

# A Content Analysis of Persuasion Techniques Used on White Supremacist Websites

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## I. INTRODUCTION

The Internet has made it possible for people to access just about any information they could possibly want. Conversely, it has given organizations a vehicle through which they can get their message out to a large audience. Hate groups have found the Internet particularly appealing, because they are able to get their uncensored message out to an unlimited number of people (ADL 2005). This is an issue that is not likely to go away. The Supreme Court has declared that the Internet is like a public square, and it is therefore unconstitutional for the government to censor websites (*Reno et al. v. American Civil Liberties Union et al.* 1997). Research into how hate groups use the Internet is necessary for several reasons. First, the Internet has the potential to reach more people than any other medium. Connected to that, there is no way to censor who views what, so it is unknown whom these groups are trying to target for membership. It is also important to learn what kinds of views these groups hold and what, if any, actions they are encouraging individuals to take. In addition, ongoing research is needed because both the Internet and the groups themselves are constantly changing.

The research dealing with hate websites is sparse. The few studies that have been conducted have been content analyses of dozens of different hate sites. The findings indicate a wide variation in the types of sites, but the samples are so broad that no real patterns have emerged (Gerstenfeld, Grant, and Chiang 2003).

This study will focus on the content and the use of persuasive techniques of four major white supremacist websites. Three of them are major groups connected to larger movements: the National Alliance connected to the Neo-Nazi movement, the Imperial Klans of America connected to the Ku Klux Klan, and the Aryan Nations connected to the Christian Identity movement. In addition, the study will be examining a large site named Stormfront that is not affiliated with any group.

This study will catalogue what parts of the site hate groups use for

attracting people, how their extremist views are disguised, what types of age, gender, and educational demographics they are appealing to, and what kinds of attempts they make to recruit potential members. Its primary focus is to examine the efforts that are made on the site to indoctrinate visitors into white supremacist beliefs. Since the views expressed on the sites are extremist, it is hypothesized that the compliance techniques of foot-in-the-door technique (when something small is requested first to make compliance more likely for a larger request) and low-ball technique (when only part of what a request entails is made known) will be used. This study will examine the extent to which these techniques are present on the sites.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

The theories in which this study is grounded are compliance techniques that, if present on the website, would serve to make the site more appealing to potential members of mainstream society. Foot-in-the-door technique is a theory of social psychology that holds that a person will be more likely to accede to a request if he or she previously has agreed to a smaller, related request. Generally, gaining compliance with a request is the purpose of foot-in-the-door technique. It is not a new idea to use this technique to change people's perspectives. It is believed to be one of the basic tactics used in Korean brainwashing (Schein, Schneier, and Barker 1961). Furthermore, it is one of the techniques that Nazi propaganda minister Joseph Goebbles used in his attempts to spread the racism that was vital to Hitler's rise to power (Bruner 1941).

Low-ball technique is a technique wherein compliance is gained by not telling the person the whole story (Cialdini 1978). This method is often intertwined with foot-in-the-door technique. This is in fact how most propaganda works. The person or organization trying to persuade tells only part of the story. Low-ball technique includes the site's explanations and a defense of the viewpoints expressed on it. In telling only one side, the websites are more likely to sound reasonable and appealing to others. When people do not know both sides or the whole story, they are much more likely to comply, and compliance will change their self-perception (Cialdini 1978).

Freedman and Fraser (1966) did pioneering work with foot-in-the-door technique. Their study included two experiments in which they compared the likelihood of people's complying with a large request if they were first asked to comply with a smaller request and if they were not. They found that only 22% of people who were asked only the large request agreed to it, whereas 53% of the people who agreed to the initial small request agreed to the large request (Freedman and Fraser 1966). When the researchers con-

trolled for the variable of familiarity with the experimenter, they found it to be insignificant, which indicates that people do not comply because they feel as if they know the person making the request. When they looked at the factor of merely agreeing to the request and not actually following through, they found that it was only slightly less of an indication of compliance. This means that just the act of agreeing to the request is a significant part of the effect (Freedman and Fraser 1966).

This study was very significant in that it uncovered some of the basic principles concerning how and why foot-in-the-door technique works. The basic idea was that once someone has agreed to any action, no matter how small, he tends to feel more involved than he did before (Freedman and Fraser 1966, 201), which leads to a change in self-perception and attitude (Bem 1967). This is very relevant to the present study, because this is the kind of self-perception change that is hypothesized to take place when the foot-in-the-door technique is used on websites.

Bem (1967) found that cognitive dissonance is a necessary element when changing one's self-perception, if the changed perception conflicts with the person's original beliefs. Cognitive dissonance occurs when a person holds two views that are in conflict with one another. The way a person deals with this dissonance will vary, but regardless of that, it causes a person anxiety, and therefore he or she will want to resolve it (Bem 1967). When trying to appeal to potential members, these groups will structure their websites to make them appear more likeable and less extreme (McDonald 1999); this would be an example of low-ball technique. A change in self-perception comes about more easily if a person does not have set beliefs about something. In this case, cognitive dissonance may not occur and a change in beliefs could come as soon as some propaganda gets its foot in the door (Freedman and Frazer 1966; Burger 1999).

The people that are most likely to be susceptible to this technique are those with low self-esteem or values that, while mainstream, remain closer to those of extremists. Bramel (1962) found that when something is in conflict with a person's self-perception, it causes more arousal and subsequently is viewed as bad. However, the opposite is true as well: the more closely an idea matches a person's self-perception, the more likely it is to be viewed as not as bad (Bramel 1962). Thus hate groups seeking to recruit people from the mainstream are likely to have greater success if they are welcoming, and downplay or disguise their actual beliefs, as McDonald (1999) has already observed. This is why foot-in-the-door and low-ball techniques are expected to be prevalent.

There are three other major compliance techniques as well: door-in-the-face, pique, and that's-not-all techniques. Door-in-the-face technique is demonstrated when someone initially is asked to perform a large request,

and then is asked to perform a smaller one. Pique technique refers to arousing someone's interest with something unusual. In that's-not-all technique, a rather large request is made, followed by the offering of incentives for following the request (Taylor, Peplau, and Sears 2003). These techniques are not considered in this study, for the reason that they would not be effective in changing people's beliefs. This is so because in this situation, extremists are striving to make their viewpoint look appealing to those in the mainstream. These other techniques, if used, would further polarize the group from the mainstream, making its members seem more extreme or outlandish, which would not cause people to sympathize or associate with them; consequently, they would not change anyone's self-perception.

The Internet has become an excellent medium for recruitment. However, recruitment was not the main goal of these groups at first. Even today, there are many other ways in which white supremacist sites use the Internet. The history of white supremacist groups on the Internet began in 1983 when George Dietz put up a computer bulletin board system named Liberty Bell. The West Virginian Neo-Nazi used it to post various white supremacist information such as holocaust denial, racist, and anti-Semitic material (Levin 2002).

A year later, the Aryan Nations and White Aryan Resistance set up bulletin boards of their own in an attempt to help connect right-wing extremists from all over. Included in the content of the postings on the Aryan Nations site were listings of various Jewish headquarters, with messages attached encouraging surfers to take action against them (Levin 2002).

The White Aryan Resistance was even more focused on inciting violence; however, their activities caught up with them when they were held liable for the death of an Ethiopian immigrant at the hands of two skinheads for the amount of \$12.5 million (Levin 2002). Already by 1985, hate groups online were being monitored by watchdog groups such as the Anti-Defamation League.

By the early 1990s, bulletin boards were being replaced by discussion boards. These allowed more people the opportunity to contribute their own extremist views. By this time, the Internet was also being used by hate groups to encourage their strategy of leaderless resistance (Levin 2002). The goal was to have people take matters into their own hands, operating in underground cells unaffiliated with any particular group. William Pierce's 1978 novel, the *Turner Diaries*, is a model of this tactic. In the book, the main character starts a race war by bombing the FBI building (this was the model Timothy McVeigh used in his attack on the Federal Building in Oklahoma City). Other groups have promoted RAHOWA (or racial holy

war) on their sites and generally encouraged leaderless resistance (Levin 2002).

The Internet offers groups the opportunity to reach unprecedented numbers of people with these ideas. It further allows groups to implicitly encourage leaderless resistance, glorifying real-life terrorists such as Robert Mathews, Gordon Kahl, and David Tate. It allows lone wolves the ability to keep up on events, stay informed about the group, and get ideas while protecting the group from liability (ADL 2005).

Now that the Internet is more widely used and accessible, groups use it for many of the same purposes, but have expanded its role to include more intricate methods of recruiting. Groups are able to appeal to a wide range of age groups and people with different ideologies by allowing them easy access to what interests them.

There are hundreds of racist websites, all of which have different objectives and means by which they attempt to arrive at those objectives. This was confirmed by the most recent content analysis done by Gerstenfeld, Grant, and Chiang (2003), who looked at 157 racist websites. They found that recruitment appeared to be a main objective for many sites that were making attempts to reach more impressionable surfers. These attempts occasionally included kids' pages, but much more commonly were links to multimedia, merchandise, racist music, and video games (Gerstenfeld, Grant, and Chiang 2003).

The Internet allows hate groups to control their image in terms of how they wish to appear to the public. Groups are able to appear much more respectable, and nearly all are choosing to take this route. Among the sites included in this analysis, overt support of violence (even by violent groups) was seen infrequently, and claims that groups were unbiased, not racist, and not hate groups were made fairly often. Indeed, a great many sites were lacking in overt bigotry, especially on the home page (Gerstenfeld, Grant, and Chiang 2003, 41).

An ostensibly non-offensive and objective site is one of the things that is effective in preparing to use foot-in-the-door and low-ball technique. The first step is to make the site friendlier and apparently closer to people's mainstream views. Doing so will make the ideas presented more likely to be considered, as they are perceived as being closer to people's self-perception.

Another way hate groups take advantage of the Internet is by linking up with one another in networks. This allows smaller groups to take advantage of a large group's popularity by being linked to its site. In addition, sharing information between groups has become much easier (Gerstenfeld, Grant, and Chiang 2003).

Burris, Smith, and Strahm (2000) looked extensively at the white supremacist network through the Internet. They were looking for connections between the white supremacists and groups or people on the fringes of the mainstream. For example, they looked for ties to right-wing Republicans like Pat Buchanan, and right-wing Christians such as Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson, and the Christian Coalition. They further looked for ties to militias which, while extremist, tend to be more paramilitary, and focus more on gun ownership and resistance to governmental encroachment. The other relevant aspects they examined were the attempts made to unify the movement as a whole, and how hate groups attempt to recruit members through the way they structure their sites (Burris, Smith, and Strahm 2000).

In their findings, Burris et al. (2000) identified the most central sites in the white supremacist movement as being the ones that had the most links leading to them. Those sites were Stormfront, one of the oldest and the largest white supremacist sites on the Internet; Zundelsite, a Holocaust denial site; Resistance Records, a white power music production company; and the National Alliance, a Neo-Nazi group that owns Resistance Records.

This brings up one of the problems with the study. The researchers divide the white supremacist movement into subgroups. As a result, they make overgeneralizations, such as saying that Stormfront is a Klan site (Burris et al. 2000). Stormfront was started by a Klan member but is not a site that is representative of the KKK. In addition, in creating the subgroups, the researchers divide up different branches of certain groups. The most notable is treating the music arm of the National Alliance, Resistance Records, as a separate group representing skinheads. The study stated that the only affiliation was a web link, whereas in reality Resistance Records is a music label that is owned by the National Alliance.

The other findings they produced were that there were almost no links to the Christian right, or right-wing Republicans. More surprisingly, though, there were “almost no links in either direction between white supremacist sites and militia sites” (Burris, Smith, and Strahm 2000, 229). Furthermore, they found that white supremacism is a decentralized movement. They argue that supremacists do not share enough unifying ideals to start a centralized movement. One of the interesting ways the Internet is used for recruitment is through soft-core sites that are fronts for other more extreme sites (Burris, Smith, and Strahm 2000). This would be an example of the theory of foot-in-the-door and low-ball techniques.

It can be speculated that the lack of connection between hate groups and those on the edge of the mainstream results from the desire of the latter to remain reputable. Having ties to hate groups would have serious repercussions on perceptions of their legitimacy. However, the supporters of these groups would likely be the ones who experience less cognitive disso-

nance when presented with the hate group's compliance techniques on the site, because they already have similar beliefs on some issues.

McDonald (1999) has done the study most closely related to the present one. In her analysis of websites she found that foot-in-the-door technique was commonly used. "A review of hate groups on the Web reveals a variety of foot-in-the-door techniques used to gain the attention of browsers. [There are] warnings, disclaimers, objectives/purposes, social approaches, and more sophisticated counter-argument strategies" (p. 150). On the thirty sites examined, she found that stating the site's objective was the most common use of foot-in-the-door technique, with 37% of the sites using it. Behind that, 25% used the counter-argument strategy, in which the site defended its position (McDonald 1999).

This article was very useful in determining how to formulate the hypothesis, both in terms of what to look for and what to exclude. One of the things done differently in this study is that warnings and disclaimers will not be included, as both make a site appear more extreme. There is the possibility that having a warning at the entrance to a website would be a way of using the pique technique, but that is not applicable when trying to change a person's self-perception in the necessary manner. The counter-argument strategy and the objectives, providing that they are stated in a neutral or favorable way, would be what the present study considers low-ball technique. Groups want to recruit members to make their group stronger and more powerful.

Blazak (2001) found that skinheads go to great lengths to try to recruit disenfranchised kids, who will be drawn to their guise of sticking up for the little guy. The most common method of recruitment among these white supremacists is distribution of flyers (Blazak 2001). This form of recruitment is much more active, because youth are able to congregate with whom they choose more often than are adults, which facilitates persuasion.

The importance of Blazak's (2001) article is that it shows what types of people are recruited by hate groups. This is likened to the people hate groups are trying to convert online. These are people who are disenfranchised from the mainstream culture and who have low self-esteem. The low self-esteem or similar values can be caused by anomie. Anomie comes from the society and can result in the formation of subcultures. These subcultures arise in response to the frustration resulting from the members' inability to reach a certain cultural status (Cohen 1955; Cloward and Ohlin 1960). In this case, people would feel as if they were disenfranchised from mainstream culture for a variety of reasons; an example would be feeling threatened by affirmative action. People who feel frustrated, alone, or oppressed can develop a hostile attitude toward what they deem to be the root of their frustration (Cohen 1955). It is thought that the sites will direct

their propaganda to play into subculture theory, because subculture theory can explain why hate groups persist.

The purpose of this study is not to see why people join hate groups; rather, it is to see how the sites try to recruit them. Thus, it is important to formulate a background for the possible reasons people would join, since their motivation could be used as a tool by those setting up these websites. This study will not be examining the extent to which sites try to use subculture theory; it will only be looking to see if it is at all present on the sites.

What has not been done before, and what this study provides, is an in-depth examination of specific sites. It is necessary to look at white supremacy on a micro scale because there are great variations within the movement, as previous studies have shown. Thus, to categorize the movement on a broad scale would be to miss details of specific groups or sites that may be important. This study's examination of the four websites provides detailed documentation of what is on the sites, which distinguishes it from previous studies. This study sheds light on how individual groups are using the Internet. This matters because examining the groups on an individual level serves to shed light on specific tactics used by groups, and further research can pinpoint the methods that are effective in recruitment.

### III. DATA AND METHODS

The goal of this study is to look at how white supremacist groups try to bolster membership by using the Internet.

A white supremacist website will be defined as a website on the Internet that is dedicated to the advancement of the white race in a manner which places whites above all other people.

It is believed that these websites will use primarily foot-in-the-door technique to appeal to people. This study will examine groups that are representative of larger movements of the Neo-Nazis, Christian Identity, and the Ku Klux Klan, and one site that is unaffiliated with any specific group. The groups that were chosen are the most well known and largest groups within the movements.

For the purposes of this study, white supremacist groups were assessed in terms of categories, as has been done in previous studies. However, we believe that the characteristics chosen to define these groups through this method of categorization might be misleading. The categorization is nevertheless useful when choosing groups because it helps to identify groups or websites that represent different factions of the movement. In this case groups were chosen because they were the one of the largest groups within a particular movement. This effort differs from previous studies in that the sites that are chosen are the home sites of particular groups, not sites that

are dedicated to one area, such as a record publishing site. This is an important difference because the study is looking at the group itself and not only at one part of it. This is a study of how groups use the Internet rather than a study of websites. The obvious exception is the website of Stormfront; this site was included because it was the largest white supremacist Internet site, and could serve as a gateway to entry to the white supremacist movement.

The National Alliance is the largest Neo-Nazi group in the U.S., despite the death of its leader and founder, William Pierce, in 2002. The West Virginia-based group was founded in the 1970s and since then has grown a great deal, thanks to Pierce. Erich Gliebe took over as the head of the NA after Pierce's death. The group uses several mediums in addition to the Internet, including radio, flyers, video games, magazines, and newsletters (ADL 2005) (Since this study was done the National Alliance has struggled with a great deal of internal turmoil. They have now split into two groups, with some of the members belonging to the National Vanguard. Erich Gliebe is no longer the leader of the NA; that job was taken over by Shaun Walker. Gliebe is currently the head of Resistance Records [ADL 2006]). One of the main focuses of the National Alliance is recruiting: "To attract new followers, NA leaders and members have used billboards, hung organizational banners in prominent locations, rented booths at gun shows, posted their propaganda materials on public property and distributed NA literature in suburban neighborhoods and on college campuses" (ADL 2005). In addition, the National Alliance owns Resistance Records, a label for white power music meant to attract younger people. It also publishes Pierce's books, the *Turner Diaries* and another book called *Hunter*, which details a race war. These measures have influenced a number of terrorist acts and hate crimes. All of these efforts toward recruitment are intended to get NA members' foot in the door so that they can attract a greater number of people. The National Alliance takes a much less direct approach when it comes to letting people know they are out there. Thus we surmise that the group is more concerned with recruitment and indoctrination than they are with spreading a hateful message.

The Aryan Nations was chosen for this study because, while it has ties to Neo-Nazis, it is one of the largest and most visible representations of the Christian Identity movement. The Christian Identity Church is based on the presupposition that Aryans are God's chosen people and Jews are the offspring of Satan. The Aryan Nations was established in the mid-1970s by Richard Butler, and since then it has grown under his leadership. At the time of Butler's death in 2004, the group was bankrupt as a result of a Southern Poverty Law Center lawsuit against it; currently the group is run by August Kreis, who has led it into disarray (SPLC 2005). The mediums for recruitment used by this group are Internet websites, posters, videos,

chat rooms, conferences, and online bulletin boards (ADL 2005). Its members can also be linked to numerous hate crimes and terrorist acts that have occurred since the 1970s.

The Ku Klux Klan is a group that is fragmented into many various factions. In general, its members all share the same beliefs and ideologies. Their basic goal since the group's genesis in 1866 has been to lash out at minority groups who they feel are responsible for any change in lifestyle or hardship they experience (ADL 2005). Today their focus appears (at least to the outside observer) to be inward, on such things as taking pride in their heritage. They have also made an effort to clean up their image in order to mainstream the organization (ADL 2005). This study will examine the Imperial Klans of America, chosen because they are the largest single group within the KKK. The mediums they use to reach people are leaflets, mass mailings, the Internet, and rallies. All of these rely on compliance techniques; however, this study is concerned only with those used on the Internet. Most of these techniques would not be effective in changing a person's self-perception, and therefore are not effective methods of recruitment. They are used simply to let the public know that the Klan is out there.

Stormfront.org is the largest white supremacist site on the Internet. Don Black is the founder and operator of the website. It has numerous links to sites all across the world (ADL 2005). It can most accurately be described as a forum, but what makes Stormfront unique is that it is very inclusive of all other white supremacist sites. It was chosen for the very fact that it is by far the largest white supremacist site on the Internet.

The reason for not including skinheads in this study is that they are primarily focused on recruiting on a micro level, as was evident in Blazak's (2001) study, rather than on the macro level like the other groups. As a consequence, their sites are not as easily found as those of the other groups. Also, they have no intention or motivation to try to recruit anyone but other youth. They therefore will not use the methods of recruitment other groups use on their sites.

Content analysis will be used to determine the extent of foot-in-the-door techniques used on the websites. A content analysis is a systematic analysis of a form of communication (Champion 2000). This content analysis will consist of searching the sites and identifying instances in which foot-in-the-door technique and low-ball technique have been used. In this study, foot-in-the-door technique will be somewhat modified from its social psychological definition. Rather than meaning asking people to perform a task or overtly comply with something, it will refer to aspects of the site that hide or "dumb down" the group's true message. That is why it is intertwined with low-ball technique. The principle remains the same, however, because dumbing down a message to make it seem less extreme is like

making the initial small request. If a person agrees to something that is less extreme, he will be more likely to then accept something that is more extreme as a result of familiarity. In the same way, a person will be more likely to comply with a larger request if he has already agreed to a smaller request.

The criteria for foot-in-the-door and low-ball techniques will be broadly defined in terms of whether they are used to make site's message appear less extreme. The criteria will include links to sites such as the League of the South or Holocaust denial sites that appear scholarly, but in reality can be a first step toward indoctrinating people with extremist beliefs. These links will be counted because they concur with the message of the group, but they have people with Ph.D.s backing the assertions up. Related to that, any attempt to clean up a group's reputation, whether it has a .org address or a plea to be understood, will be considered foot-in-the-door or low-ball technique.

Persuasive techniques will also be considered to be used if the site has pages explaining the group's beliefs and backing them up. Another criterion is that in order to be counted, an element has to be a permanent part of the site; therefore postings by members will not be counted. However, the forum topics as a heading will be counted, as long as they would potentially appeal to members of mainstream society. Parts of the website that are meant for a specific segment of the population, such as women or children, will also be included. Each instance of foot-in-the-door and low-ball technique used will be coded as "1." Then the results will be tallied to determine on which of the sites it is most prevalent. It is impossible to judge what would be more persuasive to people, so different values will not be attached to certain uses of a technique. In addition to looking at ways in which sites try to recruit people, this study will try to identify overtly racist and offensive parts of the sites. It is necessary to examine what is offensive because offensive parts will negate attempts to recruit people from the mainstream. A ratio between the persuasive techniques and offensive parts will give a good general idea of the overall welcoming feel of the site and the group's dedication to recruitment on the Internet (Champion 2000).

It is believed that all of the sites will have some instances of foot-in-the-door and low-ball techniques. This will be partly due to the broad operational definition of the techniques. It will also be due to the fact that the Internet is a valuable resource to use in recruiting, and that groups would want to take advantage of that. It is further thought that, because the sites are part of the white supremacist movement, which by definition is offensive and racist, all of the sites will have some parts that are overtly offensive and racist.

It is hypothesized that the National Alliance will have the largest ratio

of foot-in-the-door and low-ball technique to overtly racist portions. This is because this group is known to target a more educated and middle class demographic (ADL 2005), who would not respond as well to offensive material. Behind the National Alliance will be Stormfront. This is hypothesized because they are a site for all types of people within the white supremacist movement; therefore they will be less likely to have overtly offensive material against a certain type of people. Rather, they will likely have unifying themes, such as their motto: "White Pride World Wide."

Next will be the Imperial Klans of America. This is because the Klan has a history of terror and violence. Despite its attempts to soften its image, terrorization was the reason the group was founded. Last is expected to be the Aryan Nations. They are anticipated to have fewer persuasive techniques and more overtly offensive parts than the other groups, because the Christian Identity theology is itself overtly offensive and racist. That is not to say that all white supremacist beliefs are not offensive and racist. It is rather to say that because their theology states that the Jews are the offspring of Satan, it will be hard to disguise their organization as mainstream. Finally, we hypothesize that all sites will use subculture theory in their propaganda to some extent, because the trend of late has been to focus on creating solidarity among whites (ADL 2005).

#### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The findings of this study were for the most part what was expected. The sites appear to be used largely as recruiting tools. There were many examples of foot-in-the-door technique and low-ball technique. Stormfront had the most instances of the techniques with 154; next was the National Alliance with 76; then came the Imperial Klans of America with 72; and last was the Aryan Nations with 40 instances. When contrasted with examples of overtly racist or offensive parts of the site, it was found that the overwhelming majority of the content for three of the sites paints their parent group in a positive light. Stormfront had only 2 examples of overtly racist or offensive material, the Imperial Klans of America 3, and the National Alliance 0. What was unexpected was the open virulence of the Aryan Nations, who had 20 overtly racist and offensive portions on their site. The quantity of racist and offensive portions of the site is important to note because even a few instances of a site's overtly stating its message have a strong impact on the viewer. Such directness serves to negate many of the efforts of the sites to appear mainstream and reasonable.

There are many differences and similarities that were found between the sites. The National Alliance separated itself from the other sites by its complete lack of overtly offensive areas on its website. That is not to say

that there is nothing offensive about the message of the site; however, to a person with little or no knowledge of white supremacy looking at the site, it might not immediately appear offensive and racist. The site lacked any racial epithets; instead, it explained why the group holds its beliefs and cites evidence to support those beliefs. The absence of overt hostility makes it impossible to place the site in a ratio. It appears to be appealing most to a better-educated, middle-class demographic. Evidence for this assertion can be gleaned from a section in which the group profiles those involved in the National Alliance. In the profile section two middle-class housewives explain why they wanted to join. The National Alliance owns a rather extensive publishing company, Vanguard books. There are 600 books available through the site, many of which appear to be unaffiliated with the white supremacy movement. Both of these are examples of foot-in-the-door technique, but the member profile is also an example of subculture theory being used. It is interesting that two women are profiled. The choice of female profiles shows whom the group is trying to target: people who would not normally be associated with an extremist group. Another telling fact was that there was no link to the group's music label, Resistance Records. The absence of the link has changed since December of 2003 (Scoggins 2003). The missing link is further evidence that the group is targeting exclusively an older, more educated generation. The same is true of their radio show, which appeals to people who would have the time and desire to listen to such things during the day. It is clear from this study that the National Alliance is the group in the study that is most heavily focused on trying to appear mainstream.

The Imperial Klans of America and Stormfront have very similar approaches when it comes to attracting people. As was stated earlier, the overtly racist and offensive parts of the site have a huge impact. So even though there is a large discrepancy between the ratios, it does not appear that great when visiting the sites. Stormfront has a ratio of 77:1, the IKA a ratio of 24:1. Stormfront covers all of the demographics. It has discussion forums for teens and for women, as well as an entire kids' site.

Among the more notable parts of the site is the section for the scholarship essay competition. An essay is a small request, yet the power to change someone's self-perception through getting him to agree to write one is a huge step in indoctrinating young minds. Using this same principle, the kids' page attached to the site suggests that any students having to do a report on Martin Luther King would do well to use the resource of martinlutherking.org. This is a site that appears legitimate, but makes Martin Luther King out to be a villain and hate-monger. It is also noteworthy that the kids' page has a large collection of writings explaining the history of the white race. Stormfront makes great use of low-ball technique. The site goes

to extreme lengths to explain the group's views and the problems caused by minorities. This low-ball technique accounts for 111 of the 154 instances of efforts to recruit used on this site.

Stormfront has a variety of areas that are dedicated to all age groups and genders. Furthermore, there are discussion forums for all sorts of different interests. There are forums for health and fitness, homemaking, business, poetry, theology, and personal ads, just to name a few. It is a very inclusive site with respect to white supremacists.

It was somewhat surprising that a site unaffiliated with any particular groups would have so much of its content tailored to prospective members. This suggests that Don Black, the site's creator, is more concerned with changing people's beliefs than with having them take any sort of action, such as joining a particular group or committing a certain act. This orientation is similar to that of the IKA.

The Imperial Klans of America have made a distinct effort to separate themselves from their menacing past. This was evident from the disclaimer on the site, which stated that the group does not condone any acts of violence whatsoever. This claim is ironic because historically the Klans are the oldest and most violent group. The reason for the disclaimer is to protect the group from legal liability if a person was to commit a hate crime based on the information on their site. The disclaimer also serves a secondary purpose: to give the impression that the IKA is nonviolent. Like Stormfront, they have a broad discussion forum, though it is somewhat smaller. They have a selection of specific forums to choose from, such as homemaking, Bible studies, education and home schooling, and unrevised history, to name a few. These categories are evidence that they are trying to appeal to women as well. This site had no specific section for young kids, but promoted Nordic Fest, a White Power music festival that would appeal to teens in general.

In keeping with tradition, their primary enemies were blacks. They have a very long section entitled "Black Hate Crimes Against Whites," in which they explain how the crime statistics people see are skewed toward favoring blacks. The different points made here accounted for 19 different examples of the efforts to recruit. Nothing was overtly racist; rather, it was made to look well-researched and scholarly. As one example, on the part entitled "Martin Luther King, The Truth," which tells about the torture of whites in South Africa at the hands of blacks, there is a toll-free hotline at the bottom of the page. Its mere presence made the group appear to be a reputable organization.

While much of the site was professionally done and much of the work appeared scholarly, there were some blatantly racist and offensive images. There were pictures up from a recent cross "lighting" the group had held.

There were also advertisements for Nordic Fest, the annual White Power music festival sponsored by the IKA. By far the most offensive material on the site was the printable flyers. These flyers could not possibly be intended for anything other than shock value and for threatening minorities. It is clearly this group's goal to have people distribute the flyers in order to harass the groups depicted in them. Often they depicted minorities in a dehumanizing fashion, as ready to prey on whites.

The Aryan Nations was the black sheep of the sites studied, with a ratio of 2:1. Half of their 40 instances of foot-in-the-door or low-ball technique were different writings explaining the national socialist movement. The rest were simple things like links to contact them and the implication of a nonprofit .org URL. There were very few efforts to appeal to a broader range of people. It should be noted that several of the links that would likely have led to parts of the site that could have been coded as attempts to recruit did not work. The faulty links are most likely a result of the internal disarray that plagues the group. Consequently they are probably not devoting much time or effort to the upkeep of the website.

What made this site stand out were the graphics and ominous messages all over it. Probably the most ominous were the cries that there must be a holy war against the Jews. The Jews were the main target of most of the propaganda on the site. It was evident from all of this that the main purpose of the site was not to recruit people from the mainstream of society.

The site is largely dedicated to the group's new message that a racial holy war is necessary. It preaches that the world's problems will not be solved until such a war takes place. The group even goes so far as to suggest that there should be a union between Islamic terrorists and the Aryan Nations because both are fighting a Jihad. This is by far the most extreme of the sites. The message is not disguised or understated in any way. The site stops just short of advocating specific actions against specific people or groups. There were also no sections of the site that were tailored to kids or women specifically, as there were on the other sites. It can be deduced from the site that the Aryan Nations is not trying to recruit disenfranchised members of society, or any other people who have right-wing yet mainstream values. If there is any point to this site, it is to push those already involved with the movement even further. This was a goal of the other sites as well, but the others were much more welcoming to new people. All of the offensive parts of the website serve to negate any instances of low-ball and foot-in-the-door technique that could be effective recruiting tools.

Finally, all of the sites tailored their propaganda to fit with the way subculture theory works. They all gave reasons for the necessity of whites being united and taking a stand against minorities. This is not surprising though. It is the reason that these types of groups persist today. It is a reality

that people will respond to this kind of deviance in the foreseeable future. How many actually do will be dependent on how effective the groups are at recruiting.

The social psychological theories do a good job of explaining how the sites function. Both were used extensively on all of the sites. One of the possible drawbacks of this study is that both theories are rather one-dimensional. This study did not uncover anything that might indicate more complicated persuasion tactics at work. The only way to test such tactics would be to determine whether they paralleled a persuasion technique exactly, and none of the sites exhibited anything that would fit a different technique. Simpler techniques can be molded to different contexts as long as the same principles are at work. This question is most pertinent to the Aryan Nations. There is the possibility that this group might be relying on a less obvious technique, such as desensitization. However, desensitization is not linked to a change in self-perception. This possibility also has to be weighed against the fact that these groups are generally not organized well enough to come up with something like that.

The conclusions of this study are that recruitment from the mainstream of society using the Internet appears to be a main goal of three of the four sites. That recruitment relies almost completely on foot-in-the-door and low-ball techniques tailored to fit with subculture theory. There is a clear effort by three of the sites to try to appear more mainstream.

What became evident in this study is that breaking groups up into larger movements is somewhat antiquated. The Aryan Nations, who were supposed to be representing the Christian Identity Movement, had a large section of literature on the National Socialist movement. It was even larger than that of the group representing the Neo-Nazis. The IKA had a larger section on Christian Identity literature than did the Aryan Nations. The sites also do not appear to be competing for members, in that they are not taking members away from other sites. It seems that they would have no problem with people being members of more than one site; however, it is unclear how many people might have multiple memberships. Some of the sites are linked directly, but all are linked through lists of other sites. This fact would seem to contradict Burris, Smith, and Strahm (2000), who noted that the movement was relatively decentralized. What needs to be taken into consideration here is that the Burris, Smith, and Strahm (2000) study examined a lot more sites. In addition, the sites in this current study are larger and therefore more likely to have links. The other reason for the conclusion that these organizations are not competing for members is that there were no instances of the websites criticizing each other.

This study can lead to several follow-up studies; the most obvious would take a look at which of the sites is most effective in recruiting.

Another study could examine how people would rate the sites in terms of persuasiveness. It could also include a longitudinal study that examines groups and site membership over a period of time. Also important would be a comparison of white supremacist sites with other deviant sites that attempt to alter self-perception. Another consideration is the fact that the evidence collected in the studies of white supremacist groups on the Internet can become outdated and obsolete very quickly, due to both the transitory nature of the Internet and the instability of the white supremacist movement. The white supremacist movement is very volatile; lawsuits, deaths of leaders, and internal feuding lead to frequent changes within the movement as a whole. One last unanswered question concerns the intentions of the Aryan Nations. The motivation behind their shift is unclear at this time; however, they are moving in a direction opposite of that chosen by most of the hate websites. It will be interesting to see what happens in the coming months with their organization.

This study has been a preliminary study of the content of four white supremacist websites. Ideally it will be a launching platform for more encompassing studies of how white supremacists use the Internet. It is hoped that it will also be a basis for studies that can determine exactly how effective the Internet is for recruitment and other purposes.

The trend that has emerged in this study of major websites is that they are continuing to move toward the mainstream, at least in appearance. It is important to study this topic now more than ever, because the sites' push for reeducation is already one of their main goals. In a decade or so, no one will be alive who lived through and remembers the Holocaust. In another generation, no one will remember what the civil rights struggle was like. When this time comes, it will be harder to deny the claims these groups make. Their notions will be recorded in the same fashion as accurate historical information has been, making it possible for it to seep into mainstream society without its legitimacy being questioned. The best way to combat messages of hate is through education. Educating people about the principles and beliefs of these groups, the persuasive techniques they use, and the harm their views and subsequent actions can cause, is imperative.

## APPENDIX

	FITD or LBT	Overtly Racist/Offensive	Ratio
Stormfront	154	2	77:1
IKA	72	3	24:1
Aryan National	40	20	2:1
National Alliance	76	0	NA

FITD = Foot-in-the door; LBT = Low-Ball Technique

Overtly Racist: Swastikas, other images associated with racism, as well as racial epithets and/or slurs.

Offensive: Cross burning, for example. Burning a cross is not in and of itself racist, but the mere display of it (due to its associated meaning) would shock and offend most people. These codings are subtler, so they were tallied only when the meaning was clear.

For Tables Below:

Every dash indicates one instance, unless followed by a number; then it is the value of the number.

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Stormfront ([www.stormfront.org](http://www.stormfront.org))

Visited: April 3rd, 2005 at 6:30 pm

- .org url

Discussion Forum- people post everything

- Essay Contest/Scholarship Contest
- Poetry
- Culture and Customs
- Theology
- Quotes
- Revisionism of History
- Science Technology and Race
- Business
- Self-defense
- Health and Fitness
- Homemaking
- Education and Home-Schooling
- Youth (White Nationalist issues and teens)
- Music and Entertainment
- Lounge (informal postings)
- General Questions and Comments (open to guests)
- Opposing Viewpoints
- The Truth about Martin Luther King
- White Singles Talk (meeting other White Nationalists)
- Dating Advice

-Explanation of how racism is blown out of proportion, entitled "What is Racism"

-Scholarship Competition

- Essay #1
- Essay #2
- Essay #3

-"Who Rules America?" (from National Alliance website)

- "Molding American Minds"
- Electronic News and Entertainment Media
- "The Print Media"
- "Three Jewish News Papers"
- News Magazines
- "Our Responsibility"

Text Library

- 5 "White Nationalist Issues" - articles dealing with White Nationalist philosophy
- 20 "Affirmative Action" - anti-white bias documentation of pervasive racial discrimination in America against white people
- 3 "Immigration in America" - Third world immigration and America's melting point melt down.
- 2 "Racial Differences" - Nature vs. Nurture- evidence of the heritability of racial differences
- 9 "Revisionism"
- 3 "National Socialism"
- 7 "Zionism and Judaism"

Women's Page

- about me
- about hate
- 45, writings by Edgar Steele
- 18, writings by men and women in the White Pride Movement
- Kosher symbols and consumer goods

Kids' Page

- MartinLutherKing.org
- March of the Titans- A History of the White Race
- Music
- 5 non-racial things (i.e. games, optical illusions, flags of Europe)

Overtly Racist

- Picture of P. Wolfowitz
  - Graphics
  - White Pride World Wide
-

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Imperial Klans of America (*www.k-k-k.com*)

Visited: April 4, 2005 at 4:00 pm

Community Forums

- Homemaking
- Education and Home-Schooling
- Youth Corner
- Music and Entertainment
- Racial Identity Studies
- Bible Studies
- Unrevised History
- Community Lounge
- Opposing Views (open to guests)
  
- Martin Luther King, the truth
  
- 20 Reasons to Join or Support the IKA
  
- 19, Black Hate Crimes Against Whites, 39 Stories
  
- 17, Christian Identity Literature
  
- 15. IKA Educational Publication
  
- Introduction to the Site
  
- Statement Denouncing Illegal Activities
  
- Why the KKK?
  - What Klan stands for
  - Klan symbols
  
- White Rider Records
  
- About the Klan
  
- Contact Link
  
- Toll Free Hotline
  
- Aryan Torture (in South Africa)
  
- Claim 1 million hits a week

Overtly Racist/Offensive

- Leaflets
  - Pictures Cross Lighting
  - Nordic Festival of Flyers
-

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Aryan Nations (aryannations.org)

Visited: April 5, 2005 at 6:40 p.m.

(Had technical problems, links don't work)

- .org url

- About Us

Ability to Contact

- forums

- welcome guests

- questions and answers and suggestions

- 4, Intelligent Discussion

- 2, Religion

- 2, MSL1

- 9, Literature

-Explanation of the Shield

- 20, National Social Movement Explanation

Overtly Racist/Offensive

- 4, Aryan Jihad

- 16, leaflets

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National Alliance ([www.natvan.com](http://www.natvan.com))

Visited: April 4th, 2005 at 6:40 p.m.

- National Vanguard Books (racist and non-racist books), 600 books and audio cassettes

- Yellow Ribbon Campaign Leaflets

- What is the National Alliance?

- 4, General Principles

- 5, Goals

- Program

- Activities

- History of NA

- Why You Should Join

-Documentary by Pierce

-Who is the National Alliance, Profile of Members

- 7, Who Rules America?

- 30, National Vanguard Magazine

- William Pierce Biography

- American Dissident Voices Broadcasts

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