

SPINNING THE WEB OF HATE: WEB-BASED HATE PROPAGATION BY EXTREMIST ORGANIZATIONS*

by

Joseph A. Schafer
Southern Illinois University at Carbondale

ABSTRACT

Professed and suspected members of hate organizations have been involved in a number of highly publicized violent episodes in recent years. It has been suggested that there are connections between web sites operated by extremist organizations and select episodes of violence (including the Littleton, Colorado, school shooting and Benjamin Smith's 1999 Independence weekend Midwest shooting spree). The proliferation of the internet in the lives of the American public raises new possibilities for this medium's use by groups and individuals preaching hate and intolerance. This exploratory study examines the web sites operated by a sample of recognized extremist organizations to better understand how the internet is used to transmit ideologies and facilitate communication. Issues explored include the types of resources extremist sites made available to general users, categories of information provided to users, methods of communicating within the group, and mechanisms used to appeal to specific audiences.

INTRODUCTION

In early 1995, the internet was becoming prevalent in millions of American homes. The "worldwide web" offered the public a means to communicate, find information, meet new people, conduct business, and seek entertainment. As the internet was beginning to become a staple in the lives of the average American, Donald Black, a Florida computer consultant, launched *Stormfront* (www.stormfront.org), generally regarded as the first extremist hate site on the World Wide Web (Anti-Defamation League, 1996; Kaplan & Weinberg, 1998). In the subsequent years, Black has made *Stormfront* one of the most prominent extremist sites on the internet. Users may access an extensive library of essays and speeches by some of the most prominent actors in ideologically extreme right-wing and racial separatist groups, post messages on various discussion boards, subscribe to electronic mailing lists, and use chat rooms to communicate with others in "real time."

Although Donald Black was a pioneer in his use of the internet, American extremist organizations have been using computers and computer networks since the early 1980s (Marks, 1996). Under the guidance of Louis Beam, a prominent leader of the radical right, the racialist movement in America began to advance "from the age of the Xerox to the computer age" (Kaplan & Weinberg, 1998: 160). In the pre-internet years of the mid- and late-1980's, several extremist groups made use of computer "bulletin board" systems to facilitate communication among members (Coates, 1995), although it is unclear to what extent such systems were actually utilized by followers.¹ Extremist groups found these systems especially appealing because they

were efficient, cost effective, and lacked any substantial police and/or governmental oversight (Dobratz & Shanks-Meile, 1997).

Stormfront represents the pinnacle application of the internet as a means to preach hate and extremist ideologies to the general public. Donald Black has defined the genre of using web-based mediums to propagate separatist messages. As the internet has transformed how families communicate, how businesses operate, how consumers shop, and how students learn, it has also offered new modes of recruitment, retention and communication to groups with extreme views on a variety of issues. Leaders of ideologically extreme organizations were quick to perceive that the internet may be a useful tool to enhance and expand their operations. In a 1998 appearance on ABC's *Nightline*, Black explained that his internet site had allowed him to "recruit people" who he "otherwise wouldn't have reached" (Anti-Defamation League, 1999: 5). This paper considers how ideologically extreme "hate groups"² use the internet as a tool to spread their message and facilitate communication among members.

HATE IN AMERICA

The United States, like many other nations, has a rich history of hate-related behavior motivated by race, ethnicity, gender, age, and sexual orientation (George & Wilcox, 1996); such views have often been an integral part of our cultural and political identity. Although many of the first European settlers were fleeing religious persecution, these colonists were guilty of making organized efforts to suppress the expansion of other religious beliefs. In some colonies legislation imposed fines on persons found practicing faiths deemed to be unacceptable. Prior to the Civil War, conspiracy theorists suggested that Catholic immigration was an attempt by the Pope to infiltrate and take over America (Ridgeway, 1995). In the wake of abolition, "Jim Crow" laws formalized popular sentiments by creating barriers to equal opportunities for freed slaves. Throughout the late 19th and early 20th centuries, immigration laws denied entry to immigrants leaving many nations. Even in the modern day, despite their many advances, women still lag behind men in terms of social status and job opportunities.

At the dawn of the new millennium, America is progressing in improving tolerance and enhancing appreciation for multiculturalism and diversity. Despite such gains, "although the melting pot is apparently at full boil, assimilation into one national identity is still incomplete" (Bushart, Craig, & Barnes, 1998: x). Advances have been made, yet our society is still struggling to balance national identity and the autonomy of various racial/ethnic, gender, religious, and behavioral groups. Some individuals and organizations believe that efforts to foster tolerance and diversity take place at the expense of certain cultural identities; they are quick to point out perceived contradictions and double standards in policies and programs aimed at integrating and assimilating American society. These persons often adhere to belief systems which conventional society might label controversial, extreme, delusional, or conspiratorial.

The majority of American society has (arguably) advanced beyond the tendency to adhere to overtly hateful and restrictive beliefs. There are, however, some segments which still maintain unconventional belief systems based upon race, ethnicity, gender, and religion. The presence of groups organized primarily for the purpose of furthering extremist ideologies is not a new phenomenon in Western cultures. For centuries, societies have engaged in internal and

external wars, crusades, revolutions and movements. Long before the internet, campaigns were being waged by anti-Masonic, anti-Semitic, anti-Catholic, anti-black, anti-white, anti-labor and anti-communist organizations (to name only a few targets). The targets have remained largely stable, but the “warriors” and their modes of operation are undergoing a transformation. The internet has not changed the fact that our nation contains extremist organizations; what may be changing is the way in which such groups function.

Mirroring conventional social and political organizations found in American society, groups that espouse a hateful or extremist ideology have tended to be male-dominated (Anti-Defamation League, 1996; Blee, 1991; Coates, 1995; Schmaltz, 1999). Women who joined such organizations were viewed as “apolitical in their own right, attached to the racist movement only through the political affiliations of their husbands, boyfriends, or fathers” (Blee, 1996:680). It has only been in recent decades that women have taken a more active role, not only as full members, but also as leaders, in these organizations. As American society becomes more diverse, so, it would seem, have the leaders and followers of organized racialist organizations. It is possible that groups of “angry white males” are being replaced by more heterogeneous, ideologically complex, technologically advanced, market savvy men *and* women from diverse social, political, geographical, and educational backgrounds.

HATE ON THE INTERNET

Traditionally, the impact of extremist groups has been limited by the resources (or lack thereof) they have to spread their message to a wide audience. Groups have used radio (AM or shortwave) or television broadcasts (public access channels) to present their ideological beliefs (Marks, 1996), or used print mediums to educate, inform, enrage and entice (Barkun, 1997; Coates, 1995). These modes of communication are only capable of reaching a limited audience. Radio and television broadcasts are only available to those in a limited range who possess the proper equipment. Printed materials can only be used by a finite number of people over a given period of time.

The internet allows groups greater convenience in spreading their message to the general public and in offering information to members (Bennett, 1995; Dobratz & Shanks-Meile, 1997). Groups may “link” their web sites, enabling users to access resources offered by a variety of individuals and organizations, regardless of geographic restrictions (Kaplan & Weinberg, 1998). Electronic mailing lists automatically send text, audio, or video files to subscribing e-mail addresses, quickly and efficiently reaching users anywhere in the world. Published information that has been achieved on a web site can be accessed at a user’s leisure. New followers may use such archives to quickly learn about a group’s beliefs, values, and tactics. A member of the general public who “surfs” through a web site can hear group leaders proclaim their ideology 24 hours a day, seven days a week.

The difference between these traditional and conventional formats of communication is what Negroponte (1995) refers to as “the difference between atoms and bits” (p. 11). Traditionally, our communicative capacity was limited by our ability to transmit “atoms” of information – for example, using printed media to espouse an ideology or agenda. A given amount of money allowed the production of a limited number of copies (atoms) which could

only be read by a finite number of users at any one time. The internet allows for the transmission of the same information via “bits” – for a set fee a web page can be accessed simultaneously by geometrically greater numbers of users. The end result is that a group is able to disseminate information to a (potentially) larger audience using bits instead of atoms. The internet ameliorates the resource-based and geographic limitations that had restricted the capacity of groups to reach others.

The internet also offers advantages that mesh with the ideologies of many racist extremist organizations. Inherent in the belief systems of many right-wing extremist groups is a distrust of the government and popular media outlets; members tend to feel alienated from popular culture and disenfranchised from the government and legitimate socio-economic opportunities (Aho, 1990; Dobratz & Shanks-Meile, 1997; Freilich, Pichardo-Almanzar, & Rivera, 1999; Kaplan, 1997; Neiwert, 1999). As with members of youth gangs (Shelden, Tracy, & Brown, 2001), members of extremist organizations may turn to these groups as a source of social support. Unlike gangs, which traditionally offer support through face-to-face interactions, the internet allows extremist groups to offer social support, regardless of geographic proximity (Kaplan & Weinberg, 1998). Members can also share information that is outside of the control of either the government or conventional media (Dobratz & Shanks-Meile, 1997), making this mode of communication more secure and appealing in the eyes of group adherents.

An additional advantage of internet technologies is the capacity for groups to manage their image to appear more acceptable to persons in the social and political mainstream (Kaplan & Weinberg, 1998). Ideologies may be disguised or diluted to create a web site that is more palatable to an unknowing user. A student searching for information about Martin Luther King Jr. might unknowingly access a site intended to defame his character and reputation.³ The internet serves as a “bridging mechanism” (Barkun, 1997), offering a segue between racist ideologies (in the case of race-based extremist groups) and more conventional conservative beliefs. Many people initially find extremist ideologies to be incompatible with their own belief systems (Aho, 1990), making them reluctant to immediately embrace the beliefs and tactics of a group. If, however, a person is “hooked” into a group through more mainstream concerns (e.g., taxes, social spending programs, educational systems, etc.), that person may slowly come to embrace other dimensions of the group’s ideology (Barkun, 1997; Neiwert, 1999). Over time, a person accessing a group’s website to learn about a relatively innocuous issue may be hooked into the group and may adopt more extreme beliefs about more controversial issues (Aho, 1990).

METHOD

Perhaps the greatest challenge to successful internet-based research is determining an appropriate population from which to draw a representative sample. By its very nature the internet is amorphous. Its size, dimensions, and composition are dynamic – constantly changing as sites appear, disappear, move and change. While “search engines” catalog the contents of a portion of the internet, it is generally accepted that they omit far more than they include. Thus, it is extremely difficult, if not impossible, to determine the true size of any population of web sites at any one point in time. In the absence of a known population, it is not possible to develop a representative sampling scheme for use in social science research. Consequently, research using web sites as the unit of analysis must often rely on less accurate purposive sampling techniques.

A content analysis of a purposive sample of web sites cataloged online with HateWatch (www.hatewatch.org) was used to generate the data for this study. HateWatch is a “web based not for profit that monitors the growing and evolving threat of hate groups on the Internet.”⁴ The criteria used for defining an organization as a “hate group” by members of the general public, the media, and the academy tend to be vague and inconsistent. HateWatch uses the following definition to determine which materials it will catalogue on its internet site:

an organization or individual that advocates violence against or unreasonable hostility toward those persons or organizations identified by their race, religion, national origin, sexual orientation, gender or disability. Also including organizations or individuals that disseminate historically inaccurate information with regards to these persons or organizations for the purpose of vilification.⁵

In the absence of a more consistent standard, this definition offers an acceptable starting point for delineating and studying extremist organizations on the internet.

A sampling scheme based upon a catalog developed by a “watchdog” group (a group formed to protect a class of persons from discrimination and bias) does raise certain methodological concerns. All watchdog groups have an established agenda and vested interests which they seek to protect. Watchdogs may use vague and inconsistent criteria in determining which groups and individuals they will oppose. In addition to protecting a certain class of citizens, watchdogs also seek to preserve their existence, to garner media attention, and to obtain financial support for their cause (Dobratz & Shanks-Meile, 1997; Kaplan, 1997). Watchdogs may focus more attention on some groups than on others (Dobratz & Shanks-Meile, 1997); the Anti-Defamation League, by its very nature, is more concerned with groups believed to threaten Jewish citizens, showing far less concern for groups threatening Asian-American citizens. Most watchdogs are ideologically opposed to those whom they monitor (Freilich, Pichardo-Almanzar, & Rivera, 1999), thus they may seek to silence their opponents, rather than offering a balanced perspective on an issue (Aho, 1990; Kaplan, 1997).

From a scientific perspective, all of these issues may bias the information which watchdogs develop and color how that information is presented. Using data from watchdog groups for sampling or analysis purposes has potential shortcomings; it is important to understand the watchdog group, its motives and its beliefs in order to weigh these concerns. Unlike many other watchdog groups, HateWatch does not raise many of these methodological concerns. As indicated above, HateWatch has clear and explicit guidelines for defining which types of web sites will be included in its catalog. As a watchdog, HateWatch is not affiliated with any groups organized to protect a select class of citizens. HateWatch is a nonprofit entity which seeks to share information about threatening sources of hate in general. Although its operators may still have agendas and aspirations, the methodological issues that attend the use of watchdog groups for sampling purposes are not points of concern in this study.

The web sites cataloged by HateWatch reflect the dynamic and fluid nature of the internet. The author printed the entire list of links contained in the HateWatch directory on one day. Although HateWatch periodically updates its directory and requests that users notify them of “dead links,” as the sites were accessed and analyzed during the subsequent month, approximately one in six were no longer active. As others have noted, web sites of all types are constantly transformed and modified; it is impossible to identify the exact number of groups or individuals operating web sites that espouse a hateful ideology (McDonald, 1999). It should be noted, however, that the sites found on HateWatch include the most prominent organizations preaching hate in contemporary America.

After removing sites with multiple listings, sites which were clearly subsections of other sites, and cataloged sites which were no longer operational, 132 internet sites were included in the study sample. Given the amorphous nature of the internet, this purposive sample, while limited in terms of generalizability, offers perhaps the best representation of the phenomenon in question. Each site was examined to determine the basic elements it contained, particularly in terms of the types of resources made available, categories of information provided to the user, methods of communicating within the group, and mechanisms used to appeal to specific audiences. The “depth” of web sites is widely variable; some offer a limited amount of information, while others are quite expansive. Pragmatically, the author could not review all of the information included on each site in the study sample. Consequently, this content analysis may actually underestimate the prevalence of some features within this sample of hateful extremist web sites.

The internet and its emerging impact upon global culture influence both this study’s topical focus and methodological approach. Although the internet is fundamentally transforming how Americans work, live, and play, it is unclear how this technology will affect social science research. The issues addressed in this section illuminate a partial list of concerns and limitations that behavioral scientists will have to confront in the near future. The internet offers exciting new methods by which people may learn and interact, but there are few clear rules to define how these processes are best studied.

RESULTS

The study sample consisted of 132 web sites that espoused an extremist and (arguably) hateful ideology. Less than one-tenth (9.1%) of the sample sites provided any form of warning statement on their main page to alert users of the volatile and potentially offensive nature of the site’s contents. Upon accessing the main page for an extremist site, the user would typically find a brief introductory statement detailing the most basic beliefs held by the group. In most cases, the sites would then allow the user to access a variety of additional information, possibly including: More extensive statements of belief; “libraries” of textual, audio, and/or video material; discussion boards and chat rooms; information on contacting the group and, in some cases, local chapters; information on becoming a member; membership application materials; information about subscribing to the organizations publication(s); catalogues of products for sale; internal search engines; and a guest book.

Each study site was examined to determine its contents in three categories: Resources available to the site users; information provided to site users; and techniques used to facilitate communication between group members and site users. Resource available to the site users refers to textual, audio, and video files that users could access to learn more about the organization as well as the origin and nature of its ideological beliefs. The study sites provided users with a myriad of information about memberships, subscriptions, meetings, and activities. The study sites also employed a variety of techniques to facilitate communication between the group and the public, the group and their members, and among group members.

Available Resources

Table One presents the more common resources that the study sites made available to their users. Just over one-fifth (21.2%) of the web sites offered the user access to an archive of the group's primary publication (i.e., magazine, newsletter, etc.). It should be noted that not every hate organization has such a periodic publication; however, it would appear that when such publications exist, it was common for sites to make them available to users. The most commonly observed resources feature (found on 87.9% of the sites) was some form of text library. Such libraries ranged from a few short essays to expansive collections of essays, articles, and on-line books (e.g., complete copies of Hitler's *Mein Kampf* and Henry Ford's *The International Jew*). While most sites tended to be modest, certain sites offered large collections of writings by prominent extremist leaders (e.g., Louis Beam, William Pierce, Richard Butler, Matthew Hale), as well as works prepared by members of their own group.

Libraries of graphics, sections of the site specifically dedicated to cartoons, photos, or other graphic images (files which could be used to create ideological appropriate letterhead or operating system "wallpaper"), were found on over one-fourth (28.0%) of the sites in the study sample. In coding this category, the author was looking for more than just the inclusion of photos or graphics on the web site. "Library" was defined as a section of the site which was dedicated solely to making such images available to users. As computer technologies and communication networks improve, and as the internet continues to develop, it is becoming easier for sites to offer users audio or video files. Approximately one-quarter (21.2%) of the study sites allowed users to download audio files of speeches made by group leaders and members. Video files were less common (observed on 10.6% of the sites). With continual improvements being made in data transmission technologies, it might be expected that transmitting video files will eventually be a more pragmatic option for web site designers.

Information Provided

Table Two presents the types of information provided to site users. The most common information provided to site users was links to other sites, available on nearly three-quarters (72.7%) of the sites. The number of links provided by the sites ranged from a half-dozen to several hundred. The links allowed the site administrator to direct users to other sources of information, e-commerce establishments, and the web sites of groups with similar ideologies. Information on products for sale was the second most common item in this category. Over one-third (36.4%) of the study sites offered information on how users could purchase an assortment of products from the site's proprietor(s). Common items being sold by these groups were books,

leaflets, pamphlets, audio/video cassettes, stickers, hats, and t-shirts. A few sites allowed the user to place an on-line order, while most offered a catalog and information on ordering by mail, telephone, or fax machine.

It is unclear how many of the study sites were organizations with formal members and official periodical publications. A small number of the sites provided users with information on subscribing to the organization's periodical publications (22.0%) or on how to become a member (15.9%). Approximately one in seven sites (12.9%) provided contact information for local chapters, although it is unclear how many of the study sites were actually formal organizations with local chapters. All three of these items may underestimate the prevalence of these items on the sites of groups which actually had publications, offered membership, or were organized into local chapters.

Sites occasionally offered users access to important news items (sometimes with selective interpretations) and current events. Despite frequently being labeled as "news" or "current events," these features were not necessarily up-to-date; it was common for items found in these sections to be outdated by several months. Analogously, calendars announcing "upcoming" events (such as meetings and rallies) were frequently outdated by six to 12 months. For user convenience, one in six (15.9%) sites provided a search engine that would allow one to query the entire site to obtain specific information.

Modes of Communication

The most common modes used to facilitate communication between users and group members are presented in [Table Three](#). The most common mediums for allowing communication were chat rooms and discussion boards. Chat rooms allow users to engage in a live dialog with one or more other users by sending and receiving text messages. Discussion boards enable users to post messages and review the writings of others; postings are arranged by subject so that users can quickly determine whether a message is of interest. Despite being observed on nearly one-fifth (18.2%) of the study sites, it is not clear to what extent these were actually employed by users and members to communicate with one another. Regardless of the number of sites which hosted active chat rooms and discussion boards, a small number of popular sites may provide a sufficiently expansive forum to enable a user to locate and communicate with other like-minded individuals.

Many (17.4%) of the sites provided a "guest book" where users could make entries to voice their opinions and attitudes. While a guest book may not be a mode of communication in a traditional sense, they allowed site users to voice their support or opposition to the site administrator and other users. In addition, 11.4% of the study sites had a section of their web page where they displayed "hate mail" and negative guest book entries. These were often used by groups to reinforce their beliefs and to demonstrate that they were not the "real haters." In a sense, by posting the messages in a special section of their internet site, the groups were viewing them as a badge of honor. A small number of the study sites also (proudly?) proclaimed that they were listed by HateWatch.

Electronic mailing lists were also a common tool for communication. Because individuals and groups may operate such mailing lists at no cost and with little effort, they are a quick, efficient, and easy way for like-minded individuals to share their ideas and beliefs. The existence of such a list does not guarantee that actual messages are sent to subscribing members. Some lists are generally inactive, while others are quite prolific.⁶ These prolific mailing lists may compensate for the lack of productivity among their inactive peers. The World Church of the Creator (WCOTC) and the National Alliance (NA) send out text copies of their weekly addresses via their e-mailing lists. WCOTC also routinely sends out press releases, membership updates, and news articles it views to be salient to its members and their cause.

The use of other modes of communication was relatively rare. In the years before the internet became a prevalent component of American culture, some groups and individuals operated computer bulletin board systems (BBS's) that the public could access. Equipped with a computer and a modem, a user could "dial in" to a host computer to access and post information. Although BBS's are outdated, phone numbers for such systems were still found on a small number of sites. A few groups (such as WCOTC) also made use of recorded messages; users may call a telephone number to hear a weekly update from Matthew Hale, the group's leader. One in twenty study sites provided information about radio or TV broadcasts produced by their organization. Typically, these broadcasts would have very limited audiences. Radio programs were broadcast on short band or AM frequencies, while TV programs were aired on local public access cable channels.

Targeting Women

The role of women in hate-based extremist organizations is undergoing a transformation, as they become increasingly active members and supporters. When the issue was addressed, the study sites commonly portrayed men and women as having equally important (although frequently different) roles in their struggle. The Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, for example, stated that: "We welcome the ideas, input, and suggestions of women. And we welcome your involvement! Lets work together - men and women - to Take Back America!"⁷ A small percent of the study sample had sections of their sites that were dedicated to "women's issues" (2.3%) and a few sites were exclusively aimed at a female audience. Although many of these groups may still see women as serving a secondary (support) function, it was common for sites to present this role as noble and critical in their perceived struggle.

Blee (1996) points out that the factors that motivate participation in hate groups tend to be gender specific. While male activists reflect the belief that society is degenerating at a rapid rate, females often focus on protecting their children. Indeed, this notion would seem to be supported by contrasting the contents of web pages devoted to a female audience. Issues addressed on such pages often revolve around pregnancy, home schooling, and child rearing. Although groups may not always recognize women as equal partners in their ideological struggle, women are frequently portrayed as vital supporters of these racist causes (Blee, 1991; Coates, 1995). To facilitate this supporting role, sites focus on how women may raise children in a manner consistent with the ideologies of these groups. For example, one such site proclaims that: "We are the mothers of the movement. The future of the Aryan race depends on our ability to bear and raise healthy, strong children."⁸

Targeting Youth

Social movement organizations have long recognized the importance of appealing to youth in order to perpetuate their existence. In the 1920s, during the height of its existence, the Ku Klux Klan had a children's auxiliary designed to instill the group's values in youth during their formative years (Blee, 1991). George Lincoln Rockwell, recognizing that the American Nazi Party needed to ensure its future existence by seeking to attract young, energetic members, spoke at colleges across the country. His campus presentations were well attended and, if they did not foster a strong base of support, they appeared to neutralize much of the opposition to his group's ideology (Schmaltz, 1999). Following in Rockwell's footsteps, modern hate-based extremist groups endeavor to attract young members through the internet. Among the sites in the study sample, 4.5% contained subsections that targeted children and young adults. These sites often had colorful images, hate-filled games, and messages aimed at a preteen audience.

Web sites operated by various white supremacist organizations allow users to sample and purchase "white power music." The violent, hateful, and profane lyrics found in such music are set to a heavy metal tune; the music may be a powerful inroad for extremist groups in their quest to attract younger members. Like other forms of music and performance which are outside of the mainstream (e.g., raves), part of the appeal of white power music may be attending live performances and interacting with other fans. The nature of white power music and live performances may appeal to some youth who would not ordinarily be open to a blatantly hateful ideology. Once a youth begins to listen to the music and interact with other fans, however, he or she may slowly be desensitized to racist images and messages, and may be more accepting of the beliefs of extremist organizations. By building a subculture around certain symbols (ways of dressing, phrases, images, etc.) and transmitting these symbols through a medium which appeals to youth (live and recorded heavy metal music performances), some youth may find the beliefs and tactics of extremist groups to be more palatable. In this way, music may serve as a "bridging mechanism" (Barkun, 1997) between youth and extremist organizations and their ideologies.

The sale of white power music is a source of potential profits for sponsoring organizations. The desire to reach a younger audience and raise additional revenues was an impetus behind the National Alliance's decision to purchase Resistance Records in the winter of 1999-2000. Resistance Records boasts a modest collection of titles and a brisk business (Segal, 2000). It specializes in selling white power music via the internet. While older members of racist movements may not personally enjoy this type of music, they recognize it as a valuable tool in replenishing their membership roles and producing additional revenues. In the words of William Pierce, founder of the National Alliance, author of the infamous *The Turner Diaries*, and veteran of the racist movement: "I don't care for the music myself... But if it helps move people in the right direction, I'm for it" (Segal, 2000: C01).

DISCUSSION

Reviewing the web site contents of extremist organizations allows for several key observations to be made about these groups and the role of the internet in their operations. First, extremist organizations use the internet to provide a wide range of information to both their

followers and the general public. Unlike past technologies, which limited the audience a group could reach, internet technologies allow extremists to provide large portions of the American public with access to information about their beliefs, values, and actions.⁹ Although providing such information is no guarantee that groups will experience growths in membership or support, the internet allows them to do so with greater ease and (most likely) at a lower cost. Organizations have the potential to share their message with a wider audience and to operate more effectively as a group.

Second, groups may also have strong financial incentives for establishing a web site, although the internet does not necessarily lead to actual economic gains. More than one-third of the study sites offered products for sale. The sale of these products may have been tied to the group's informational mission; there is a clear information-sharing function linked with selling booklets, books, video tapes, and audio cassettes designed to educate the user. Even other commonly sold products, such as t-shirts and hats, have the potential to inform the public by advertising the existence of the group. It is not clear to what extent groups profited from the sale of these products. It is possible that groups may funnel proceeds back into their operating budget, as it does not appear that most group leaders are profiting from their advocacy (Neiwert, 1999). As previously noted, the sale of products (e.g., white power music) may serve the dual function of spreading a group's message and generating much needed revenue to support continuing operations.

Third, in addition to providing organizations with the opportunity to share information with the public, this research highlights the importance of web sites as tools for communication among group members. One in four (28.0%) of the study sites offered users the opportunity to subscribe to an electronic mailing list and/or participate in an on-line discussion or chat. Such mechanisms are important methods by which groups may facilitate communication between committed members and followers. Discussion boards and chat rooms are of particular relevance, as they allow the committed to engage in two-way dialogue with other adherents. While these tools were only present on a minority (18.2%) of the study sites, they were still prevalent among the study sample. In the past, it was not possible for large numbers of members to engage in an on-going dialogue unless they met face-to-face. The internet allows committed group members to routinely interact with one another to discuss strategies and tactics, to learn more about the group's belief system, and to offer each other general social support. This study had no way of tracking how groups might supplement web-based communication with electronic mail to facilitate group interactions.

An important issue which cannot be resolved via these research findings is the degree to which the internet increases the membership of extremist organizations. Although the internet most likely increases the efficiency of these groups (e.g., faster and more reliable modes of internal communication), it is unclear if the internet is truly a more effective means of recruiting new followers. Kaplan and Weinberg (1998) address this issue, citing anecdotal evidence that suggests that extremist groups using technology (specifically, electronic mail messages sent out *en masse*) to carry out recruitment achieve little success. They argue that the internet does little to actually increase the size of extremist groups, although it may be a powerful tool to increase the allegiance of those who are already committed to radical ideologies.

Furthermore, while the internet has the potential to increase a group's efficiency and efficacy, it may also become a burden. Followers of extremist ideologies may spend too much time creating and maintaining web sites. Followers responsible for web sites may find themselves devoting considerable time to responding to electronic criticisms (via e-mail, guest books, or discussion boards). Critics may also "hack" into a group's site, requiring leaders to devote time and energy to repairing cyber-vandalism. All of these activities may occur at the expense of other actions that support a group's objectives. Viewed in this way, web sites may be both assets and liabilities for extremist groups and their members.

CONCLUSION

This research illustrates the various ways in which extremist organizations may use the internet as a tool to operate, communicate, spread their beliefs, and attract new members. Sites included in the study sample were widely varied in terms of their depth (i.e., number of sub-pages) and breadth (i.e., number of features). All of the sites, however, reflect the potential of the internet to transform the traditional ways in which hate has been expressed in American. Combining these new avenues for recruitment with technological changes in communication mediums may dramatically alter the future face and function of hate and extremism around the world. The extent to which this is actually occurring is not readily evident.

Since Donald Black first launched *Stormfront* in the early days of the internet, groups and individuals wishing to espouse an extremist ideology have been quick to pursue this new avenue of operation. The internet offers users the opportunity to involve themselves in debating and advancing hate-based extremist ideologies with a high degree of anonymity and with considerable convenience. Groups that are actively advancing their agenda may share ideas and resources at any hour of the day, from anywhere in the world, at very little expense. The internet sites included in this study's sample clearly understood and capitalized upon the potential benefits of using the web to further their causes. This is reflected in an electronic message announcing a change in the features offered on the World Church of the Creator's web site. Matthew Hale, the group's leader, proclaimed that: "Once again, Creators are leading the way in expanding Racial Loyalist communication throughout the world."¹⁰

TABLE ONE
RESOURCES MADE AVAILABLE TO SITE USERS[†]

Type of resource	n of sites	% of sites
Archive of primary publication	28	21.2
Text library	116	87.9
Library of graphics	37	28.0
Audio library (speeches)	28	21.2
Video library	14	10.6

[†] On average, each site offered users 1.69 of these resources.

TABLE TWO
INFORMATION PROVIDED TO SITE USERS[†]

Type of resource	n of sites	% of sites
Calendar of upcoming events	15	11.4
Search engine	21	15.9
Membership information	21	15.9
Products for sale	48	36.4
Contact information for local chapters	17	12.9
Information on subscribing to primary publication	29	22.0
News/current events	25	18.9
Links to other sites	96	72.7

[†] On average, each site offered users 2.23 of these information sources.

TABLE THREE
TECHNIQUES SITES USED TO FACILITATE COMMUNICATION AMONG USERS[†]

Type of resource	n of sites	% of sites
Subscription information for online mailing list	19	14.4
Chat room/discussion board	24	18.2
Telephone number for BBS	2	1.5
Telephone number for recorded message	4	3.0
Information on radio/TV broadcast	7	5.3
Guest book	23	17.4
Personal ads	1	0.8

[†] On average, each site used 0.61 of these techniques to communicate.

ENDNOTES

* Direct correspondence to Professor Joseph A. Schafer, Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, Center for the Study of Crime, Delinquency & Corrections, Mailcode 4504, Carbondale, IL 62901-4504 (Email: jschafer@siu.edu). An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 2000 annual meetings of the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences in New Orleans, Louisiana. The author would like to thank Elizabeth Bonello and Todd Bricker for their assistance, as well as the two anonymous reviewers for their helpful input. Professor Schafer's current areas of research include police behavior, police organizations, fear of crime, public perceptions of the police, community policing and extremist ideologies. Dr. Schafer is the author of *Community Policing: The Challenges of Successful Organizational Change* (2001, LFB Scholarly Publishing) and recent research articles appearing in the *Journal of Criminal Justice*, *Justice System Journal*, and *Police Quarterly*.

1. Hamm (1993) found that the overwhelming majority of the skinheads in his purposive study sample had never accessed such systems, relying instead on telephone "hotlines" and printed literature as sources of information.
2. Labeling these organizations as "hate groups," while conventionally acceptable, is not necessarily ideologically accurate. The content of the web sites examined in this study reveals that many of the groups they represent would deny any hatred. They attempt to portray their opponents (be they black or white, Christian or Jew) as "the real haters," while presenting themselves as indifferent toward the welfare of others. They will deny hatred or animosity toward their targets; they simply do not care about the well-being of their opponents. While many sites make efforts to cloak themselves in this more benign neutrality, reading between the lines often reveals hateful, vitriolic, and truculent attitudes. Because of its emotional connotation, the author is reluctant to use the label "hate group," preferring, instead, to use the label "extremist organizations." The label of "hate group" would, however, seem to be an apt characterization of many of the groups considered in this study (based upon their web sites).
3. At first appearance, *Martin Luther King, Jr. - A Historical Examination* [<http://www.martinlutherking.org>] seems innocuous. A closer examination of its content reveals that it is a site aimed at vilifying and maligning King's life and accomplishments. The site was designed by Candidus Productions (which markets its services to those holding racist ideologies) and the webmaster has an e-mail address through Donald Black's *Stormfront*.
4. Quoted from HateWatch [<http://hatewatch.org/faq.html>] (Accessed 2/12/00).
5. *Ibid.*
6. In the course of conducting this research, the author subscribed to online mailing lists whenever this option was available. Of the 15-20 lists which were identified, only four have ever produced mailings.
7. Quoted from the *Knights of the Ku Klux Klan*, [<http://www.kukluxklan.org/women.htm>] (Accessed 12/04/00). This site also notes that David Duke, its former director, was the first Klan leader to allow women to become general members.
8. Quoted from *Mothers of the Movement* [<http://www.sigdrifa.com/motm>] (Accessed 12/04/00).
9. A recent survey estimates that 60 percent of Americans have access to the internet at home or work [<http://www.cnn.com/2001/TECH/internet/02/15/internet.access.reut/index.html/>] (Accessed 02/15/010).
10. From WCOTC's Creativity mailing list; 03/12/00.

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APPENDIX A LIST OF INCLUDED INTERNET SITES

Note: *These sites were accessed in the winter of 2000. Due to the fluid nature of the internet, some sites may be using a different URL or may no longer be available.*

1. 12 Tribes of Israel (www.hodc.com)
2. 14 Word Press (www.14words.com)
3. AAARGH (French Holocaust Denial Site) (www.abbc.com/aaargh/engl/engl.html)
4. Adelaide Institute (www.adelaideinstitute.org)
5. AIDS Cures Fags (members.yoderanium.com/aidscuresfags/)
6. Air Photo Evidence (www.air-photo.com)
7. Alabama White Knight of KKK (www.KuKluxKlan.net)
8. Altar of Unholy Blasphemy (www.anus.com/altar)
9. America's Invisible Empire (KKK) (www.airnet.net/niterider)
10. America's Promise Ministries (www.amprom.org)
11. American Civil Rights Review (webusers.anet-stl.com/~civil/index.html)
12. American Front (www.americanfront.com)
13. American Knights of the KKK (www.americanknights.com)
14. American Nationalist Union (www.anu.org)
15. American Nazi Party (www.americannaziparty.com)
16. Arthur Butz (pubweb.acns.nwu.edu/~abutz/)
17. Aryan Nation (www.christian-aryannations.com)
18. Bayou Knights of the KKK (www.bayouknights.org)
19. Bible Believers (www.biblebelievers.org.au)
20. Blacks and Jews Newspaper (www.blacksandjews.com)
21. Blood and Honour (www.bloodandhonour.com)
22. Bob Enyart Live (www.enyart.com/)
23. British National Party (www.bnp.net/welcome.html)
24. Broadsword (www.hail.to/bnsm/1024broadsword.htm)
25. Canadian Freedom Site (www.freedomsite.org)
26. Carl Klang (www.klang.com)
27. Carlos Whitlock Porter (www.cwporter.co.uk)
28. Children of Yahweh (www.childrenofyahweh.com)
29. Christian Bible Study (www.christianbiblestudy.org)
30. Christian Defense League (home.inreach.com/dov/cdl.htm)
31. Committee for Open Debate on the Holocaust (www.codoh.com)

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32. Covenant Vision Ministry (homepage.idx.com.au/fdowsett)
 33. Crosstar (www.nationalist.org)
 34. David Duke Online (www.duke.org)
 35. Euro-American Student Union (esu.simplenet.com/)
 36. European Foundation for Free Historical Research (www.vho.org/index.html)
 37. Final Conflict (dspace.dial.pipex.com/finalconflict)
 38. First Amendment Exercise Machine (www.faem.com)
 39. Focal Point Publications (www.fpp.co.uk)
 40. German Historical Documents (abbc.com/berlin)
 41. GOAL -- God's Order Affirmed in Love (www.melvig.org)
 42. God Hates Fags (www.godhatesfags.com)
 43. Gospel Broadcasting Association (www.neosoft.com/~preacher)
 44. Hammerskins Nation (www.hammerskins.com)
 45. Hebron Institute for Political and Religious Studies (www.hebron.com)
 46. Heritage Lost Ministries (www.heritagelost.org)
 47. Historical Review Press (www.ety.com/HRP/)
 48. Hoffman's Radical Truth (www.hoffman-info.com)
 49. I Love White Folks (www.ilovewhitefolks.com)
 50. Iahueh's Kingdom (www.iahushua.com)
 51. Imperial Klans of America (<http://www.kkkk.net/>)
 52. Institute for Historical Review (www.ihr.org)
 53. Invisible Empire, National Knights of the KKK (www.neters.com/web/wwf2.shtml)
 54. Jerry's Aryan Battle Page (pw1.netcom.com/~jna/index.html)
 55. Jew Watch (www.jewwatch.com)
 56. Jewish Defense League (www.jdl.org)
 57. Jubilee Newspaper (www.jubilee-newspaper.com)
 58. Kahane (www.kahane.org)
 59. Kingdom Identity Ministries (www.kingidentity.com)
 60. KKK.com (www.kkk.com/)
 61. Knights of the KKK (wpww.com/knights/)
 62. Knights of the KKK (www.kukluxklan.org)
 63. Lord's Work Inc. (www.freespeech.org/thelordswork/)
 64. Malmo Skinheads (malmoeskins.tsx.org/)
 65. Mission to Israel (www.missiontoisrael.com)
 66. Nation of Europe (www.demon.co.uk/natofeur/index.html)
 67. Nation of Islam (www.noi.org)
 68. National Action (www.adelaide.net.au/~national/)
 69. National Alliance (www.natvan.com)
 70. National Association for the Advanced of White People (www.naawp.com)
 71. National Journal (abbc.com/nj/engl.htm)
 72. National Observer (www.whiteracist.com)
 73. National Socialist German Workers Party – American Order (www.nidlink.com/~nsdap)
 74. National Socialist German Workers Party – Australia (www.ns.aus.tm/propoganda/index2.html)
 75. National Socialist Hitler Youth Legion (www.front14.org/ruediger)
 76. National Socialist Movement (www.nsm88.com)
 77. Nations of Gods and Earth (www.nge.org)
 78. New Order (www.theneworder.org)
 79. Niggerwatch (members.yoderanium.com/niggerwatch/)
 80. North Georgia White Knights (members.surfsouth.com/~ngwk/index.html)
 81. Northwest Kinsmen (www.cris.com/~nw/nwk.htm)
 82. Northwest Knights of the KKK (www.concentric.net/~nw/intro.htm)
 83. Official Harold Covington Website (www.harold-covington.org)
 84. Oil Boys (www.execpc.com/~odinthor/)
 85. Open-Bible Ministries (www.1335.com)
 86. Oregon Knights of the KKK (home.cdsnet.net/~wotan/aiframe.htm)

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87. Ostara (www.ostara.org)
 88. Our Legacy of Truth (www4.stormfront.org/posterity)
 89. Ourhero Library (www.ourhero.com)
 90. Patriot (www.patriot.dk/)
 91. Peoples Resistance Movement (holywar.org/)
 92. Politics and Terrorism (www.flinet.com/~politics)
 93. Posse Comitatus (www.posse-comitatus.org)
 94. Preterist Archive (www.preteristarchive.com)
 95. Resistance Records (www.resistance.com)
 96. Revisionism.com (www.revisionism.com)
 97. Right of Israel Online (home.arkansasusa.com/dlackey)
 98. Scriptures for America (www.christianidentity.org)
 99. Seig Heil 88 (www.concentric.net/~seigheil)
 100. Sigdrifa Publications (www.sigdrifa.com/index1.html)
 101. Skinhead Pride (www.skinheadpride.com)
 102. South Mississippi Knights of the KKK (http://www.kukluxklan.net/south_mississippi_knights.htm)
 103. Southern Cross Militant Knights (www.homestead.com/militant/)
 104. Stormfront (www.stormfront.org)
 105. STRAIGHT -- Society to Remove All Immoral Godless Homosexual Trash (www.melvig.org/mel/melvig.htm)
 106. Student Revisionists' Resource Site (www.wsu.edu:8080/~lpauling/index1.html)
 107. Sword of Christ (www0.delphi.com/jcsword)
 108. Tangled Web (www.codoh.com/zionweb/zionweb.html)
 109. The Aryan Militia (www.aryan-militia.com)
 110. The Order (www.14words.com/theorder)
 111. The Spotlight (www.spotlight.org)
 112. The Third Position (dSPACE.dial.pipex.com/third-position/index.html)
 113. Thule Publications (www.thulepublications.com)
 114. Truth at Last (www.stormfront.org/truth_at_last/)
 115. United Confederate Knights (www0.delphi.com/uckkkk)
 116. United Strike (unitedstrike.com/)
 117. United White Klans (expage.com/page/unitedwhiteklans)
 118. Voice of White America (members.aol.com/tsaukki/whiteamr.htm)
 119. Wake Up or Die (www.wakeupordie.com)
 120. WCOTC (<http://209.143.158.42>)
 121. Weisman Publications (www.seek-info.com)
 122. Western Imperative Network (www.usaor.net/users/ipm)
 123. White Aryan Resistance (www.resist.com)
 124. White Camelia Knights of KKK (www.wckkkk.com)
 125. White Nationalist News Agency (nna.stormfront.org/)
 126. White Power Online Magazine (www.whitepower88.de)
 127. Whites Only (www.whitesonly.net)
 128. Willis A. Carto (www.williscarto.com)
 129. Women.WPWW.Com (women.wpww.com/)
 130. World Wide Blasphemy (freedom.gmsociety.org/~god/)
 131. Yagdrasil's Library (www.ddc.net/ygg)
 132. Zundelsite (www.lebensraum.org)