system is to define victims and villains. Often, the stories that Fox chose to ‘personally’ cover included casting transgender persons (and their allies) as villains or criminals. In the example above, Starnes had defined cisgender children as victims of their fellow transgender or gender-non-conforming students. He also defined parents as being the

victim of rogue liberal teachers and public-school systems who wish to teach their children the so-called inappropriate curriculum of sexual identity during health classes or carry transgender-related book titles in the library. Other examples in the sample include: Chelsea Manning, the criminal oath-breaker traitor who, once granted clemency, was potentially going to use the government dime to finish her transgender transition; or the transgender wrestler who was unfairly winning medals; or transgender soldiers who, as denigrated by President Trump, were draining scarce economic and training resources from the military and taxpayers that would be better spent outfitting conventional (cisgender) soldiers. The list goes on.

Within almost all of these victim/villain story arcs are the implications that the transgender persons in the story, the villains, are “takers.” That is, they are burdensome, costly, and disruptive, as President Trump tweeted when first initiating the ban on transgender troops. Often, they are also seen as being criminal, as seen in the transgender bathroom bill legislation claims, and in the cases of Manning, Gonzalez, and others in the sample whose criminality is held out alongside their transgender identity as key components of whole villains.

Fox also decides victims and villains on a story by story basis through use of who gets the final word, or who gets the most paragraphs. It was a common technique for the author of a news article to include a quote from a prominent LGBT leader, but this quote may get a few sentences of coverage, compared to a dozen paragraphs covering what pro-bathroom bill politicians might have to say about their legislation, or what Senate candidates had to say about their campaigns (which for example in the case of Roy Moore, was overtly bigoted and exceptionally transphobic).

- *Civil/business dog whistle*: A civil or business frame being deployed as a dog whistle stand in for otherwise overtly bigoted anti-transgender ideas or policies, e.g. conservative arguments that transgender people are a source of social or market instability, or exorbitant costs to taxpayers/public.

Many civil and religious dog whistles have already been included in previous theme and motif analysis. As previously stated, it was common for opinion article writers to do the heavy lifting of defining the more overt bigoted concerns, and often weaving the mythical stories which set the stage for fear, loathing, and mocking of legitimacy (see that motif for further explanation). Then, Fox News journalists would write articles that would not need to appeal directly to those bigoted tropes, rather, the use of dog whistles would be deployed instead – either by the journalist themselves, or via a quote from some politician or think tank expert. Here are some concise examples for examination:

[Opinion article re: education] – There is less focus today on the fundamentals of educating our kids in the basics of reading, writing, and math and more on indoctrinating children with a calculated political agenda aimed at hijacking young minds and making extreme social policies the societal norm in our schools and communities.

If a boy identifies as a girl and plays on a girls' sports team, can he share a hotel room with girls?

-- "Senate tax bill could be a game changer for parents frustrated with the public school system" by Lauren DeBellis Appell & Fox News, 12/12/17)

In this news article re: education where a Pride Center guest speaker was invited to speak to a class of 7th through 10th graders, a teacher was suspended and the Pride Center educators were uninvited (after going to the school for 12 years) after parents raged on social media about the handouts the Pride Center guest brought, including "a four page handout for seventh graders that listed LGBTQ terminology." The article centralizes the parents' outrage and dedicates more

than 80% of the article to quotes from the parent's YouTube rant. Four sentences were dedicated to a response by the Pride Center CEO. Clearly the journalist's use of "LGBTQ terminology" is being used, in context, in the same "political agenda" way that Appell used in the opinion article. The bigoted outrage of the parent is also centralized and legitimized – far from a fair or balanced approach to citing the facts and facets of the story ("Transgender lesson gets New York 7th grade teacher suspended by Fox News on 11/5/17).

A similar focus on the bigoted outrage of parents is made in the article "Georgia mom upset about sexual 'identity definitions' quiz at school" by Fox News on 10/9/17. The article describes that, again, a health class was using an assignment that asked students to "identify and differentiate between various sexual orientations and identities." These included terms "such as gay, lesbian, and transgender." The three-page article focuses entirely on the outrage of one parent whose child was in the class, and another parent who used to have a child attend that school. No other viewpoints are highlighted. Once again, the mere use of LGBTQ terminology is being used by the anonymous author of this article as being an outrage, calling this a "controversial quiz."

Sometimes the reverse is true, and "balance" becomes the means by which transgender dog whistle bigotry is normalized and seen as merely an alternative viewpoint. Take the article "Cajun restaurant's bathroom doors draw criticism, praise" by Fox News on 11/1/17. "A Cajun restaurant in Texas is getting some feedback about its bathroom doors, which feature full-length photos of pre- and post-transition Caitlyn Jenner." This is the opening sentence to the article. Here is a quote from later in the article that outlines the false sense of balance:

Some have called the photos 'transphobic' and 'insensitive,' while others think they're 'hilarious.' One person even posted on Twitter that they now 'have to eat there,' because of the signs.

The article cites a number of for and against tweets, and then finishes with the line:

Last year, a bar in Los Angeles posted similar photos of Caitlyn Jenner before and after her change on their bathroom doors as distinguishers and received a ‘mostly lighthearted’ reaction.

This also highlights how dog whistles can come in the form of symbols and material culture, not just linguistic turns of phrase. A business owner making a joke of photographs of pre- and post-transition persons who are transgender implies that affirming their identity as a person is invalid. Much like deadnaming, failing to affirm a transgender person’s identity (as they would have it affirmed) is an act of signaling – of “outing” – and implies that the person doing the deadnaming does not wish to put forth the effort to respect the identity of the transgender person. Thus, far from a joke, such an action – whether using material culture, such as photographs, or in language, such as deliberately calling a person by their deadname, using the wrong pronouns, or misgendering, is a form of dog whistling that one does not believe that discrimination is a problem, and that they do not support their transition. Given that high percentages of transgender people report being discriminated against in housing, medical care, and the workplace, this type of invalidation, and the subsequent making light (“light hearted” and “hilarious” being framed as merely the other side of the coin of “transphobic” and “insensitive”) of it in media via civil dog whistle is undoubtedly reifying existing oppressions.

In an article by Brooke Singman and Fox News on 10/9/17 entitled “New California law allows jail time for using wrong gender pronoun, sponsor denies that would happen,” the author explains that if a healthcare worker were to “‘willfully and repeatedly’ decline to use a senior transgender patient’s ‘preferred name or pronouns’” that they could face legal consequences. Singman, however, is not interested in this bill’s actual context – which is to prevent elder abuse

and discrimination in nursing homes and healthcare using transphobic misgendering, deadnaming, and the like. Instead, Singman posits healthcare workers as potential victims of this legislation, and ends the article with this dog whistle quote, positing “free speech” as being the antithesis of LGBT civil rights and protections:

“How can you believe in free speech, but think that government can compel people to use certain pronouns when talking to others?” [California Family Council’s Greg Burt] said to the California Assembly Judiciary Committee in August, according to CBN News.

Of note is that the above quote is sourced from a religious daily news show linked to Pat Robertson’s 700 club, as discussed in the theoretical literature. Thus, as this analysis segues into discussing the motif of the religious dog whistle, it can be noticed that religious news broadcasts also seem to be making civil and economic dog whistle claims, alongside whatever religious claims they may also make – and that content is being sourced by Fox News authors in published ‘news’ articles.

- *Religious dog whistle:* A religious frame being deployed as a dog whistle stand in for otherwise overtly bigoted anti-transgender ideas or policies, e.g. Transgender persons as undeserving of the rights of other citizens due to perversion, transgender persons as a direct threat to families, heteronormative nuclear families as the victims of transgender persons, use of moral degeneracy argument as substitute for social explanations (such as ignoring inequalities and oppressive systems and instead suggesting that transgender suffering is the result of their immoral choices and resulting consequences).

In the theoretical literature, researchers (Peterson, 2011; Peck, 2014) were finding religious dog whistles frequently being used during Fox News broadcasts, and by organizations

that typically affiliate with Fox and Fox News’ target audience. Yet, it was less common than the counterpart of economic and civil dog whistles when looking at the published articles on the Fox News website. Thus, this was one of those areas where I could again not form any firm conclusions regarding whether or not Fox News makes it a “habit” to use and publish religious dog whistles in writing. That said, I did see religious dog whistles appear in the videos that would accompany articles. Often the video accompanying articles was not specific to the article itself. Rather, someone or some machine algorithm assigns a topically related video to some percentage of Fox News authored articles. To take an educated guess, around 30% of articles had an accompanying video that was assigned. Among these topically related videos, I saw between 6 and 10 different video clips that were simply “transgender” topically related videos. Many of these were segments from opinion talk shows, e.g. Bill O’Reilly. Many of these videos contained pundits and hosts talking about transgender folks in some way – often Chelsea Manning, some dated content criticizing some Obama-era policy re: LGBTQ issues, or transgender persons banned from the military. While short, these segments (which were uncredited and in a video queue via the embedded Fox News video window), would occasionally contain a pundit using religious dog whistles.

However, examples of religious dog whistles were found. Christopher Carbone and Fox News authored “LGBT Groups demand withdrawal of judicial nominee who called trans kids ‘Satan’s plan’” on 10/17/17. In this article, President Trump’s judicial nominee for U.S. District Court for the Eastern District of Texas was quoted using numerous religious dog whistles:

During a 2015 speech titled “The Church and Homosexuality” Mateer said that transgender children were evidence of ‘how Satan’s plan is working and the destruction that is going on.’ During that same speech, Mateer said same-sex marriage would open the door to “people marrying their pets.”

And:

In two speeches before the National Religious Liberty Conference... Mateer also reportedly lamented that states were banning “conversion therapy.”

The article’s author does not make an effort to criticize Mateer’s claims, but instead relies entirely on the letter/press release from the LGBT activists to make those arguments. As noted elsewhere, what is most notable about this article is that it is the only coverage of this judge’s nomination by Fox News, and they do not directly follow up with coverage of the removal of said judge’s nomination after these bigoted speeches surfaced. Similarly, they did not challenge the Trump administration’s lack of vetting which allowed this person to be nominated in the first place while being on the record with such views.

In the article covered in the previous motif, “Georgia mom upset about sexual ‘identity definitions’ quiz at school” by Fox News on 10/9/17, we see a number of religious dog whistles made in quotes from parents, cited by the author:

Why are they teaching that in school? What does that have to do with life?

And:

If a kid wants to know about the gender or know about the sex preference, it should come from the parents, not from the school.

Within these quotes are the latent religious cultural assumptions that sex is the realm of family and religion, and not of school and government. We saw this in the theoretical literature which spoke of the Family Research Council and their lobbying practices (Peterson, 2011). Also, there is the religious dog whistle that to teach this LGBTQ terminology in school in tantamount to teaching perversion – and that this perversion has no place in normative life (“What does that have to do with life?”).

In the article “Evangelicals draw critics with ‘Nashville Statement’ on sexuality” by Lukas Mikelionis and Fox News on 8/30/17, the author touts that “evangelical leaders... released the Nashville Statement... reiterating historic Christian viewpoints toward same-sex marriage and transgender rights.” It is not until later in the article that these “evangelical leaders” are narrowed to a specific group – The Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood (CBMW). Multiple Trump advisors are said to have signed this “manifesto.” These include Family Research Council President, and author of Trump’s transgender military ban, Tony Perkins and Southern Baptist pastor Jack Graham. Here are a few select dog whistle quotes that stand in for overtly bigoted statements:

The spirit of our age does not delight in God’s good design of male and female. Consequently, confusion reigns over some of the most basic questions of our humanity.

And:

The document includes 14 points on issues such as gay, lesbian, and transgender rights, and marriage – rejecting what the signers describe as the attitude of “moral indifference” toward those issues.

Because in this dog whistle, to grant transgender people (and other LGBTQIA folks) the normative rights of citizens is tantamount to “moral indifference” and evidence of our society’s confused inability to delight in God’s gender binary design. The author of this article does, in the last 10% of the article, list a few tweets and quotes in opposition to this Nashville Statement. The article ends, however, with a dismissive quote from Fox News “conservative political commentator” Ben Shapiro, who says, “the statement’s points are merely mainstream Christian viewpoints...” This in itself is a religious dog whistle, as it casts the whole of Christianity as a bigoted monolith, and in agreement with the CBMW. Fox News does not cover this topic further,

not does it highlight the responses of other major U.S. Christian (and other religious) denominations that would stand in opposition to this Statement.

- *Mocking legitimacy*: Conservative person or group casts transgender and gender non-conforming persons as an illegitimate or undeserving group by using diminutive or dismissive language, or through use of quotation marks (as a form of sarcasm, in place of saying “so-called”).

This motif was by far the most commonly found in the sample, with nearly all articles referring to transgender or gender non-conforming persons containing some form of mocking legitimacy. From a coding standpoint, this is also one of the easiest to find and unambiguous codes and was manifest in a number of common ways. While a surely non-exhaustive list, this researcher found examples of transgender people being labeled as a group in diminutive or overtly discriminatory ways, transgender people (often students and kids) being proclaimed as undeserving of human rights protections, the term “transgender” being included in a list of pejorative identifiers alongside others such as ‘criminal’, ‘illegal’, or ‘traitor’, and the use of quotation marks as sarcasm or insult. As explained in an earlier motif, the use of quotations from outspoken bigoted members of the public or politicians acted as stand ins for the things the journalist did not want to say themselves. Thus, sometimes the quotes were real quotes, but strategically placed to make a pejorative point about transgender persons without the article author having to come out and say the nasty thing themselves.

Overall, numerous quotes and examples can already be found in the analysis of previous motifs. Here, however, I will identify a few common tropes, in their generalized form, that I saw repeated throughout numerous articles.

The first trope mocks the legitimacy of a transgender person's transition. The myth told many times, as seen in previous analysis of opinion articles by Todd Starnes and Lauren DeBellis Appell, tends to begin with the implication that a person leaves work for the weekend as a man, and shows up to work on Monday morning as a woman. This myth is almost always couched in stories where the transgender person is a teacher, Scout leader, or some other children's authority figure. Even if we are to assume the best of these writers, politicians, and members of the public -- that these remarks are rooted in ignorance, not malice or bigotry -- it is a stark misunderstanding of the transition process to assume that such a scenario would be the norm, and that the transgender individual would not be acutely sensitive -- like parents, and any other reasonable person -- to their impact on their students and other children in their care. Such a trope, even in the most generous of interpretations, delegitimizes the transgender individual and distills them into a folk demon, not a human being.

The second trope that is common in similar contexts as the one above is the myth that transgender people are just men in women's clothing. In addition to the opinion writers, politicians often hauled this myth out when talking about transgender bathroom bills and the need to keep women and children safe. This myth pulls on people's socialized moral panic that transgender people are predators and rapists, as seen in the theoretical literature (and also completely false).

Both of these tropes are linked to the notion that transgender people are not actually honestly living their authentic lives as the gender that they feel and are. Rather, it is based on questioning their honesty, and authenticity, and suggesting that they are making themselves appear like the opposite gender in order to commit some wrongdoing, or due to perversion or mental illness.

Using the wrong word, or (intentionally?) misconstruing the labels for transgender persons was also very common. One of the most visible examples was the tweets by President Trump instituting the ban on transgender troops. In that tweet he refers to how “[The military] cannot be burdened with the tremendous medical costs and disruption that transgender in the military would entail.” In this sentence he is using the adjective without the noun. One could make a number of latent inferences about this “mistake” to which no correction was made. One could argue that he is unwilling to use the word “soldier” or “serviceperson” adjacent to the word “transgender.” One could similarly argue that he was aiming to say “transgenders” instead of “transgender” which is a common intentionally-dehumanizing pejorative mis-label found in use by other quoted politicians, opinion writers, and Fox News TV hosts – as opposed to the commonly accepted uses, e.g. transgender person, or person who is transgender.

Related to the above form of mis-labeling as mocking legitimacy, Fox News journalists did not hesitate to quote this tweet by the President on numerous occasions, and often not correcting the incorrect grammatical use of the term transgender, nor making any effort to label it as such, as in using the common journalistic technique of adding [*sic*] next to a grammatically incorrect use of a word. In quoting this tweet, without critique, Fox News becomes a party to the derogatory mis-labeling. This was found in other examples where politicians would speak pejoratively about some group of persons (e.g. people of color, LGBTQIA folks, etc.) and their quotes would go uncriticized and uncorrected with a [*sic*] designation. Again, this would be an interesting area for further research exploration in terms of when (and for whom) an entity like Fox News chooses to correct the meaning to be respectful and humanizing, versus when they let it slide, and thereby become party to the insult.

- Political Territory (emergent motif)

The one clear frame/motif/element that emerged from iterative open coding was what I have come to call “political territory.” The theoretical literature discusses these motifs/elements of realism, autonomy, and mocking legitimacy – and ‘political territory’ seems to be an emergent frame that pulls from ideas within each of these motifs/elements but has its own character.

Political territory is when the author of an article focuses on the political aspects of a discussion about transgender human rights without acknowledging the human costs associated with the policy that is being discussed. For example, if an author writes an article about a transgender bathroom bill law, and quotes multiple politicians talking about the financial and political fallout from their lawmaking, but fails to once mention the reason that the public has expressed outrage about said law, and fails to acknowledge the impact (in a contemporary or historical sense) of such a law on the persons the law specifically targets (persons who are transgender), then this distillation is what I call political territory.

Political territory can also be used as a motif/element in the discourse itself where, in an example similar to above, politicians can discuss a law they intend to make or have made, purely in terms of the economic impact it may have on the state, or the effect it will have on other institutions – such as education or sports profitability, or on other individuals – such as made-up victims of transgender perversion and violence (often “women and children” or “daughters and wives”), without acknowledging the express action taken within the law – which is controlling access to bathroom spaces based on gender identity. If any reference is made at all to transgender persons, they are cast as a political group – the ‘other side’ – embattled for political power from a position of equal standing where ‘both sides’ are ‘disappointing’, ‘need to come together’, or ‘must form a compromise.’

Articles and discourse that deploy political territory do not question the justice of the policy or policy outcomes; they simply present policies legislating control over transgender persons' use of public and private spaces as a matter of political difference of opinion. This is a concept that in the age of #MeToo, and the revival of the conservative push to outlaw abortion rights in the USA, would seem highly relevant as an area of crossover research for how women's use of public and private spaces has historically, and is currently managed in a similar way in the media discourse – as a mere matter of political difference.

In an article by Ryan Gaydos and Fox News, published on 2/22/17, entitled “Trump administration working on new transgender bathroom directive,” the author frames the article as political territory. It starts out by framing the issue as a mere repeal of an “Obama era directive” – not as linked to Title IX federal protections. In fact, Title IX is not mentioned until much later in the article, and then only in a quote from a former Obama era Justice Department head. Much of the article focuses on Press Secretary Sean Spicer stating that this is a “states’ rights” issue, and later quoting President Trump’s phone-in to the Fox and Friends television program where he stated that undoing this directive “does not diminish the protections” and that it is a “massive story” which only affects a “‘tiny, tiny’ percentage of the population.” In the next paragraph Trump is quoted on the Sean Hannity show as having said:

I love North Carolina, and they have a law, and it’s a law that, you know, unfortunately is causing them some problems... and I fully understand that they want to go through, but they are losing business and they are having people come out against.

The article concludes with quotes from a research fellow at the conservative Heritage Foundation, Anderson, who suggests that “students, parents, and teachers should work out ‘win-win’ solutions at the local level. The article ends with a quote from Anderson that equates the

danger concerns of students who are transgender as being equal to the privacy and safety concerns of cisgender students. Thus, the frame for the entire article is one of this being a problem of political sides, where there are dangers and concerns on both sides. Ultimately quotes from the POTUS and the others featured prominently in the article support the authors frame, and reinforce the latent discursive motif that this is an issue that has been overblown, is mostly a problem of federal overreach on the part of the Obama administration, and that by repealing protections based on gender identity no actual harm will befall anyone – thus the decision is framed as inconsequential.

In the context of cisgender fragility, limiting the frame to political territory serves as a prime example of how cisgender persons can maintain comfort while appearing to discuss gender identity and transgender persons' rights without ever having to experience the discomfort of acknowledging the injustice of laws or the baked-in inequality in the systems of politics, sports, economics, education, the military, etc. The limitation of the article discussion to 'merely' political territory manifests in this way over and over in the articles I coded and was present in some form in nearly every article.

This framing technique is indeed highly consequential because it serves to erase the concerns of the group impacted by political policymaking. It fails to question the justness of a law or policy, and instead focuses on the inconveniences that political disagreements inflict on lawmakers, other officials, and those who are profiting or losing from the economic effects of bigoted policymaking. It is reductionistic and serves to distract the reader entirely from critical thought that might trigger empathy for transgender persons, or challenge cisgender privilege.

Conclusions

I came to the topic of cisgender fragility through reviewing the CDA queer studies literature on types of conservative rhetoric and their connections with reinforcing power structures through various discursive techniques, e.g. dog whistle terminology. The theoretical idea of White Fragility, an explanatory concept found in the study of the social construction of race, showed a resemblance to these discursive techniques. Chapter II set out to develop an extensive theoretical synthesis on which to connect the findings of queer theory researchers with the construct of fragility.

As I wrote in Chapter II, so often the dominant group's behavior is left largely unexamined by researchers. Cisgender persons are worthy of scrutiny – as it is within the examination of their defensive behaviors that we begin to see the way that oppressive practices persist and are reified through lawmaking and political platform building.

Seeing that connection, my goal then was to design a small-scale exploratory study to test if these common themes presented in the evaluation of a definitive mainstream conservative news network. The obvious choice was to observe Fox News, as they are widely viewed as a mainstream source of news for the broad base of U.S. conservatives. ECA was identified in Chapter III as the ideal method to take up such a study. Of particular interest is the way in which Fox News constructs the idea and archetype of “transgender” – especially as it translates to their perceptions of how these persons should have access to services, civil rights, and how the public should respond to the perceived dangers presented by those who identify as transgender in the U.S. This archetype is demonstrated earlier in this chapter in my examination of this study's themes.

The concept of cisgender fragility is complex, as outlined in Chapters I-II. This explorative and cursory study certainly does not sufficiently vet all the theoretical claims I made in Chapter II, nor does it necessarily provide the best methodological means to attempt such a lofty goal. As outlined in Chapter III, completely vetting these concepts was never the goal. Rather, the goal was to begin testing whether or not some of these common themes exist in the everyday media consumed by persons most likely to espouse anti-transgender views based on political, economic, and religious affiliations, and then give examples via ethnographic content analysis that might allow the future researcher to springboard in a number of directions, and gather more conclusive results. Certainly, a number of mixed methods would be necessary to vet all of the theoretical claims made in Chapter II.

Conducting this ECA method on these Fox News website articles was illustrative of the often-banal ways in which subtle defensiveness and veiled bigotry finds its way into everyday media content. The topic of transgender human rights issues was almost always distilled in some way to political territory. The real physical and emotional concerns of those in the oppressed transgender group were often equated as being similar in intensity and validity to the mere discomfort of the dominant cisgender group.

Cisgender/straight outrage was often given more paragraphs, even in articles merely discussing the use of LGBTQIA-related vocabulary terms in schools. The feelings of cisgender business owners – such as finding humor in mocking transgender people’s transitions via bathroom signage or anti-trans warning signs on doors – were posited as being equal to the concerns of transgender people that such public mockeries incite violence, reify existing social discrimination in jobs, healthcare, and housing, and solidify social bigotry. The concerns of conservative Christian religious leaders over the moral degradation of the country due to

transgender perversion became the basis of articles uncritically covering bigoted church stances against LGBTQIA persons, and moreover, led to religious leaders like Tony Perkins of the Family Research Council advising President Donald Trump to ban all transgender participation in the armed services of the United States – which President Trump did. All of this despite studies and statistics, easily googled by any member of the general public, showing that transgender people were not in any way more perverted, criminal, costly, or less effective as soldiers than the general population. Thus, these false accusations – both moral and economic -- carried weight due only to stigma and bigotry – cisgender opinions – rather than the weight of facts. These false victim narratives, raised up by members of the dominant cisgender group and reversing the real direction of danger, served to castigate and endanger the lives of transgender persons across the U.S. – as evidenced by ongoing reports showing violence and killings of transgender and gender non-conforming persons – 26 deaths of transgender persons in the U.S. due to fatal violence in 2018, and at the time of this publication, more than 10 in 2019 (Human Rights Campaign, 2019).

Thus, I will argue that while this study was unable to judge the weight or importance of each motif in the theoretical construct of cisgender fragility, it is my conclusion that this study did serve to show the overall concept of cisgender fragility exists in forms similar to those offered by DiAngelo's *White Fragility* (2011). The notable differences between white fragility and cisgender fragility seem to be evidenced discursively in the way that this study's themes highlighted. Cisgender fragility is indeed externalized, evidenced by dominant group defensiveness, and rooted in underlying anti-transgender and gender non-conforming systemic bias, and does not require the individuals involved to be overtly bigoted (although that does appear at times). Cisgender fragility would prefer not to hear even the mention of transgender

persons or their concerns and would rather return to a state of “normalcy” where they no longer have to think about those things – a state of naivete and privilege.

The themes identified in this study were often underlying the systemic bias: Transgender people as threats to the public and/or private safety of individuals, Transgender people as threats to public systems (e.g. the military, education, housing, sports, economics), Transgender persons as outside moral conformity, and Transgender persons as outside market conformity. It was within the confines of these frames that journalists, pundits, politicians, religious leaders, and outraged parents alike were able to dismiss or minimize the human rights concerns of transgender groups and individuals in favor of highlighting the perceived threat felt by the majority cisgender group. The mere mention of LGBTQIA terminology was enough to concern parents that their children were at risk or in danger.

The mere desire of transgender persons to relieve themselves in a bathroom without fear of harassment or threat of violence was seen as a public safety threat worthy of legislation – not to protect the transgender people who were under actual threat of violence, but *from* transgender people who may commit some perverted sexual assault of mythical proportions. When such legislation was repealed, it was not because the legislation was bigoted and a human rights abuse. No, it was because the state was losing massive amounts of money and looking bad in the press. Thus, the decision was motivated by economics and saving face. In the end, most articles covering these events posed the two sides as differences of political opinion. The word “bigoted” only appeared once or twice in all of the articles, and almost always with the word “allegedly-“ in front of it.

In conclusion, it seems not a question of whether cisgender fragility exists or not, but rather, to what degree does it infiltrate wider popular media and social discourse, beyond my

limited study of Fox News website articles during Trump's first year of presidency? I have created more questions than I have answered. I believe that my theoretical construction in Chapter II is robust and provides a starting point for research that far exceeds my own method here. However, to what degree do the motifs found in my theoretical construction actually provide evidence of the fragility concept? Or, are they components of anti-transgender bigotry in general? This was a distinction that I was unable to make due to the limitations of my study design.

Any conclusions that I have made in this chapter cannot be generalized in any way; rather, they are my best attempt to give examples that illustrate the concepts already found in theoretical literature, and to test their usefulness in ECA media analysis. I believe that given the limited nature of this study that I have sufficiently provided provocation for future researchers to explore this idea more fully.

Further, while cisgender fragility is born of intersectional comparisons with the existing constructions of male fragility and white fragility, the overarching intersectional theory of fragility is still in its infancy. At the time of this publication, this is the only known conceptualization of cisgender fragility, and few studies of white, male, and other dominant group fragilities have been documented. This is an area for a great deal more research, and the honing of an inclusive platform on which to examine fragility at numerous intersections of domination and liberation, rather than taking each one individually as I have done here.

As I stated in the opening words of this chapter, those on the side of human rights and equal protection under the law can benefit from well-considered theory and analysis of qualitative aspects of the positions held by their opponents, who often come from dominant and privileged social positions. The discussion and adoption of legislation and court decisions in

favor of LGBTQIA human rights has a positive effect on public attitudes toward persons with LGBTQIA identities. This reinforces the need to deploy sound social science analysis in arenas of politics and lobbying to enact social change in favor of LGBTQIA rights and recognition. This is the time for such research, as it seems that a queered and intersectional approach to explaining our society's greatest human rights challenges is needed urgently.

Challenges and Limitations

This research employed a convenience cluster sampling method. Sampling was not random. Theoretical saturation was used as a cutoff for sampling, thus the sample of detail-coded articles was not necessarily representative of the entire population of related articles on the Fox News website. This limitation was addressed, in part, by printing and reading all of the population of related articles. So, while they were not all coded in-depth, all of them were read thoroughly. Certainly, this exploratory study cannot be generalized to all news sites, or to the general population of all cisgender persons in the United States. As stated in the introduction, the purpose of this study was exploratory and aimed at cultivating a theoretical groundwork that future research can explore with greater depth, precision, and explanation. Therefore, it is possible that given the replication of this study that a different sample group may provide different findings and conclusions, especially from different time periods or using a more inclusive sampling method (such as including articles not authored by Fox News exclusively). That said, this study seeks to employ all commonly accepted practices of transparency and reflexivity, alongside the theoretical saturation sampling process, to provide sound and trustworthy conclusions. These methods are outlined in Chapter III, including a detailed account of expected best practices for the method of ECA – which this researcher has attempted to follow with utmost detail.

Researcher Bias

The primary researcher identifies as a queer, gender non-binary, masculine presenting, white person. The researcher was raised in a working-class household with cisgender, heterosexual, blue-collar, politically, religiously, and socially conservative, white parents. The

researcher is not a member of any political party, and his politics are often described by political compass results as “Left Social Libertarian, Pacifist, Non-Interventionalist, Social Liberal.” The researcher has worked as a music professional and a programming director in a variety of Christian churches, including churches who espoused the Evangelical moral conservatism described in detail in this study. The researcher now self-describes as irreligious and has no current affiliation with any church or denomination. The researcher has participated in social justice activism related to LGBTQIA concerns, including advocating for the rights of transgender persons.

Unknown Sources of Bias

It is unknown whether the Fox News website uses cookies or other such tracking devices to selectively display results in their search engine. The researcher attempted to account for this by using a browser not normally used for other activities, and only after having cleared all cookies and caches before performing the search, and viewing articles.

Credibility

In terms of credibility and internal validity, the researcher has attempted to utilize a theoretical saturation model in order to provide the greatest richness of data gathered. The researcher has employed best practices per the chosen, well-accepted research method of ECA. However, it is not possible for the researcher to check with the authors of the Fox News website articles to determine if they feel that the findings are credible and accurate.

Transferability

In terms of transferability and external validity, this study was meant to set up an exploratory framework that might be tested more extensively in other news website contexts, and with attention to other less overt groups displaying cisgender fragility. Thus, these findings may be useful to extend in future research to liberal and left leaning cisgender groups, other news sites, and other forms of media (such as tweets, or social media practices) and experience (such as interpersonal conversations). Without such further study, it is unknown whether these findings are transferable. They certainly are not generalizable in their current setting, but may be insightful, nonetheless.

Dependability

The dependability and reliability of these findings should prove high. The researcher documented all sources of initial codebook development (see Chapters II-III), and also documented all iterative open coding for those evaluating and replicating this research. It was this researcher's goal to document all changes or unexpected findings, and to employ reflexive journaling to show how that process developed.

Confirmability

At present, no other researchers have confirmed these findings. All coding and analysis was carried out by the primary researcher with no inter-coder reliability checks by other researchers. Thus, this researcher cannot claim objectivity in this research, yet invites researchers to test these findings to corroborate, confirm, or disconfirm the findings. Reflexivity was

employed to document and deter inappropriate personal biases, yet this research cannot be declared entirely free of such phenomena.

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APPENDIX A: CHRONOLOGICAL BIBLIOGRAPHY OF FOXNEWS.COM ARTICLES
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APPENDIX B: CISGENDER FRAGILITY STUDY CODING SHEET

Date of article coding:_____

Name of article, author, and date of publication:_____

_____Coder Name:_____

Themes Identified:	Check if present
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transgender people as threats to the public and/or private safety of individuals. (<i>circle public or private, when appropriate</i>) • Transgender people as threats to public systems, e.g. the military, education, housing, sports, economics. (<i>circle, when appropriate</i>) • Transgender persons as outside moral conformity. • Transgender persons as outside market conformity. 	
Motifs and Elements:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transgender perversion and the potential for violence in all transgender persons 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Self-defense claim by cisgender person/group 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cisgender discomfort 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Folk hero narrative 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Realism 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determining gender 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Autonomy 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individualism 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Responsibility 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fox as protector/advocate 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fox as victim advocate 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fox decides victims/villains 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Civil/business dog whistle 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Religious dog whistle 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mocking legitimacy 	

• Political Territory (emergent)	
Other identified themes, motifs, or elements in article?	

Write additional notes on the back of this page. Do not detach this sheet from the coded article, as in-line coding also contains notes and other identified themes, motifs, and elements.

CISGENDER FRAGILITY STUDY -- CODING NOTES: