THE WOMEN OF *STORMFRONT:*
AN EXAMINATION OF WHITE NATIONALIST DISCUSSION THREADS ON THE INTERNET

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ABSTRACT

Although a plethora of literature exists on hate or extremist group activity, the role of racist women remains an unexplored area. The current study sought to explore one method of communication for racist women, the Internet. The researchers conducted a content analysis on 227 discussion threads provided on one of the oldest extremist websites on the Internet, Stormfront. The purpose of this study was to investigate the content of the discussion threads described as 'For Stormfront Ladies Only.' Of primary interest to the researchers was whether the content discussed by women in this 'White Nationalist' cyber community supported the assertion by some scholars that the role of women in racist activities is undergoing a transformation and the implications of this study in that regard are discussed.

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INTRODUCTION

The Internet has become increasingly accessible to the average citizen as the cost of personal computers continues to decline and Internet access is provided by local libraries, Internet cafes, etc. The Internet has become a primary source of information and through the use of various search engines, such as www.google.com and www.yahoo.com, an individual can locate information on any subject of interest. For this reason, the Internet has become a powerful tool for the distribution of information and social networking through websites like Facebook, but also through online discussion forums.

Some of the first individuals to take advantage of this new technology were members of extremist groups. As Hamm (1993) noted, Tom Metzger, the founder of the White Aryan Resistance (W.A.R.), was among the first to use the Internet when he created a computer bulletin board in 1985 for posting white supremacy messages. Since that time, many extremist groups and organizations have found an audience on the Internet. They use the websites for a variety of purposes including recruitment, social networking, distributing propaganda, and even selling white supremacy items of interest to members.

Although extremist groups in the United States have been well documented, by organizations such as the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC) (www.splc.org), research on extremist or hate websites remains in its infancy (Gerstenfeld, Grant, & Chiang, 2003). Furthermore, although Blee (1996, 2002) has written extensively on the role of women in organized extremist groups, the participation of women in extremist websites remains relatively unexplored. Thus, the purpose of this study was to examine the participation of women through the discussion forum of *Stormfront*, one of the Internet's first hate sites.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Although hate or bias crime remains an underdeveloped research area, a plethora of literature exists on the influence of hate groups. As Perry (2003) noted, "While responsible for a relatively small proportion of hate-motivated violence, hate groups undoubtedly play a role in conditioning an environment in which bias-motivated incidents can occur" (p. 297). Even though the primary target of these groups varies, all hate groups "are opposed to some group (or, much more commonly, groups) on the basis of race, religion, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and so on" (Gerstenfeld, 2004, p. 106). Many of these are white supremacy groups and one, the Ku Klux Klan, has a very long history within the United States. Other groups fall under the categories of neo-Nazi or racist skinhead, such as Aryan Nations. The ideologies underlying many of these groups overlap with the primary idea being that of white supremacy or white nationalism, even though there are non-white supremacist hate groups identified by the SPLC. The focus of this study is on one website that self identifies as white supremacist or nationalist.

Racist Women

Arguably the most extensive research conducted on racist women, or women in organized racist groups, to date was Blee's (2002) interviews with thirty-four women over a two-year period, representing a number of different groups including the Ku Klux Klan, neo-Nazi, and Christian

Identity. Blee's study was instrumental in correcting some common myths about racist women specifically that they represented an uneducated, poor segment of society and had been goaded into racist activities by men. She found that of her interviewees most were educated and not poor. In fact, most did not grow up poor and "marginal employment was a consequence, not a cause, of being active in racist politics" (p. 9). Furthermore, Blee noted that the women followed many paths into racist activity, of which a boyfriend or husband was just one.

Another interesting finding in Blee's (2002) study was that women in these racist organizations take on a variety of roles and that these vary by group. For example, women in Ku Klux Klan and Christian Identity groups "tend to emphasize women's familial and social roles, while women in some white power skinhead and other neo-Nazi groups are involved in more direct action, playing what I term "operative" roles" (p. 122-3). Blee describes the operative role as taking part in racist activities that could include everything from "routine clerical tasks to informal (and, very occasionally, formal) leadership and paramilitary activities" (2002, p. 133). The operative role is less common than the familial role, which includes "racial elaborations of the domestic roles to which women are traditionally assigned" (p. 123). Although the organization is "family-like," Blee suggests the women are charged with "creating and nurturing a racist family" (2002, p. 123). In addition, the social role requires women to "act as the social facilitators of racist groups" and includes organizing racist events (p. 131).

Hate on the Internet

As mentioned previously, hate groups were some of the first organized groups to make use of the Internet. For example, Tom Metzger, leader of White Aryan Resistance (W.A.R.) and the host of the public cable television show Race and Reason, created an early computer bulletin boards which allowed members of white supremacy groups to communicate (Gerstenfeld, 2004). Since then, as members of racist groups come under closer scrutiny by law enforcement officials, the Internet has provided an anonymous way to communicate, distribute propaganda, and recruit new members.

Two studies sought to address the rise in extremist websites by investigating the content. Schafer (2002) examined 132 websites provided by HateWatch (www.hatewatch.org) a non-profit group whose mission is to monitor hate on the Internet. He noted what kind of information was provided beyond the initial introductory page and found that some of these sites provided resources other than a text library, including archives of primary publications (21%), a graphics library(28%), an audio library (21%), and a video library (11%). In addition, the majority of the sites included links to other sites (73%). Also included were products for sale (36%), information on subscribing to a primary publication (22%), news/current events (19%), membership information (16%), and a calendar of upcoming events (11%). Furthermore, of the sites that facilitated communication among users the techniques included chat room/discussion boards (18%), guest book (17%), and an online mailing list (14%). Finally, and directly relevant to this study, only a small portion (2%) of the sample included information dedicated to women, although a few sites were solely targeting females.

Gerstenfeld et al. (2003) also examined extremist websites but used a variety of sources to obtain a sampling frame instead of relying only on HateWatch, yielding a usable sample of 157

websites. Of these, 15 of these sites were internationally based. The researchers noted that the United States plays host to many extremist websites due to the fact that racist propaganda is illegal in many countries. In addition, there is no international law that precludes an individual from perusing hate websites hosted by countries where censorship is illegal, like the United States. Providing further evidence to support the idea that hate has gone global, the researchers found that more than half the hate websites in the content analysis they conducted provided links to site in other countries and approximately ¼ had content in languages other than English.

The researchers also provided descriptive information about the websites examined, such as the type of extremism and external links contained within the site. The top two types of extremism were represented in the categories of "Other," a category including right-wing groups and non-white supremacist hate groups, and "White Nationalist." Regarding external links, the authors noted that many of the groups linked to other groups within their own category. For example, skinhead sites were the group most likely to provide external links (92%) and many of these links were to other skinhead sites. "White Nationalist" groups also were more likely (67%) to link to international sites. Unlike the previous study, however, the researchers did not address female related content or whether the sites were targeting women.

Stormfront

Stormfront (www.stormfront.org) is an Internet forum launched in April 1995 by Don Black, a member of both the Ku Klux Klan and American Nazi Party, and considered to be one of the first extremist Internet sites (Kaplan & Weinberg, 1998). According to Schwartz (1996), Black joined David Duke's Ku Klux Klan faction while living and attending college in Alabama. He became an active member of the KKK, becoming the Alabama Grand Dragon and national leader after Duke's departure, but was tried and convicted in 1981 in a federal court district for his role in the attempt to overthrow the government of Dominica, known as Operation Red Dog (Bell, 2008).

After serving his sentence in a federal prison, Black moved to Florida where he began work as a computer consultant and eventually launched *Stormfront*. According to the Anti-Defamation League (1998), in the early years of the website Black posted articles and essays by other well-known white supremacists including David Duke and William Pierce of the neo-Nazi Alliance. Over the years, Black expanded the site to include links to other extremist websites as well as a message board and interactive chat room. Although Black is still the full time webmaster of the site, additional moderators have been added due to the websites growth. Currently, there are over 50,000 registered users on the site.

The purpose of this exploratory study was to conduct a content analysis on the female-only threads on the website. Since the site self-identifies as a 'White Nationalist' community forum, the researchers were primarily interested in what women discussed in the threads of the forum. More specifically, the researchers wanted to describe and categorize the topics discussed by registered users.

METHODS

The website describes *Stormfront* as a White Nationalist Community (www.stormfront.org) and, as mentioned previously, has over 50,000 registered users on the site. The website mainly contains a forum for discussion but also includes a donations link, a blogs link, and additional community links. The Internet forum has a variety of discussion threads organized by category with titles such as "News," "General," "Open forums (open to guests)," "Suggestions" "Frequently asked questions," "Activism," "White singles," and "International."

The purpose of this study was to explore the role of women in extremist websites by examining the nature of the content of female-targeted posts in the forum. Although females seemingly participated in other discussion threads, there was one specifically targeted towards females. This sub-section was titled 'For *Stormfront* Ladies Only' and was listed as a separate forum under the "General" category. Upon further examination, the ladies only forum contained 227 discussion threads.

A content analysis was conducted on the discussion threads in the ladies only forum by two coders in September/October 2008. The coding categories were developed after the threads were examined two times by the raters and the inter-rater reliability was assessed. Ultimately, fifteen coding categories were developed and are discussed in more detail in the following section.

RESULTS

The fifteen coding categories created from the discussion threads are noted in Table 1.

Table 1: *Frequencies and Percentages for Thread Categories (n = 227)*

Thread Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
White Nationalism	32	14.1
Men	28	12.3
Women's Issues	27	11.9
Motherhood/Caregiving	21	9.3
Advice-General & Seeking	21	9.3
Health	19	8.4
Beauty & Fashion	19	8.4
Hobbies	17	7.5
Violence	10	4.4
Values & Traditions	10	4.4
Friendships	9	4.0
Politics	5	2.2
Food	3	1.3
Holidays	3	1.3
News/Events	3	1.3
Total	**227**	**100.0**

The five categories with the most discussion were 'White Nationalism,' 'Men,' 'Women's Issues,' 'Motherhood/Caregiving,' and 'Advice-General & Seeking.' Since the website forum is a white nationalist community, it makes sense that the majority of posts in the discussion dealt with this topic. 'White Nationalism' included all of the threads directly related to recruiting or retaining other white nationalists, and the expression of views directly related to the concept of white nationalism, such as "[white women with black men] are liberal feminist race traitors (See Table 2)."

Table 2: *Examples from White Nationalism Category (n = 32)*

- Thread: "Ladies: It's Time to Put Our Momentum Where Our Mouth Is"
  o Content: "If we're going to bring about our respected place in WN, our women need to take the steps necessary to do so."

- Thread: "Why Non-Whites Would Willingly Support the WN Agenda"
  o Content: "Okay, here's my logic. Most "people of color" are liberals, right? Liberals are suckers for "good causes", right? Well, then they should easily support the WN agenda. White people are an endangered species. Our natural habitat is being destroyed by the encroachment of minorities and their ghettoes. Our native cultures and languages are threatened with extinction."

- Thread: "Diversity at it's finest…."
  o Content: "It just really pees me off to see another race traitor! What happened to purity, the love for your race & just stickin' with your own kind?"

- Thread: "Race Traitor in the Family"
  o Content: "Anyways, [my step-daughter] is now 21 and recently gave birth to a half-breed. The father is a worthless spic. I can assure you the girl knows better. Her father is a staunch defender of his race and I know she was raised better than this."

- Thread: "Craziest Thing I Have Ever Seen"
  o Content: "I am amazed at my maternal instinct toward one of their (black) babies...in that second, race was not on my mind at all. All that was on my mind was 'save the baby'. That was it. What is wrong with me? Am I being too hard on myself? I am WN through and through. My beliefs haven't changed."

- Thread: "Do we need to save each other?"
  o Content: "I feel like women who cater to the black men are self-conscious about themselves, they feel like they aren't worthy enough to get themselves a wonderful white man…do I say something?"

Items also discussed in this section include the 'White Nationalist agenda,' as well as 'half-breeds' or black babies and black men.

The 'Men' category included all threads related to relationships with and opinions about men, and are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: *Examples from Men Category (n = 28)*

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- Thread: "Let's Hear Your Funniest Interactions With a Male Partner!"
  - Content: "When my hubby was my boyfriend in high school, we had a way of goofing on each other when we were leaning in towards a kiss. Sometimes, he would bug his eyes out and let loose with Goofy's famous "Arg Yarg" laugh."

- Thread: "Help in Finding a Good White Man!"
  - Content: "I'm currently in a very liberal college and have been looking for a good guy who shares my White Pride. I'm curious to know how you ladies found your boyfriends/husbands with the same qualities."

- Thread: "Assumptions about Men"
  - Content: "I have recently been instructed by a male friend of mine that, if a guy comes up and talks to me or is trying to get my attention or company in any way, then I should automatically assume he wants to get in my pants."

- Thread: "Hugh Laurie"
  - Content: "My dream guy - Dr House!"

- Thread: "Renewed Faith in Men"
  - Content: "I don't know about any of you girls - but my faith in finding a good solid white man hasn't been very strong lately. Not that I'm looking or anything - but in general its like finding a needle in a haystack - BUT my faith as been renewed - I had the pleasure of meeting the most respectful, down to earth, solid as they come white man."

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One thread was titled "WN Women to Start a Meeting/A Group" and contained the post, "I always go along well with WN men." A second thread was titled "I love white boys!" with a post that stated "I'm going to be 100% shallow and post pics of my Fav White Boys, i'm totally going by looks here and nothing else."

'Women's Issues' included threads discussing issues specifically related to the lives of women only, such as reproductive rights, birth control methods, etc (See Table 4).

Table 4: *Examples from Women's Issues Category (n = 27)*

- Thread: "Birth Control Methods for WN Women"
o Content: "I was wondering what you gals thought about birth control for WN women. What kinds are appropriate? What do you use?"

- Thread: "Hormone Imbalance and Hormone Allergy"
o Content: "I found some interesting info today that may have answered my allergy and hormone questions. I posted the details on this thread."

- Thread: "The Media and White Womens Weight Issues"
o Content: "The media seems to really shine a spotlight on white womens weight issues but when it comes to black women or latina women they seem to hold them to another standard. It seems that the media encourages beautiful white women to be anorexic and if they aren't then they are beaten up in the media."

- Thread: "There is a New Breed of Feminism"
o Content: "The following is an insightful commentary on "today's feminist". She speaks about celebrating feminine things yet still being able to be successful in the home (ie career of Mommy/House managing) or in our careers in the business world."

- Thread: "How do You Feel About Egg Donation?"
o Content: "Lately I have been seeing a lot of ads for egg donations. It is awfully tempting considering how much money you can make by giving away some of your eggs. It also sounds like a great thing to help out a white couple in need."
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One thread titled "Welcome, *Stormfront* Ladies" stated "this is a haven for our womenfolk…let us use this area for constructive purposes and some good old fashioned girl talk." An additional thread titled "LADIES, PLEASE!!" had a post stating "we finally have voice on here, and some of the men just cant stand it!"

In Table 5, the 'Motherhood/Caregiving' category includes threads relating to caring for children or elderly parents and the process of having children (i.e. pregnancy and birth).

Table 5: *Examples from Motherhood/Caregiving Category (n = 21)*

- Thread: "I Need Some Pregnancy Advice!"
o Content: "So I'm just about 13 weeks and I'm wondering what the *bleep* is going on with my body. I've lost 5 lbs so far but 90% of my clothing doesn't fit - not because of my stomach but because my legs, butt, and arms are at least 2x the size they were."

- Thread: "Maybe Maybe???"
o Content: "Anyone who has had fertilty issues or adopted feels my pain. Please pray for us to get a beautiful, healthy, perfect White baby boy or girl, even a toddler would be wonderful too!!!"

- Thread: "Handicapped Children"
  o Content: "Does anyone here have children who are disabled? What do people feel on the subject? If you were to know your child was going to be mentally disabled, would you have it?"

- Thread: "Being a Caregiver for an Elderly Parent"
  o Content: "For the past year I have been the caregiver for my elderly mother, in addition to taking care of my children and family. Lately she has taken a turn for the worst, and last week had to go to the hospital again, and is now in a nursing home for rehab only"

- Thread: "New American Mom's Expect Push Presents"
  o Content: "I'm sure these women with diamonds on every finger will learn real quick how much better it is to have a husband who will get up to see about the baby in the middle of the night than one who's got a Gold Card."

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An example of one such thread is titled "Postpartum bleeding" and includes the following posts such as "It's been two months now since our baby was born, and the bleeding still hasn't stopped yet. My doctor has given me the go-ahead to go back to doing everything I would normally do, but still…two months seems like a long time to me."

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inally, the fifth category with the most discussion posts was coded as 'Advice-General & Seeking," and included all posts giving or seeking advice that did not fall under the other categories (See Table 6). On example of this is a thread titled "Question for the Ladies," with the post asking "What face wash works the best?"

Table 6: *Examples from Advice-General & Seeking Category (n = 21)*

- Thread: "I Feel Really Down"
  o Content: "This morning I woke up feeling the most depressed I have felt in well,years. I know it's daft to dwell on the past, but I feel that I am thinking back of things I wish I had done, you know how they say you regret more the things you haven't done than the things you have."

- Thread: "Irrational fear, or something else?"
  o Content: "Okay. For some reason, every time I'm about to get on a plane, I start getting nervous. Anyone else have weird phobias? What do you do about them?"

- Thread: "Why does my heart overrule my brain?"
  o Content: "OK ladies I got one for you. Well I have been a widow for almost seven years. Well for a couple months now there has been this man who does business with my employer he comes in every day, and I am aware that he has a girlfriend one that cheats on him steals from him put him in prison for three years(the day after he was arrested she left him and

he did not here from her the whole time he was locked up)he is a close friend of my boss they have been friends for over 20 years. Well we talk all the time and I can feel a mutual attraction. The other day my boss informed me that he had left his girlfriend and he wants my phone number. He is cute attentive well ladies sexy as hell if the truth be told and my brain is saying no no no, but my heart is going pitty pat and other things are getting stirred up as well. I feel like a giddy school girl. Help me with this one y'all have solid advice come on now!"

- Thread: "Advice on House Guest Please"
o Content: "A good friend that I haven't really spoken to in almost two years shows up on my door step with her demon child. The boy is one of the main reasons I haven't spoken to her in almost two years. So, yeah they've been here for going on three weeks. I am not rich by any means. Going into the fact that supporting two more people in my home and feeding them is a hardship is putting it mildly."

- Thread: "I can't get along with others!"
o Content: "Yep, just like the title says. I have a difficult time getting along with other people. Even in the work place, I find myself getting into sniping matches with others… Is it me, do I just have this thing about me that invites this sort of thing, or is it actually a common thing, and I happen to be the one that won't turn the other cheek?

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'Health,' 'Beauty and Fashion,' 'Hobbies,' represented 56% of the 'Other' categories and examples of these threads are included in Table 7. The remaining categories included 'Violence,' 'Values and Traditions,' 'Friendships,' 'Politics,' 'Food,' 'Holidays,' and 'News/Current Events."

Table 7: *Examples from Other Categories (n = 98)*

Health (n = 19)
Thread: "Hormone Imbalance & Hormone Allergy"
Content: "I found some interesting info today that may have answered my allergy and
        hormone questions. I posted the details on this thread."

Beauty and Fashion (n = 19)
Thread: "I LOVE her makeup!"
Content: "This girl does her makeup beautifully, its so awesome!"

Hobbies (n = 17)
Thread: "Ladies, Post Your Introductions Here"
Content: "My interests are (besides activism, Stormfront Radio, and law): I am a big John
        Hughes fan, I was learning how to make jewelry"

Violence (n = 10)
Thread: "being beaten by black men…common?"
Content: "he slapped me across my face, after that, the men just kept hitting me."

Values and Traditions (n = 10)

Thread: "Traditional Small Wedding Ideas"
Content: "I was thinking of a small traditional Celtic Wedding possibly. Does anyone
have any ideas?"

Friendships (n = 9)
Thread: "WN Women to Start Meeting/A Group"
Content: "I do not have many white female friends"

Politics (n = 5)
Thread: "PARENTAL RIGHTS UNDER ATTACK BY US GOVT"
Content: "It is imperative that everyone in the US sign this petition:
http://www.parentalrights.org"

Food (n = 3)
Thread: "Good low calorie snacks any tips\ideas?"
Content: "I eat tomatoes like i would an apple and people always look at me weird lol."

Holidays (n = 3)
Thread: "Happy New Year Ladies!"
Content: "All the best for a healthy, happy and prosperous 2008!"

News/Current Events (n = 3)
Thread: "The media and white womens weight issues"
Content: "Have you ever noticed that the media seems to really shine a spotlight on white
womens weight issues but when it comes to black women or latina women they
seem to hold them to another standard."

DISCUSSION

In his study of extremist websites, Schafer (2002) noted that the role of women was "undergoing a transformation, as they become increasingly active members and supporters" (p. 77). In fact, although some of the sites "commonly portrayed men and women as having equally important (although frequently different) roles in their struggle," he noted that of the sites in his study that targeted women they revolved around "pregnancy, home schooling, and child rearing" (p. 77). From Blee's (1996, 2002) study this would highlight the 'familial' and 'social' roles, rather than the more active 'operative' role.

The findings of this study lend to support the idea that racist women are primarily using the site for questions and advice related to family and personal matters, as well as an emotional support system. For example, although the largest number of threads was on the topic of 'White Nationalism,' upon closer inspection only a couple of them focus on how racist women can support the 'White Nationalist agenda.' Although all of the threads were related to 'White Nationalism,' they tended to be more personal with women discussing 'race traitors' in the family and maternity concerns.

Providing further support for the idea that racist women are primarily concerned with familial issues, of the fifteen coding categories created only three did not overtly seem to involve family (violence, politics, and news/current events). However, upon closer inspection even the 'politics' thread involved family matters as the discussion was related to signing a petition about parenting rights in the United States. Furthermore, the 'news/current events' thread was primarily concerned with perceptions of white women's weight in the media.

None of the discussion threads observed highlighted the more active 'operative' role of racist women described by Blee (1996, 2002). The "*Stormfront* Ladies Only" section of the website is primarily a space for women to discuss "women's issues," ranging from 'how to find a good white man' to giving advice on the best beauty products. In addition, there were no threads that supported the 'social' role described by Blee where the racist women were required to "act as social facilitators of racist groups" (p. 131). The threads were not used to promote racist events or recruit women for various projects. The threads simply were a way for racist women to communicate with one another, acting more as a social networking site. Therefore, the findings of this study do not support Schafer's (2002) assertion that the role of women in extremist groups is changing.

Limitations

*S*tormfront is a public, international 'White Nationalist' forum where registered users can post discussion threads and participate in online chats with other users. For this reason, the discussion topics likely represent a wide range of views and are not limited to racist women who participate in organized group activity. Thus, Blee's (1996, 2002) observations about the women in her study may not generalize to this group. In addition, because the forum is public, it is possible that 'action items,' are not discussed openly; thus, the 'operative' role is less transparent.

CONCLUSION

Stormfront was one of the first websites used to promote racist views on the Internet. Some scholars have asserted that the role of women in racist activity seems to be changing and women are taking a more active role (Blee, 2002; Schafer, 2002). The findings of this study, however, do not support this assertion although the women who post in these forums may not be part of a larger racist organization. The primary function of the women-only discussion threads on the *Stormfront* website seems to be as a social networking device. 'White Nationalist' women participate in discussions about a variety of topics ranging from beauty products to violence by black men. Rather than promoting an 'active' role in the 'White Nationalist' movement, the threads seem to embody female-dominant concerns, such as pregnancy, child birth, and child rearing. The role of the racist women as fulfilling a 'familial' role, as described by Blee (2002), is supported by the findings of this study. Suggestions for future research include examining other means of communication by racist women, whether through blogs or online journals.

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