Hate Group Community-Building Online:
A Case Study in the Visual Content of Internet Hate Sites

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The number of U.S.-based hate groups posting their hateful rhetoric online has risen drastically since the first reported U.S.-based "hate site" was posted in 1995. However, relatively little has been written about online hate speech in the communication literature, despite the potentially negative effects that this controversial form of mass-mediated content may have on members of the Internet community, if not society in general. This study extends the communication research literature on hate speech by examining the non-textual (i.e., non-typewritten), visual content posted on a sample of Internet hate sites maintained by organized hate groups residing in the United States. In particular, the study seeks to reveal the various ways in which U.S.-based hate groups may aid their community-building efforts by utilizing the visual communication capabilities that the Internet offers. The population of hate sites was acquired from the Spring 2004 edition of the "Intelligence Report" published by the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), an organization which monitors hate group activity in the United States. The sample included a single representative site from each of the seven "hate website" categories identified by the SPLC: "Ku Klux Klan," "Neo-Nazi," "Racist Skinhead," "Neo-Confederate," "Christian Identity," "Black Separatist," and "Other." The website from the "Other" hate group category was one of the few American hate sites operated by a Jewish group. Analysis was conducted on all hate-group-maintained, publicly-accessible visual content posted on the sampled websites. The study reveals that hate groups are taking full advantage of the visual communication capabilities offered by Internet webpages: motion video, photographic images, computer-generated images, and computer-generated animation. The author concludes the essay by identifying the various ways in which he believes the visual content of the sampled sites may have served an important role in the hate groups' community-building efforts beyond its capacity to grab one's attention.

The number of U.S.-based hate groups posting their hateful rhetoric online has risen drastically since 1995, when former Klansman Don Black posted the first reported U.S.-based "hate site" (Bostdorff, 2004; Southern Poverty Law Center, 1999), a term commonly used to refer to a website containing content that denigrates a class of people. In 2007, it was estimated that the number of U.S.-based hate sites was approximately 600 (Potok, 2007).

However, relatively little has been written about online hate speech in the communication literature, despite the potentially negative effects that this controversial form of mass-mediated content may have on members of the Internet community, if not society in general. Surprisingly, although communication scholars have examined the hate speech issue generally since the Internet went commercial in 1990, few articles in the communication literature have been written specifically about online hate speech (e.g., Jackson & Heckman, 2002; Leets, 2001a; Leets & Giles, 1997; Leets & Giles, 1999; Leets, Giles, & Noels, 1999), and even less have involved analyses of hate site content (e.g., Apple & Messner, 2001; Bostdorff, 2004; Leets, 2001b).

What is more, the studies that have involved content analyses of hate sites (Apple & Messner, 2001; Bostdorff, 2004; Leets, 2001b) have been restricted to sites posted by white supremacist groups.

Informed by Bostdorff (2004), this study extends the communication research literature on hate speech by examining the non-textual (i.e., non-typewritten), visual content posted on a sample of hate websites maintained by a variety of U.S.-based hate groups. In particular, the study seeks to reveal the ways in which U.S.-based hate groups may aid their community-building efforts through the non-textual, visual-based content (hereinafter visual content) that they post on the Internet. Although, Bostdorff correctly points out that hate sites use written messages to a far greater extent than they do visual images, it is almost always the visual content of websites that draws one's attention and makes the first, and perhaps most enduring, impression.

Method

Given the exploratory nature of this study, the author utilized a modified sample of sites that he had previously analyzed for purposes of determining whether U.S.-based hate websites were deserving of First Amendment protection. The sample was drawn from a population of hate sites listed in the Spring 2004 edition of the *Intelligence Report* published by the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), an organization which monitors hate group activity in the United States. The sample consisted of sites maintained by various U.S.-based hate groups, including white supremacist organizations as well as other hatemongers. Indeed, the author's original sample included at least one representative site from each of the hate site categories identified by the SPLC: "Ku Klux Klan," "Neo-Nazi," "Racist Skinhead," "Neo-Confederate," "Christian Identity," "Black Separatist," and "Other." For purposes of the present study, analysis was conducted on a single representative site in each of these seven hate website categories.

Content from the sampled sites was collected between November 18, 2004 and December 25, 2004. All hate-group-maintained, publicly-accessible (i.e., not requiring the user to enter data to gain access) visual content on the sites was analyzed. Since sites frequently go down or are removed, computer printouts were made of each of the relevant hate pages, and additional materials (e.g., video) were immediately downloaded and their origins designated. All printing and downloading from a particular site occurred within a single 24-hour data collection period so that the materials could be content analyzed later. In those cases where content (e.g., animation) could not be printed or downloaded, it was immediately examined and the findings noted.

Defining the Visual Content of Hate Sites

Because of technological advancements in webpage design, the visual content of hate sites can include motion video, still images, and computer-generated animation. What follows is an explanation of how these types of visual content were defined for purposes of this study.

The term "motion video" is used when referring to video of persons, animals, or objects in motion. By contrast, the term "computer-generated animation" is used to refer to a computer program that depicted persons, animals, or objects, including text, in motion. The designation "still image" is used when referring to any stationary visual content. However, this is a very

general designation as many sorts of still images can be posted online. Thus, more specific terminology is used when referring to those still images that appeared on the sampled sites.

Still images posted online can be divided into two categories: (1) "photographic images" - images that existed offline, apart from any computers, and were reproduced in an Internet-ready digital format, and (2) "computer-generated images" - images posted online that were entirely created by computer. Virtually any image that exists in the offline world can be photographed, transformed into a digital file, and posted online. Some computer programs even allow users to create digital "freeze frames" of offline images that appear on motion video.

However, just as the Internet has allowed persons to engage in communication unlike that in the offline world, so too has the computer enabled individuals to create images not of this world. Thanks to computer imaging programs, persons can generate graphic-style (i.e., non-typeset) lettering, various forms of artwork, and any number of other computer-generated images. Generally speaking though, it requires more time and greater computer skills to generate an original image using an imaging program than to simply digitize a pre-existing offline image using a digital camera or computer scanner. However, as imaging programs have become more user-friendly it has become increasingly easy for persons to design a website that contains computer-generated images, such as the rectangular-shaped banners that often appear at the top of webpages. In fact, imaging programs have even made it possible for "webmasters" to alter digitized offline images or combine them with computer-generated images. Like anything posted online, however, computer-generated images appearing on a "hate page" (i.e., a webpage posted on a hate site) may have simply been downloaded from another site on the Internet.

The process of differentiating between "photographic images" and "computer-generated images" (CGIs) is inevitably an inexact science, as it is often impossible to know the true origin of any still image posted online given that computer-imaging programs have become fairly sophisticated. Thus, the author categorized still images on hate pages based strictly on their appearance, with images that appear to have existed in the offline world being classified as "photographic," and all other images being placed into the "computer-generated" category.

Visual Content Appearing on the Sampled Hate Sites

Ku Klux Klan Category: American White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan (AWKKKK):

Based in Cordele, Georgia, AWKKKK posted an abundance of visual content on its website (American White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan). Like most websites, AWKKKK's hate site contained an extensive number of still images, mainly computer-generated ones.

AWKKKK established that its Klan community had anti-Semitic and white supremacist ideological underpinnings by posting various CGIs of symbols associated with these ideologies, such as swastikas and Confederate flags. The group also established that it considered itself pro-Christian by posting various CGIs of crosses. By representing itself as a pro-Christian group, AWKKKK may have made its community more appealing to current and prospective members, especially those of the Christian faith. AWKKKK also defined its community in terms of membership by the CGIs it posted online. AWKKKK posted various CGIs of white persons, children and adults, the types of individuals the group allowed into its community. AWKKKK even posted CGIs of other hate groups' logos, thus suggesting that its community extended beyond its own organization. In expanding the scope of its community, even if only in the minds

of persons visiting its site, AWKKKK may have made itself appear as more of a mainstream organization, which could have helped the group in attracting and maintaining members.

AWKKKK helped to further define its Klan community by posting various CGIs that demonstrated its hatred for non-whites, those persons that the group refused to allow into its community. To supplement its racist textual rhetoric, AWKKKK posted CGIs of particular non-white groups or of something that was intended to negatively represent those groups (e.g., images of particular animals). In some cases, the group expressed its hatred for persons of color by digitally altering, or combining offline photos (e.g., animals) with, photographs of particular non-whites in a way meant to demean those individuals. Several of the CGIs on AWKKKK's site had hateful (e.g., racist, anti-Semitic) comments incorporated into them.

Sometimes the CGIs on AWKKKK's site simply served as a visual supplement to the text-based rhetoric posted on a webpage, including that contained on printer-friendly Klan flyers that the group had posted online. However, the CGIs on the group's site were typically utilized as eye-catching "hyperlinks" (i.e., non-textual links to webpages). For example, AWKKKK's site contained a profuse number of computer-generated, banner-style hyperlinks and even had several pages that contained little else. While most of the CGIs that functioned as hyperlinks on AWKKKK's site simply linked to the group's other webpages, many served as links to sites maintained by other like-minded Klan organizations. Some of the other CGIs on AWKKKK's site served as hyperlinks to websites operated by groups with ideologies ranging from anti-black and anti-Semitic to pro-white and pro-Christian. By posting CGIs that served as links to sites maintained by various like-minded Klan organizations, AWKKKK further established its community's ideological underpinnings while simultaneously indicating that these groups were part of its extended community. Several of the CGIs on AWKKKK's site contained Christian-based commentary, thus reinforcing that the group perceived itself as a Christian community.

AWKKKK's hate site also contained numerous photographic images, many of which were photos of the group's public demonstrations. The demonstration photos on AWKKKK's site included images of individuals (e.g., members), persons delivering speeches, and articles (e.g., banners) that the group displayed while demonstrating. By posting these photos, AWKKKK established that its community existed in "the real world," not just online. The group aided its community-building efforts by establishing that it had an offline presence since such knowledge helped to instill a deeper sense of purpose in current members, while suggesting to prospective members that they had the opportunity to become part of a real community.

AWKKKK also posted photos of offline activities engaged in by other hate groups, Klan and neo-Nazi, including meetings, as well as cross and swastika burning ceremonies. The meeting photos showed Klansmen and neo-Nazis listening to, and delivering, speeches. In many of these photos, Klansmen and neo-Nazis could be seen giving Nazi salutes. As for the burning ceremony photos, they consisted of images of persons, both children and adults, by themselves and congregating with others at an outdoor facility when the ceremonies were taking place. By posting photos of offline activities engaged in by other hate groups, AWKKKK once again suggested to persons that its community extended beyond its own organization.

AWKKKK made its site even more eye-catching to current and prospective members of its community by utilizing computer-generated animation. Indeed, the group endeavored to bring youth and children into its Klan community by utilizing computer-generated animation on its site, namely in its "Kristian Kids Korner." In the "Korner" there were several video games that could be played and two cartoon-like animated sequences that could be viewed. While most of the video games were unsophisticated by today's technological standards, the two computer-

generated animated sequences found in that section were a bit more advanced. One computer-generated animated sequence showed a dinosaur and graphic-style text in motion. The other sequence was intended to symbolically represent the group's belief that persons wash away their sins when they support the Christian faith. That sequence had a sweater, with text superimposed on it, and a Tide-like logo and detergent box, both inscribed with the name "Jesus" and other religious terminology, moving about the screen. Thus, the sequence served to grab the attention of younger persons visiting the site while perhaps suggesting to them that AWKKKK was a good Christian community, a community to which they may have wanted to belong.

Neo-Nazi Category: National Socialist Movement (NSM)

Compared to AWKKKK's site, the hate site maintained by NSM (National Socialist Movement), a Minneapolis-based neo-Nazi group, contained a plethora of visual content, more than any other website examined in this study. Indeed, with the exception of motion video, NSM utilized every available visual method of presentation that can be employed on a website.

The visual content posted on NSM's site consisted mainly of photos, many of which were of the group's public demonstrations. NSM's demonstration photos featured its male and female members, who usually appeared wearing Nazi-style regalia, marching, delivering speeches, giving Nazi salutes, being covered by the press, displaying Nazi symbols, or merely congregating together, sometimes with Klansmen. In posting photos of its female members, NSM may have assisted itself in recruiting more females into its neo-Nazi community.

NSM also posted several photos of its members at the group's, and other hate groups', private meetings and gatherings, where they were once again shown dressed in Nazi regalia and engaging in many of the same activities previously described. NSM members were sometimes shown burning crosses or swastikas at outdoor gatherings. The group also posted photos of its members gathering together socially, and dressed in civilian attire (e.g., jeans, shirts), at private residences and public places, like restaurants. In some cases, NSM members were shown symbolically expressing their hatred for Israel and Jews by standing on Israel's flag.

Like AWKKKK, NSM established that it existed in "the real world" and that its community held anti-Semitic and white supremacist beliefs by posting photos of its offline activities on its site. NSM further demonstrated that it held anti-Semitic and white supremacist beliefs by posting several photos of Adolf Hitler, both by himself and surrounded by his followers, as well as other well-known supporters of Nazism, both individuals and groups.

NSM defined its community in terms of membership by the photos it posted online. The group posted several photos of white individuals, both children and adults, the types of persons the group allowed into its neo-Nazi community. NSM helped to further define its community by posting a variety of photos of persons that it hated, like Jews and blacks. These photos usually served as a visual supplement to the group's anti-Semitic and racist online commentary. Several photos of Jews, whites, and non-whites on NSM's site appeared in the many anti-Semitic, racist, and pro-white flyers that the group had posted online.

NSM also used photos to symbolically express its opposition to certain issues. For example, the group posted pictures of dead fetuses to show its disapproval of abortion, as well as the coffins of U.S.-military personnel to show its disapproval of the war in Iraq. By symbolically expressing its stance on controversial issues such as abortion and the war in Iraq, NSM may have went a long way in winning the support of persons who held similar views.

However, most of the photos that NSM posted online were of the merchandise that the group had for sale, which was largely white supremacist in nature (e.g., covered in swastikas). NSM

was able to generate extra financial support for its neo-Nazi community through its merchandise page, a page which being visually enhanced by the addition of photos may have solicited even more business as would-be customers were able to see the available items.

NSM's site also contained a large number of CGIs, the most common being the group's Nazi-themed logo. Almost as prevalent as that CGI was a computer-generated banner, which included the group's logo and a collage of Nazi banners and symbols that appeared at the bottom of most of NSM's hate pages. CGIs of swastikas and other Nazi symbols appeared throughout the group's site, as well as CGIs of persons such as Hitler, Nazis, and former neo-Nazi leaders. As a sign of its intense anti-Semitism, NSM posted CGIs of persons throwing the Jewish Star of David into a trashcan. The group often used CGIs of the Star of David as a visual supplement to its text-based anti-Semitic commentary. All of these CGIs further established that NSM had a racist, anti-Semitic ideology. NSM also posted some other neo-Nazi groups' logos, suggesting once again that its neo-Nazi community extended beyond its own organization.

NSM further defined its community in terms of membership by the CGIs it posted online. As it did with photos, NSM posted a variety of CGIs of white individuals on its site to signify that it only allowed whites into its community. NSM reinforced that its community was only open to white Christians by posting a variety of computer-generated artwork negatively depicting non-whites and non-Christians (e.g., Muslims). As with the photos on its site, many of the CGIs depicting the targets of NSM's hatred appeared in the various racist, anti-Semitic, and pro-white flyers that the group had posted online. Several of the CGIs on NSM's site served as hyperlinks to external websites, such as those operated by racist "white power" music companies.

In addition to still images, NSM used computer-generated animation, some of which served primarily to further establish the group's neo-Nazi and anti-Semitic belief system. On its home page, NSM had a computer-generated animated sequence, which appeared over a backdrop of Nazi imagery, in which text and objects moved around the screen while the group's name slowly appeared. As a further sign of its anti-Semitism, the group posted computer-generated animation of Israel's flag being torched. NSM's site also had computer-generated animation of flags waving and objects being engulfed in flames, all of which made the site more eye-catching.

Racist Skinhead Category: Tualatin Valley Skins (TVS)

A group that was allies of, and has since merged with, NSM is TVS, a defunct Portland-based racist skinhead group. Like NSM's website, TVS's hate site (Tualatin Valley Skins) included an array of visual content. Indeed, TVS's site contained all forms of visual content.

TVS posted numerous CGIs on its site, the most common of which was a computer-generated banner that included the group's name and a Star of David, encircled by a prohibited symbol, superimposed over artwork depicting the after-effects of a nuclear blast in Israel. TVS's site contained several other computer-generated banners combining text and artwork that clearly expressed the group's hatred for Jews generally, and Israeli Jews specifically. TVS also posted computer-generated banners combining text and artwork that appeared to have been downloaded from other white supremacist groups' sites. In displaying these various banners on its site, TVS symbolically expressed that its skinhead community was not only racist, but also anti-Semitic.

TVS used several other CGIs to further establish that its community was racist and anti-Semitic. The group posted computer-generated artwork of Hitler, swastikas, and a host of white supremacist symbols. To supplement its racist and anti-Semitic text-based rhetoric, TVS also posted CGIs that represented Jews and the various non-white groups it hated. The group demeaned Jews and persons of color by altering photos of them or combining the photos with

CGIs. Alternatively, TVS reinforced that its group was a white supremacist community by posting computer-generated artwork of whites and Klansmen, images that tended to be flattering or cast the depicted individuals in a favorable light. TVS established that its community was anti-homosexual by altering, in a demeaning manner, photos of persons purported to be homosexuals.

Although adept in creating CGIs, TVS primarily posted photos on its site. Seemingly obsessed with self-promotion, TVS posted several "freeze frames" of images that appeared in video footage that television news stations aired when reporting on the group's offline activities. These photos may have served TVS's community-building efforts well since they definitively established that the group had a newsworthy presence in "the real world," a fact which may have helped the organization in maintaining and perhaps increasing its membership.

However, most of the photos posted on TVS's site served to further define its community ideologically and in terms of membership. Along with CGIs, TVS supplemented its racist, anti-Semitic, and anti-homosexual textual rhetoric by posting photos of non-whites, Jews, and homosexuals. These photos, which often portrayed the hated individuals in a less than favorable light, sometimes had derogatory terms and hateful comments incorporated into them. In some cases, TVS posted photos of animals to negatively represent persons of color. At the same time, TVS supplemented its pro-white rhetoric by posting pro-white photos of Hitler, Nazi soldiers, whites, white supremacists, Klansmen, and its own members. Not surprisingly, the individuals in the pro-white photos were often portrayed in a flattering manner when compared to photos of non-whites on the site. What is surprising is that, in some instances, white children as young as toddlers were pictured along with swastikas and other icons that have been used as symbols of hate. In posting photos of its own members, including their children, TVS may have helped to forge a real sense of community in its current members, which may have increased their chances of remaining committed to the group. At the same time, these photos may have served to attract some white individuals to the group who were longing to become part of a real community.

Allied with NSM at the time of this study, TVS posted photos of the neo-Nazi group's members, compound, and public demonstrations. TVS also posted photos that were taken at KKK events, such as cross burning ceremonies and festivals featuring bands playing white supremacist music. By posting photos of Klan and neo-Nazi groups, TVS further reinforced that it embraced a racist and anti-Semitic ideology while simultaneously suggesting that its community extended beyond its own organization.

TVS further established that its community was racist and anti-Semitic through some computer-generated animation and motion video clips posted on its site. For example, the site contained eye-catching animation of Hitler moving from side-to-side. In addition, some racist and anti-Semitic "Skinhead Video Games" were posted on the group's site, although they were inaccessible at the time analysis was conducted. Among the video games that were listed on TVS's site were ones that allowed persons to shoot blacks, to fire upon Mexicans crossing the U.S. border, and to play a suicide bomber killing Jews in Israel. These video games may have served as an effective means by which to attract youthful members to TVS's skinhead community on the Internet, where they could then be exposed to the group's hateful rhetoric. As for motion video, the group posted the notorious, if perhaps unauthentic, footage of Jewish-American Nick Berg being beheaded in Iraq. The group posted this video, which is available online, to celebrate Berg's murder. TVS also posted original videos that included footage of Jews and persons of color along with on-screen comments denigrating those individuals. However, reflecting the group's interest in self-promotion, the majority of the video clips on TVS's site

were stories about the group and its offline activities that aired on television news stations, again establishing that the organization had a newsworthy presence in "the real world."

Christian Identity Category: Orange County Assembly of Christ (OCAC)

The site operated by OCAC (Orange County Assembly of Christ), a defunct racist, anti-Semitic Christian Identity church formerly located in Brea, California, did not contain much content overall, but the site did have a fairly diverse array of visual content. The group's site included various still images and even had some basic computer-generated animation. The visual content of OCAC's site may have aided the group's efforts to build its community within the Christian Identity movement, a movement that claims that whites are superior to all other races.

Like most of the other sampled hate sites, the visual content on OCAC's site consisted mainly of photos. This is largely because OCAC provided cover shots of the various books that the group had for sale, most of which were religiously oriented. Visually enhanced by these photos, OCAC's merchandise page served two important functions in the group's community-building efforts in that it provided an outlet for the dissemination of Christian Identity literature and enabled the church to generate additional revenue for the activities of its community. OCAC helped to establish that its church was a white-only community by posting a single photograph of a white family to its site, while excluding photos of any non-whites.

Although most of the still images on OCAC's site were photos, the group also made extensive use of CGIs, the most common of which was the Church's logo, a Confederate flag with images of Jesus Christ and three animals (e.g., eagle, lion, ox) superimposed on it. The majority of the other CGIs on OCAC's site were of a religious nature. Moreover, several of the CGIs on OCAC's site served as hyperlinks to external sites where persons could buy Christian-oriented books. These CGIs clearly established that the group had a pro-Christian ideology. The existence of the Confederate flag in the group's computer-generated logo, along with the various other CGIs of Confederate flags that appeared on the group's site, helped to inform persons that OCAC's community had a white supremacist ideology.

In trying to generate extra revenue for its community, OCAC posted CGIs of various credit card trademarks to advertise that persons could donate to the group. OCAC also posted CGIs that served as hyperlinks to sites where persons could make a cash donation to the group. Moreover, like many of the groups in this study, OCAC expanded the scope of its community beyond its own organization through the CGIs it posted on its site. OCAC did this by posting CGIs of the logos of other like-minded Christian Identity churches, something that might have helped legitimize the group and the Christian Identity movement in the minds of some persons.

OCAC established that it embraced an anti-Semitic ideology by some basic computer-generated animation on its site. That computer-generated animation depicted a black-and-white caricature of man, who was identified as a Jew, making several different facial gestures and rubbing his hands together as if to suggest that he was money hungry. After the animated sequence ended, the man's image left the screen and was replaced with several terms of oppression (e.g., persecuted), the names of various countries which the group claimed had expelled Jews, and the eras during which these expulsions were supposed to have occurred. All of this was apparently meant to suggest that anti-Semitism was an enduring practice.

Black Separatist Category: New Black Panther Party (NBPP)

While all of the hate sites discussed thus far were operated by whites, black hate groups also have an online presence, as evidenced by the website maintained by the ultra-militant NBPP

headquartered in Washington D.C. NBPP's site (New Black Panther Party) contained a multitude of visual content, including photos, CGIs, and motion video.

Like the other sampled sites, NBPP's website contained various photos, many of which symbolically represented how the group defined its community. Most of the photos on NBPP's site were of individuals. The group posted photos of its current and former leaders, persons regarded as leaders in the black community, and other blacks that the group respected. At the same time, NBPP's site included photos of persons that the group did not welcome into its community, including specific whites and Jews, as well as blacks that the organization regarded as black race traitors. In posting these photos, NBPP helped to establish that its organization was an all-black community that had an ideology that was pro-black, anti-white, and anti-Semitic.

Several of the photos on NBPP's site were of the group's offline activities, such as its rallies and public protests. Some of these photos were "freeze frames" taken from motion video. Like the offline activity photos posted on the other sampled sites, these photos let current and potential members know that the group existed in "the real world."

NBPP used photos to supplement its online commentary regarding why it believed black separatism was necessary. These "pro-separatism" photos symbolically represented the group's anti-government sentiment. In discussing the anti-black policies that the U.S. government sanctioned in the past, NBPP posted photos of black slaves and pro-slavery documents. Along with claims that the U.S. government continued to be anti-black, the group posted photos of blacks that it believed were imprisoned for purely political reasons. NBPP supplemented its textual rhetoric about police brutality by posting several photos of blacks who were the victims of such brutality, including the brutalized individuals and their families. NBPP also posted photos of police officers, both black and white, who had been accused of brutalizing blacks. Additionally, the group posted photos of persons protesting the police, police-protester clashes, and altercations between police officers and black citizens. Some of these images appeared to have been "freeze framed" from television news video. These various "pro-separatism" photos had the potential to strike an emotional chord with blacks who felt that they, or someone they knew, had been victimized by any one of the various government agents and agencies in the United States. As such, the photos also had the potential to attract new members to NBPP's black separatist community. NBPP also supplemented its commentary about police brutality by posting *CBSNews.com* video of altercations between white police officers and black individuals.

NBPP's site contained a multitude of CGIs as well, nearly equal to the number of photos that the group posted online. Many of the CGIs on NBPP's site were used to symbolically represent the group's anti-government sentiment. However, the most prevalent CGI on NBPP's site was the group's logo, an image of a black panther, superimposed over artwork depicting Africa, surrounded by two rings, one of which bears the group's name, two stars, and the words "FREEDOM OR DEATH." The logo, which appeared throughout NBPP's site, helped to establish that the group had a black separatist ideology. Additional CGIs posted by NBPP included a cartoon-like spider that appeared in the "Panther Cubs" children's section of the group's site, a kid-friendly area in which the group sought to introduce youthful members to its black separatist community.

Neo-Confederate Category: League of the South (LOS)

Headquartered in Killen, Alabama, LOS, which the SPLC regards as a "neo-Confederate" group seeking to revive several of the racist doctrines of the Confederacy (Potok, 2006), also maintained a hate site (League of the South) composed of a variety of visual content, including

photographic images, CGIs, and some basic computer-generated animation. In constructing its site, LOS created an online environment that was inviting to Southerners generally, and to individuals with strong pro-South sentiments particularly, the two groups of persons most likely to be, or to become, members of its neo-Confederate community. One of the primary ways in which LOS attempted to create such an environment on its site was by posting photographs.

LOS's site contained a variety of Southern-themed images, such as photos of Confederate soldiers, persons waving Confederate flags, and revered Southern figures. Not only did these images add to the pro-South look and feel of LOS's site, but they also served to instill a sense of group identity and Southern pride in Southerners, which may have increased their chances of committing themselves to, or remaining committed to, its neo-Confederate community. This certainly may have been true of the various images LOS posted of the Confederate flag, an icon that still serves as an enduring symbol of Southern pride for many people, despite continued efforts to bring about its eradication by those who view it as a symbol of racial intolerance.

Many of the photos on LOS's site were posted on its merchandise page. LOS's merchandise page included images of various products that the group, or one of its chapters, had for sale, such as Southern-themed books and music CDs, LOS literature, as well as audio and video recordings of LOS events. LOS's merchandise page served three important functions in the group's community-building efforts in that it helped to attract persons from various walks of life to its neo-Confederate cyber community, provided an outlet for the dissemination of neo-Confederate rhetoric, and allowed LOS to generate additional financial support for its activities.

LOS's community-building efforts were perhaps aided most by how the group used its site to put a face on its existing community, its leaders and its supporters. LOS literally put a face on its community through the photos it posted online, such as images of its board of directors. In addition to the photos that accompanied some of their online biographies, LOS leaders were shown presiding over the group's national conferences and various LOS-endorsed public rallies (e.g., pro-Confederate flag). These photos not only suggested to persons visiting the site that LOS's leadership was actively involved in the neo-Confederate movement, but they also lent an air of respectability to the movement since the leaders were always shown wearing suits and ties.

LOS also posted several photos of its supporters, in particular images of persons attending the group's national conferences and public demonstrations. The conferences photos on LOS's site, in which the group's supporters were always cast in a respectable, conservative light, showed individuals engaged in various activities, such as conversing, delivering speeches, and browsing through merchandise being sold at the events. The demonstration photos showed individuals, many of whom were dressed in Confederate-style military uniforms, delivering speeches, marching down public streets, gathering at county courthouses, waving Confederate and Southern States' flags, and holding banners inscribed with Southern symbols and religious rhetoric. As with the conference photos LOS posted online, the demonstration photos that the group placed on its site portrayed its supporters as respectable, conservative citizens.

In posting photos of its leaders and its supporters, LOS helped to legitimize itself as a bona fide group within the neo-Confederate movement. Additionally, in using photos which portrayed its leaders and supporters as respectable individuals, LOS constructed a public image which served to help the group maintain members within, and attract new members to, its neo-Confederate community. Moreover, by posting photos of its leaders and its supporters, LOS demonstrated that it was more than just a group that existed online, but one capable of organizing events in the offline world. Like several of the other groups in this study, LOS assisted its community-building efforts by establishing that it had an offline presence since, as stated earlier,

such knowledge helped to instill a deeper sense of purpose in current members, while suggesting to prospective members that they had the opportunity to become part of a real community.

Along with photos, LOS's site contained some computer-generated animation and a vast number of CGIs. Indeed, like AWKKKK's site, LOS's site contained more CGIs than photographic images. Like the photos that LOS posted online, the computer-generated animation and CGIs that appeared on its site generally had a Southern theme. The computer-generated animation on LOS's site included two basic animated sequences, one showing a waving Confederate States of America (CSA) flag and another depicting the eleven Southern states that made up the Confederacy, plus Maryland, Delaware, West Virginia, Kentucky, and Oklahoma, breaking off from a U.S. map. For LOS, these sixteen Southern states comprise "the South."

The most common CGI on LOS's site was a banner, which included a man, a Confederate flag, and graphic-style lettering that formed the group's website address. There were several CGIs on LOS's site in which the Confederate flag was either incorporated or appeared by itself. LOS also posted CGIs of a variety of other Southern flags, including the CSA flag and the flags of several Southern States. Other Southern-themed CGIs appearing on LOS's site included maps of the South, Southern plantations, and computer-generated artwork of Confederate soldiers. Coupled with the various Southern-themed photos, the Southern-themed computer-generated animation and CGIs that appeared on LOS's website had the potential to further instill a sense of group identity and pride in Southerners, possibly increasing the likelihood of their becoming involved with, or remaining involved with, its neo-Confederate community.

However, while many of the CGIs that LOS posted online served primarily to enhance the Southern-themed aesthetic of its website, several others were directly related to, and may have served an integral role in, the group's community-building efforts on the Internet. LOS promoted other pro-South groups and its own state chapters by posting CGIs of their logos. Additionally, LOS posted the computer-generated logos of several Southern businesses, as well as CGIs of products being sold by those businesses. LOS's use of CGIs on its site to promote its own state chapters, other pro-South groups, and a variety of Southern businesses served to suggest its neo-Confederate community extended well beyond its own organization.

Although considered a racist organization, LOS's website lacked any visual content that served as an overt representation of the group's hatred for non-whites, although it could be argued that the group implicitly signified its hatred for non-whites by posting Confederate flags throughout the site. The lack of any overtly racist visual content on LOS's site may have been a deliberate effort by the group to appeal to a wider array of potential community members, persons who might be exposed to anti-white rhetoric if they attended a "real world" LOS event.

Other Hate Groups Category: Jewish Defense League (JDL)

Although few in number, there are some U.S.-based hate sites operated by Jews, like that maintained by JDL (Jewish Defense League), which is headquartered in Los Angeles. Despite being comprised mainly of photos, the visual content of JDL's site still depicted its community and helped to establish how the group defined itself ideologically and in terms of membership.

The majority of photos on JDL's site were of individuals, such as its members and other persons, mainly Jewish, that the group indicated that it respected, admired, or had committed itself to defending. At the same time, JDL posted photos of persons it hated, including neo-Nazis and other individuals that the group accused of being anti-Semitic. In posting these photos, JDL established that its group was not a racist community, but rather a pro-Jewish community that hated anti-Semites. JDL further established this latter point by posting photos of facilities used

by neo-Nazis, the homes and places of employment of those individuals that the group regarded as "Jew haters," as well as literature and artwork that it believed were anti-Semitic in nature.

Several of the photos on JDL's site were of the group's public protests, which served to establish that the group existed in "the real world." JDL's public protest photos showed law enforcement officials, media representatives, the protested hate groups, and protesters engaged in activities such as burning Nazi flags and displaying pro-Jewish symbols. Like many of the hate groups in this study, JDL also used photos to enhance its merchandise page. As with the other hate groups' merchandise pages, JDL's merchandise page not only allowed the organization to generate additional revenue for its community, but it also served to attract prospective Jewish members to its site, where they could then be exposed to the group's online rhetoric.

JDL's site did, however, contain some other forms of visual content, including some CGIs. The most common CGI on JDL's site was the organization's logo, a clenched fist inside the Star of David. Being ever-present on the site, JDL's logo further reinforced that the group was a pro-Jewish community. CGIs also appeared in the various articles that JDL posted on its site. In promoting its public protests, JDL posted several computer-generated road maps that directed persons to those areas where the group was planning to hold a demonstration. The posting of these road maps may have been one of the most effective community-building tactics JDL employed on its site. These maps represented a call to arms for JDL's current members, instilling in them a real sense of purpose, while perhaps also serving to attract new members to its community who may have wanted to participate in the group's public protests.

JDL also used CGIs and motion video to establish that its organization was a pro-Jewish community that hated persons it suspected of being anti-Semitic. For example, there was an image on JDL's site in which a photo of Pat Buchanan had been altered to make him appear to have a Hitler-style mustache. The motion video on JDL's site was from an episode of *The Jerry Springer Show* in which some JDL members had a violent confrontation with several Klansmen. For current and potential members visiting JDL's site, this video may have served as the ultimate proof of the group's hatred for, and willingness to confront, persons it regarded as anti-Semites.

Conclusion

This study reveals that U.S.-based hate groups have taken full advantage of the visual communication capabilities that the Internet offers. Indeed, the author found that each of the seven U.S.-based hate sites examined in this study contained various forms of visual content.

As with most websites, still images were the main form of visual content on each of the sampled sites. Along with photographic images, offline images reproduced in an Internet-ready digital format, each of the sampled sites had various images that were completely computer-generated, further evidence that hate groups have become more computer-savvy. Indeed, two sites (AWKKKK, LOS) included more CGIs than photos. What is more, many of the CGIs appearing on the sampled sites were rather sophisticated in terms of their design. The next most common form of visual content found on the sampled sites was computer-generated animation, which was present on six sites. Three of the sampled sites (JDL, NBPP, TVS) even contained motion video, the majority of which was originally produced by professional media outlets.

In constructing websites composed of a variety of eye-catching visual content, including photos, motion video, CGIs, and computer-generated animation, the hate groups in this study endeavored to grab the attention of members and potential members of their respective communities. Even if the visual content was not all that elaborate, it was still much more striking

than mere text. However, the visual content of the sampled sites may have served an important role in the hate groups' community-building efforts beyond its capacity to grab one's attention.

Through the visual content of their sites, the hate groups in this study symbolically expressed how they defined their respective communities ideologically, which is important in attracting and maintaining members. Some of the groups in this study used the visual content of their sites to symbolically express their community's religious devotions, political leanings, and social outlooks. Virtually all of the groups used visual content to signify the hateful ideologies that they embraced. The Klan, neo-Nazi, and racist skinhead groups symbolically represented, in an overt fashion, their white supremacist ideologies by posting a variety of visual content associated with white supremacism. The Christian Identity church and neo-Confederate group implicitly signified that they each embraced a white supremacist ideology by posting several Confederate flags on their sites. The Klan, neo-Nazi, racist skinhead, Christian Identity, and black separatist groups each symbolically expressed their anti-Semitic ideologies through the visual content of their sites. This visual content helped to create an online environment that may have been especially inviting to current and prospective members of each particular community. Like text-based rhetoric, this visual content served to instill a sense of group identity and pride in individuals, which may have increased their chances of committing themselves to, or remaining committed to, a hate group's community. Interestingly, one group (LOS) known for overtly expressing racist views in the offline world did not do so on its site. This may have been a calculated effort by the group to appeal to a wider array of potential members, persons who might have been exposed to such rhetoric if they attended the group's "real world" events.

In posting visual content to their websites, the hate groups in this study also symbolically expressed how they defined their respective communities in terms of membership, information that is critical in attracting and maintaining members to a particular community. Each group posted visual content that symbolically represented, although sometimes implicitly, what types of persons made up its community in terms or race, religion, gender, and, in some cases, age. Indeed, with the exception of the Christian Identity site, each of the sampled sites showed some of the actual members, living and deceased, of the respective communities. Each group also posted visual content depicting a variety of persons, living and deceased, that they respected, admired, or felt an allegiance with. As Bostdorff (2004) suggests, such visual content, especially when viewed repeatedly, can forge a sense of group identity in individuals. Inasmuch as this visual imagery signified to persons that a particular group had a strong sense of community, it may have aided that group's community-building efforts by forging a sense of group identity in its current members, while suggesting to prospective members that they could become part of a real community. Alternatively, each group, excepting the neo-Confederate organization, posted visual content that symbolically represented, usually in a demeaning manner, what types of persons did not make up its community because they possessed a certain innate human characteristic, such as a particular race, ethnicity, religion, or sexual orientation. In so doing, each hate group helped to build a community unified by its opposition to those individuals who were depicted (Bostdorff, 2004).

In posting images of their members engaging in activities in the offline world, the hate groups in this study may have further assisted themselves in their efforts to maintain and build communities. To persons who visited their hate sites, these images demonstrated that the groups were capable of organizing events in the offline world, knowledge that may have instilled a deeper sense of purpose in members. At the same time, these images suggested to prospective members that they could be part of a community with a purpose. It may well be that hate groups'

community-building efforts are aided most by their ability to literally put a face on their respective communities through the visual content that they post online.

Other visual content appearing on the sampled sites served to assist the hate groups in this study in their community-building efforts in more obvious ways. Some of the visual content (e.g., credit card trademarks) on the sampled sites was posted to help generate revenue for a particular group. Many of the still images posted on the sites were of items available for purchase on the groups' merchandise pages. Enhanced by still images, these merchandise pages helped to attract persons from various walks of life to the groups' cyber community, provided the groups with an additional outlet to disseminate their hateful rhetoric, and allowed the groups to generate added financial support for their activities.

Additionally, all of the hate groups in this study utilized visual content to promote, signify their allegiance with, or provide hyperlinks to the sites of like-minded persons and organizations, all of which served to further expand the scope of their respective communities in the minds of persons visiting the sites. To the extent that hate groups are able to suggest to persons that their communities extend beyond their own respective organizations, they may be able to make themselves appear as more mainstream, something which could help them in attracting and maintaining members.

The findings of this study point to the need to further examine how hate groups are utilizing the visual capabilities offered by the Internet in their efforts to attract impressionable persons, including youth and children, to their sites, and by extension their communities. Indeed, three of the groups in this study were clearly trying to attract younger persons to their sites, one (NBPP) through the use of computer-generated imagery, and the other two (AWKKKK, TVS) through the use of computer-generated animation, namely video games. These findings serve as chilling examples of the extent to which hate groups will go to maintain and increase their membership, and thus why the online activities of U.S.-based hatemongers demand our attention.

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