

Race and Online Hate: Exploring the Relationship between Race and the Likelihood of  
Exposure to Hate Material Online

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## ABSTRACT

This research examines the relationship between race and exposure to online hate material. The utilization of websites, weblogs, newsgroups, online games, radio broadcasts, online newsletters and a myriad of other online platforms has proliferated race-based hate groups in the US (Shafer 2002). According to the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), the number of hate groups has been on the rise since the 1990s and continues to gain momentum with the advent of social media (Potok 2017). Exposure to separatist ideologies has propelled these radical rightwing groups into the mainstream by way of social media platforms, as they are “the most active producers of online hate material” (Costello, Hawdon, Ratliff, and Grantham 2016: pg. 313). That dissemination of radical rightwing ideologies, such as white supremacy, racial purity and racial solidarity, exists is not enough in understanding what individuals are exposed to race-based hate ideologies in online platforms. Exposure is the key to understanding the growth of these race-based hate groups and ways of countering the efforts to disseminate radical rightwing ideologies due to its relationship to hate group emergence and persistence. More so, understanding how these groups target individuals and recruit through social networking sites can provide insight into exposure. Exposure to hate material aids groups in recruiting new members and victimizing potential targets. In the same manner, exposure to hate material is victimization of those who are exposed. In a sample collected by Costello et al. (2016a), of those exposed to hate material online

nearly half centered on race. Thus, it is tantamount that research be conducted examining the role that race plays in determining who is exposed to hate material online, and how individuals react to hate material based on race. This dissertation will examine the importance of exposure to hate. Specifically, this dissertation will analyze survey data gathered from the Online Extremism Survey using logistic regression analysis and linear regression to understand exposure to hate material online and routine activity theory.

# Race and Online Hate: Exploring the Relationship between Race and the Likelihood of Exposure to Hate Material Online

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## GENERAL AUDIENCE ABSTRACT

This dissertation examines the relationship between race and exposure to online hate material. Race-based hate groups have been using websites, weblogs, newsgroups, online games, radio broadcasts, online newsletters and other online sites to maintain a presence (Shafer 2002). According to the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), the number of hate groups has been on the rise since the 1990s and continues to grow because of social media (Potok 2017). Being exposed to belief systems differ from most others has allowed rightwing groups to become a part of the mainstream because of social media sites. These groups have been responsible for posting the most hate material online over all other types of groups (Costello, Hawdon, Ratliff, and Grantham 2016: pg. 313). It is not enough to understand that radical rightwing beliefs, such as white supremacy, racial purity and racial solidarity, exists. We must identify who is exposed to race-based hate messages in online worlds. Being able to understand who is exposed allows us to determine ways of stopping these efforts to disseminate radical rightwing ideologies. By understanding how these groups post material, and how they target people online will help us understand its relationship to hate group emergence and persistence. More so, understanding how these groups target individuals and recruit through social networking sites can provide insight into exposure. Exposure to hate material aids groups in recruiting new members and victimizing potential targets. In the same manner, exposure to hate material is victimization of those who are exposed. In a sample collected by

Costello et al. (2016a), of those exposed to hate material online nearly half centered on race. Thus, it is very important that research be conducted examining the role that race plays in determining who is exposed to hate material online, and how individuals react to hate material based on race. This dissertation will examine the importance of exposure to hate. Specifically, this dissertation will analyze survey data gathered from the Online Extremism Survey using statistical methods to understand exposure to hate material online and routine activity theory.

## DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my wonderful, supportive husband and my beautiful inquisitive children that have an insatiable desire for life. Without your steadfast love and support, Joe, this would never have been possible. Through your strength and support, my dream has finally come to fruition. It is because of your endearing love, guidance, support, and strength that we have made it to this point. It is my hope that I have and continue to make you proud. I look forward to this new chapter in our lives. For my children, Kyler, Kacyn, Kaibe, and Kynzlei, each of you have given me life and continue to inspire me to strive for more. It is because of you four that I seek growth, that I search for the good in all I do and continue to find new strength. The sacrifices that you have made so that this goal was possible are endless. I will spend the rest of my life giving those moments back to you. It is my hope that each of you will follow your dreams, have the support and love of your family and strive to be the best human that you can. Always do good to others, be who you are and dream big.

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## CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

There were 917 active hate groups in the United States in 2016 (SPLC).

According to the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC), the number of hate groups in the United States has been on the rise since the 1990s and continues to gain momentum with the advent of social media (Potok 2017). In fact, since 2000, the number of hate groups has risen by over 50 percent, peaking in 2011 (Potok 2009). This documented rise in hate groups is of concern because of the likely connection between hate groups and hate crimes. This concern is especially pronounced due to the link between race-based hate groups and race-based hate crimes.

According to the Bureau of Justice, from 2007 to 2011 an annual average of over 259,000 hate crime victimizations occurred, of those over 60 percent were race based (Sandholtz, Langton, and Planty 2013). Additionally, over 52 percent of all hate crimes reported by the FBI were anti-black, 18.2 percent were anti-white incidents, and 9.4 percent were anti-Hispanic (UCR 2015). Reports by the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) reveal a surge in the number of deaths related to hate group activity in 2015 (ADL 2016). To say that race-based hate is a prevailing problem is an understatement. Even more overwhelming is that it is estimated that 66 percent of all hate crimes go unreported to police each year (Sandholtz et al. 2013).

While hate crimes and hate groups vary in definition, their relationship is indicative of a prevailing problem with race-based hate prevalence in the US. Blazak (2001) argues the distinction between the two is “an important one.” According to Sandholtz et al. (2013: pg. 1), hate crimes are any act that is defined as “crimes that manifest evidence of prejudice based on race, gender or gender identity, religion,

disability, sexual orientation, or ethnicity.” Defining a hate group is not as simplistic and has not garnered the legal recognition that definitions of hate crimes have. Many researchers have endeavored on defining hate groups, but consensus has not been obtained (Blazak 2009). Definitions of hate groups have largely relied on subjective interpretations such as whether the activity of the group or the rhetoric has resulted in an ‘us vs. them’ alignment (Yancey 2014). The SPLC defines hate groups as named entities that hold “beliefs or practices that attack or malign an entire class of people, typically for their immutable characteristics” (splcenter.org; Yancey 2014). All hate groups explicitly identify groups they deem reprehensible and state characteristics of those who share common heritage or beliefs. At least today, most hate-based groups align with the radical right. Many right-wing groups, although not all, are race-based, such as the Aryan Brotherhood or the New Black Panther Party. The Aryan Brotherhood, a white nationalist group, utilizes a white supremacist ideology to further its agenda. Similarly, the New Black Panther Party is a black separatist group that places race at the forefront. These and other race-based hate groups depend on new membership to form additional chapters and maintain their presence.

The emergence and persistence of groups deemed hate-based are not a new phenomenon; rather hate groups have a trans-historical presence. The internet has proven to be a vital resource for the rise and persistence of hate groups. The use of internet platforms as a means for disseminating hate-based material has been steadily increasing since Stormfront.org first appeared on the world-wide web in the early 1980s (Shafer 2002). As such, the use of websites, weblogs, newsgroups, online games, radio broadcasts, online newsletters and a myriad of other online platforms has proliferated

race-based hate groups in the US (Shafer 2002). The internet has become a medium by which hate groups have been able to educate, recruit and disseminate their message (McNamee, Peterson, and Peña 2010) and has allowed them to operate with little governmental interference (Shafer 2002; see Hawdon, Oksanen and Räsänen 2016). In 2010, The Hate Directory reported over two-thousand hate-based websites, blogs, file archives, groups, and chats active on the internet (Franklin 2010).

The SPLC began tracking hate groups, their activities, and their websites in 1981 with the institution of Hatewatch and later the Hatemap (Yancey 2014). Not surprisingly, as the number of hate groups increase, exposure to separatist ideologies has also increased as these radical rightwing groups become more mainstream by way of social media platforms as they are “the most active producers of online hate material” (Costello, Hawdon, Ratliff, and Grantham 2016: pg. 313). That dissemination of extreme rightwing ideologies, such as white supremacy, racial purity, and racial solidarity, exists is not enough to understand who is exposed to race-based hate ideologies in online platforms. Yet, understanding who is exposed to this material is a crucial factor in understanding its proliferation as well as how to combat radical rightwing hate-based material.

The emergence and persistence of domestic extremist groups have long proven to be problematic. Their presence has become a prevailing part of the history of the United States. The recent uptick in hate groups and hate crimes leads to a need for a better understanding of the way these groups target new members and expose others to their material online. Hates groups, such as the Aryan Brotherhood and the New Black Panther Party, cannot persist without continued recruitment of new members. As such, groups utilize a varying degree of tactics to recruit new members, educate others about their

message, and condemn those who disagree with their beliefs (McNamee et al. 2010). In order to recruit new members, groups must expose others to their race-based hate materials. As the virtual world moves to the forefront of communication, these groups have transformed the way in which they recruit new members. It becomes necessary for these hate groups to post material online, maintain a web presence and solicit new members online (Costello et al. 2016a; Franklin 2010; McNamee et al. 2010).

Costello et al. (2016a) claim exposure can be predicted by factors that place individuals virtually proximate to material disseminated by race-based hate groups such as time spent online, number of websites visited, number of social networking sites (SNS) used, number of online associates, and victimization. Additionally, Costello et al. (2016a) argue that individual attitudes affect exposure by way of “feathering, flocking, and victimization” such that our individual attitudes dictate our online habits that, in turn influence our exposure to certain material. Since exposure is key to understanding the growth of race-based hate groups and ways of countering dissemination of extreme rightwing ideologies (see, for example, Hawdon 2012), understanding how these groups target individuals and recruit through social networking sites can provide insight into exposure. Costello et al. (2016a) argue that, of those exposed to hate material online nearly half targeted groups based on race. Thus, it is tantamount that research be conducted examining the role that race plays in determining who is exposed to hate material online, as well as how individuals react to hate material based on race.

This dissertation furthers our understanding of the role race plays in exposure to hate material online. The central variable of study is race. Race has played a defining role throughout the history of the United States, and race continues to be the prevailing

problem facing the nation (Omi and Winant 2014). Race divides, incites, provokes, denies, and otherwise places some groups in the periphery of American society. Race has taken the blame for slavery, disenfranchisement, segregation, discrimination, mass incarceration, poverty and marginalization. Race plays a significant role in the everyday lives of all people. Race is also used as a tool for hate ideology and many hate groups claim race as the foundation of their ideology. The purpose of this dissertation is to examine the role that race plays in the persistence of race-based hate groups in the US. Specifically, this study will examine exposure to hate material online using a sample of Americans ages 15 to 35. A series of logistic and linear regression models are utilized to analyze exposure to hate material online and how this varies by race. This research answers the following research questions:

R1: Does an individual's race directly influence whether they are exposed to hate material online?

R2: Does race affect the routine activities that are correlated with exposure?

This dissertation consists of five chapters, each with a specific task. Chapter One is organized to provide a brief introduction to hate crime, hate groups, and an overview of the dissertation. Chapter Two will introduce Routine Activity Theory, discuss the literature on RAT and online exposure, introduce the variables of RAT and discuss the relationship between race and the RAT variables. Chapter Three will present the research questions, data, and operationalization of key concepts. Chapter Four will report the results and findings. Finally, Chapter Five will include a discussion of the findings, consider the limitations of the research, and draw conclusions from the research.

## CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The rise in hate group activity and hate crimes is well documented (ADL 2016; Potok 2009; Potok 2017; Sandholtz et al. 2013; UCR 2015). In addition, over half of those who are exposed to online hate material see materials that target groups based on their race or ethnicity (Costello et al. 2016a). Understanding exposure is tantamount as researchers look for ways of predicting the likelihood of exposure. Costello et al. (2016a) argues that the individual plays a role in their own victimization by way of “feathering and flocking.” According to Costello et al. (2016a), an individual’s attitude influences their habits, both online and offline, and this in turn influences the likelihood of exposure to hate material online. It is important to understand how our routine activities influence exposure to hate material online.

The internet has transformed our ability to communicate with others, and one way that it has is by offering an important medium for hate groups to disseminate their message to others (Duffy 2003; Costello et al. 2016a; Gerstenfeld, Grant and Chiang 2003; Hawdon, Oksanen, and Räsänen 2015; Shafer 2002). Hate groups have capitalized on the relative ease of ICT and have been at the forefront of its use to distribute hate rhetoric (Duffy 2003; Costello et al. 2016a; Hawdon, Oksanen, and Räsänen 2015; Shafer 2002). Hate groups consistently produce hate material and distribute that material across a wide-array of social networking sites (SNS) and online platforms (Costello et al. 2016a; Franklin 2010; Gerstenfeld et al. 2003; McNamee et al. 2010; Oksanen, Hawdon, Holkeri, Näsi, and Räsänen 2014). Until recently, research that explores exposure to hate material online was limited (Costello et al. 2016a; Costello, Hawdon and Ratliff 2016; Hawdon et al. 2015), and this chapter aims to address this relative lack of research.

The limited research on exposure to hate material online has concentrated on using a routine activity approach to explain proximity to exposure and victimization (Costello et al. 2016a; Costello et al. 2016b; Hawdon, Oksanen, and Räsänen 2014; Hawdon et al. 2016; Räsänen, Hawdon, Holkeri, Keipi, Näsi, and Oksanen 2016). Routine activity theory (RAT) has proved to be a useful theory in the explanation of exposure to hate material online. The following is a thorough explication of routine activity theory and its application in online platforms.

### ***Routine Activity Theory***

The ways that individuals encounter hate material online is a crucial factor in understanding the emergence and persistence of hate groups. More importantly, routine activity theory can help explain this occurrence. Just as individuals have established routines offline, they as well have established routines online (Räsänen et al. 2016). The websites they visit, the email providers they use, and the social networking sites they frequent all establish a pattern of behavior online that enables others to predict behaviors and establish patterns of use (Räsänen et al. 2016). Cohen and Felson's (1979) routine activity theory examines the relationship between those established patterns and the risk of victimization and this perspective has been applied to the online world (see Eck & Clarke 2003; Reyns et al. 2011). Due to this factor, routine activity theory proves useful in the application of online activities and victimization.

Cohen and Felson (1979) introduced the routine activity concept to understand crime occurrences. Specifically, they discuss three important components that act as pre-requisites to crime: *motivated offenders*, *suitable targets*, and *lack of suitable guardians* (Cohen and Felson 1979). Cohen and Felson (1979) argue that when all three components

(motivated offender, suitable target, and lack of guardian) experience a spatiotemporal convergence then, appropriately, crime occurs. Likewise, they argue that the structure of routine activities increases the likelihood that this convergence will occur. Without this convergence, according to Cohen and Felson (1979), crime is not likely and victimization does not result. In addition, the risk of victimization directly and dramatically varies among the locations and circumstances or the social distance between the victim and offender. Overall, Cohen and Felson (1979) argue that crime is likely unless we drastically change our routine activities to reduce the risk of victimization by altering the spatiotemporal convergence of the three components of routine activity theory. The three basic components, target suitability, motivated offenders, and lack of capable guardians, of routine activity theory as they apply to this research are discussed below.

Before the theory can be discussed further, two important contentions of routine activity theory should be discussed. First, Cohen and Felson (1979) argue that crime rates in the 'real' world will increase when there is a convergence in time and space of *motivated offenders, suitable targets, and lack of capable guardians*, but some research has questioned the applicability of RAT to online environments (e.g. Yar 2005). Despite the concern of Yar and others, a myriad of studies exist that utilize a RAT approach to the virtual world (see, for example Holt and Bossler 2008; Holt and Bossler 2009; Leukfeldt 2014; Helweg-Larsen et al. 2012; Livingstone and Helsper 2010; Marcum 2008; Marcum, Higgins, and Ricketts 2010; Ngo and Paternoster 2011; Navarro and Jasinski 2012). Researchers have discovered that the spatiotemporal convergence does occur in the online world. For example, it is not necessary that two users access the internet at simultaneous times but rather this convergence can occur asynchronously. An individual

can post material online at any given time and others can access that material days, weeks or even months later, at which time victimization occurs. Therefore, RAT proves useful in the application to the virtual world.

Second, exposure to hate material online does not always result in victimization. Some individuals may actively seek out hate material, while others may arrive at the material by accident (Räsänen et al. 2016; Gerstenfeld et al. 2003; McNamee et al. 2010). Individuals who actively search for material deemed hate-based may not feel victimized in the “traditional sense of the word” as noted by Costello et al. (2016a; pg. 312). However, some research argues that repeated or long-term exposure to hate material can be linked to violence (FBI 2011), lead to mental health issues (Tynes 2006), impact social trust (Näsi et al. 2015), and lead to adoption of extremist beliefs across generations (Tynes 2006). As well, individuals who accidentally discover material deemed hate-based may or may not feel victimized by the material (Costello et al. 2016a; Gerstenfeld et al. 2003; McNamee et al. 2010). Therefore, victimization appears to be a relative concept in terms of exposure to hate material online. Some individuals, in some contexts may define exposure to hate material online as a victimizing experience while others may not. At the same time, research notes a link between perceived victimization and actual victimization, citing psychological affects resulting from the exposure (Costello et al. 2016a; FBI 2011; Gerstenfeld et al. 2003; Leets and Giles 1997; McNamee et al. 2010; Näsi et al. 2015; Tynes 2006). Noting this, we can review the specifics of the theory.

### *Motivated Offenders*

Cohen and Felson (1979) discuss proximity to motivated offenders to understand victimization. Importantly, from their research they found that people who spent more

time away from home experienced higher rates of victimization (Cohen and Felson 1979). Yet, ironically, unemployed individuals have higher rates of victimization. From their research on routine activity, illegitimate and legitimate behaviors have an exchange relationship that influences crime (Cohen and Felson 1979). Proximity to motivated offenders is a significant factor in understanding victimization online. More specifically, when individuals become proximate to offensive material online then the likelihood of victimization can increase. Understanding how online patterns of behavior place individuals virtually proximate to offending is important for reducing victimization. As such, understanding what behaviors place individuals virtually proximate to hate material offers clues to exposure. According to Reyns and his associates (2011) and Oksanen and his associates (2014), online proximity to motivated offenders is different from physical proximity. Individuals do not need to even access the internet at the same time, the spatiotemporal requirement of RAT is unnecessary in the online world.

Understanding victimization as it relates to proximity to motivated offenders can best be explored by looking at the online habits of those victimized online. Henson, Reyns and Fischer (2011) argue that individuals who practice risky behaviors on SNS have higher rates of victimization than those who do not. These risky behaviors include such things as opening multiple accounts on different SNS platforms, opening emails from unknown senders and friending strangers (Henson et al. 2011). However, Ngo and Paternoster (2011) find an inverse relationship between victimization and opening emails from strangers or clicking links in email attachments. Nevertheless, there appears to be a relationship with online behaviors and victimization because some behaviors bring one into virtual proximity with motivated offenders. For example, Hawdon, Costello, Ratliff,

Hall and Middleton (2017) also report that individuals who confide in others online and trust others they met online increased the likelihood of victimization.

There is also a link between social networking site (SNS) use and victimization, where individuals who use SNS are five times more likely to become a victim (Costello et al. 2016b). Moreover, Oksanen and Keipi (2013) report that individuals who spend more time in online communities are almost four times more likely to be victimized than are those who spend less time. Yet, Räsänen et al. (2016) claim that the important factor in determining proximity to motivated offenders to predict victimization is more reliant on the type of activity the individual is taking part in rather than merely being online. For example, the type of risky behaviors an individual is taking part in online determines the type and likelihood of victimization ranging from fraud (Leukfeldt 2014), to harassment (van Wilsem 2013), to exposure to hate material (Costello et al. 2016a; Costello et al. 2016b; Räsänen et al. 2016). Thus, the relationship between risky online behaviors and victimization is well documented among the research on proximity to motivated offenders online (Costello et al. 2016a; Holt and Bossler 2009; Henson et al. 2011; Oksanen and Keipi 2013; Räsänen et al. 2016). As well, research supports the claim that virtual proximity to offenders increases the likelihood of victimization and can even predict the type of victimization based on routine activities online.

### *Target Suitability*

As an advancement of lifestyle-exposure theory, Hindelang, Gottfredson, and Garofalo (1978) introduced the concept of suitable target to understand why some individuals are victimized and others not. Target suitability refers to an object or person that is perceived to fulfill the needs of an offender (Cohen and Felson 1979; Felson and

Clarke 1998; Hindelang et al. 1978). Hindelang et al. (1978) explicate four key factors of target suitability, often referred to by the acronym VIVA. Target suitability is determined by *value, inertia, visibility, and access*. Value refers to the actual or attached value placed on the object or person. Without value, a target may not be perceived as suitable. Value depends on the motive and the aim, in some cases some individuals are more or less valuable while at other times not. For example, a motivated offender may perceive an individual who frequently shops on high-end websites as being more valuable than those who shop at infrequent intervals or at supermarket websites. Individuals who shop more frequently and at stores that are more expensive are perceived to have more money and therefore are more valuable to the motivated offender. Inertia involves resistance to the offender; specifically it is a perceived resistance often followed by a real resistance. Inertia refers to the ability of the target to avoid or otherwise prevent the victimization. This could include target-hardening software such as virus protection. Visibility is the social distance between the offender and the potential victim. For example, individuals who utilize many social networking sites online become more visible to motivated offenders. Access to the target by the offender is the relative accessibility, whether or not the offender can access the target or not. This could include whether or not an offender can access confidential information online in an effort to defraud. Value, inertia, visibility and access are the criteria used to assess target suitability.

Target suitability relates to the vulnerability of the individual to be victimized (Cohen and Felson 1979). According to this research, this would identify the individual exposed to hate material online. Who is exposed and what patterns emerge regarding those individuals are key factors for understanding target suitability. As such, individuals

having more *value* in terms of exposure to hate material online include those who are young (Räsänen et al. 2016) and more impressionable (Lee and Leets 2002). Younger individuals may be more risky in their online behaviors and more easily swayed by information due to inexperience or lack of knowledge. In addition, individuals who frequent hate sites online or participate in deviant online behavior may be a more suitable target because they are not actively trying to prevent exposure to hate material (Räsänen et al. 2016). This refers to *inertia*, where a more suitable target will not seek ways to prevent victimization. Visibility refers to being seen by motivated offenders. Individuals who utilize many social networking sites and frequently spend time on those sites increase their *visibility* to motivated offenders and become a more suitable target (Oksanen et al. 2014). Lastly, what makes a suitable target also includes whether or not a motivated offender has *access* to expose them to hate material. This can include the ability to post material on social networking sites, or other forms of online communication platforms. The VIVA criteria can help determine what makes a suitable target for exposure to hate material online.

Finkelhor and Asdigian (1996) expanded on the suitable target to understand victimization further. More specifically, Finkelhor and Asdigian (1996) posit that individual characteristics can influence their vulnerability to victimization. They termed this occurrence target congruence (Finkelhor and Asdigian 1996). Target congruence, according to Finkelhor and Asdigian (1996: pg. 6), occurs when a target meets the “needs, motives, or reactivities of offenders.” Target suitability is not only a condition of environmental factors but also a result of individual characteristics or attributes (Finkelhor and Asdigian 1996). These individual characteristics or attributes, such as

race, either “expose or protect individuals from victimization” (Finkelhor and Asdigian 1996: pg. 6). As a process, target congruence can increase the risk of victimization in one or more ways. Finkelhor and Asdigian (1996) have identified three components that influence target congruence: *target vulnerability*, *target gratifiability* and *target antagonism*. All three components focus on victim characteristics; however, each focuses on a different way in which those characteristics increase target suitability. Target vulnerability refers to the specific characteristics of the target that “compromises the potential victims capacity to resist or deter victimization” thus making it more difficult for the potential victim to prevent the victimization (Finkelhor and Asdigian 1996: pg. 6). These characteristics, according to Finkelhor and Asdigian (1996), include physical size or mental capacity. Target gratifiability includes the characteristics that increase the risk of victimization due to “some quality, possession, skill, or attribute that an offender wants to obtain, use, have access to or manipulate” (Finkelhor and Asdigian 1996: pg. 6). These characteristics would vary based on the motive and aim of the offender such as being female in the case of a sexually based attack. Target antagonism refers to the characteristics of the potential victim that “arouse the anger, jealousy, or destructive impulses of the offender” and increase the risk of victimization of the target (Finkelhor and Asdigian 1996: pg. 6). Some examples would be racial characteristics or being gay. These components are dependent on the potential offenders’ motive and aim and vary according to the potential victims’ status.

Understanding what makes a suitable target aids in our understanding of who is exposed to hate material online. As such, it becomes important to explore the relationship between exposure to hate material online and demographics as it provides a link to target

suitability. Victim characteristics are a major aspect of target suitability and assessing target suitability can be complicated by the anonymity provided by the virtual world. According to Holt and Bossler (2009), by simply accessing the internet an individual can become a suitable target. At the same time, research on demographics and online victimization offer conflicting results (Costello et al. 2016b). Some studies find that demographics are not a predictive factor (Costello et al. 2016b; Holt and Bossler 2009; Räsänen et al. 2016) while others find some relationship between exposure to hate material online, and demographic indicators (Näsi, Räsänen, Oksanen, Hawdon, Keipi, Holkeri 2015). Specifically, younger males have higher rates of victimization (Näsi et al. 2015). Education also has a direct relationship with victimization (Hawdon et al. 2017).

Noting this, exploring target suitability for exposure to hate material online can also be accomplished using target congruence. Thus, all three components of target congruence will be explored in terms of exposure to hate material online. Understanding how individual demographics influence target suitability is important. As noted by Finkelhor and Asdigian (1996), individuals who are more vulnerable targets can be likened to those who are more impressionable, such as younger individuals (Lee and Leets 2002; Räsänen et al. 2016). For example, individuals who are younger are often more influenced or swayed by opposing messages, which increases the risk of exposure to hate material. Therefore, target vulnerability should decrease with age. As well, individuals who are more gratifiable targets could include those individuals who possess attributes, such as being of the same race as the motivated offender, that fulfill the needs of group seeking new members (McNamee et al. 2003). For example, individuals of the same racial group as the motivated offender present as a gratifiable target during

recruitment to join or mobilize chapters. Therefore, it is important to explore target gratifiability through an examination of the individuals who deliberately view hate material online and victimization. Target gratifiability should decrease among those who deliberately view hate material online. Lastly, individuals who possess individual characteristics similar to those from the target list of the motivated offender, such as minorities; create an antagonist relationship between themselves and the offender seeking to expose others to hate material. For example, members of the Aryan Brotherhood who encounter blacks online could become angry and post hate material in order to fulfill their destructive impulses just as members of the New Black Panther Party encountering whites online may do the same. Therefore, target antagonism should decrease among those who post hate material online. Target congruence offers some insight into target suitability for exposure to hate material online.

Other researchers have explored the suitable target component of RAT in online environments to determine patterns of victimization. Specifically, Räsänen et al. (2016) argue that prior victimization, visiting hate producing sites, and worrying about victimization online all increase target suitability and the likelihood of victimization. Thus, the relationship between target suitability and victimization online has been well documented (Costello et al. 2016a; Costello et al. 2016b; Holt and Bossler 2009; Näsi et al. 2015; Räsänen et al. 2016). The appropriate measures for target suitability as it relates to this study will be discussed in detail in Chapter 3.

#### *Lack of a Capable Guardian*

Vast amounts of research exist that explores the relationship between the capable guardian and victimization. More so, this research indicates that guardianship is

operationalized in varying ways based on the context of the victimization (Choi 2008; Hollis, Felson and Welsh 2013; Holt and Bossler 2009; Ngo and Paternoster 2011; Reynolds, Henson, and Fisher 2016). The capable guardian, as conceptualized by Cohen and Felson (1979), refers to target hardening, not social control, which acts as a mechanism to prevent the motivated offender from accessing the suitable target. This occurs through door locks, security systems or the presence of others. However, researchers have utilized a varying degree of definitions for the capable guardian offline and online (Hollis et al. 2013).

The virtual world proves difficult in assessing guardianship. In particular, most research reveals that guardianship does not influence victimization online (Bossler and Holt 2009; Costello et al. 2016a; Marcum et al. 2010; Räsänen et al. 2016). Hollis et al. (2013) argue the capable guardian is an individual that by her or his mere presence deters a motivated offender from acting. However, other researchers focus on the activities individuals take part in online; claiming that individuals who associate with deviant others online are at an increased risk of victimization (Reynolds, Henson and Fischer 2015). Bossler and Holt (2009) claim online guardianship can be measured by target hardening, e.g. firewall or virus protection. As well, some researchers have operationalized the capable guardian as the living arrangements of the individual victimized; where those who live with their parents are at an increased risk of victimization (Räsänen et al. 2016; Reynolds et al. 2015). Individuals who act as a guardian would include parents seeking to protect and control the online activities of their children. According to Reynolds et al. (2015), living with parents actually increases victimization and therefore proves to be an ineffective measure of guardianship.

It becomes important to explore the relationship between guardianship and exposure to hate material online. Research that examines exposure to hate material online and guardianship is limited. However, the research that does exist utilizes online and offline attachments as measures of guardianship. Confiding in others strictly online, forming attachments to an online community, and trusting others met only online have been used to construct an online attachment measure for guardianship (Costello et al. 2016b; Räsänen et al. 2016). Costello et al. (2016b) claim that online attachments are insignificant measures of guardianship. Further, Costello et al. (2016b) uses closeness to family and friends to measure offline attachments. Where individuals who feel close to their friends and family have strong offline attachments and this closeness acts as a form of guardianship (Costello et al. 2016b). However, both measures were insignificant and not effective measures for guardianship (Costello et al. 2016b).

Hawdon et al. (2017) argue that guardianship is also influenced by conflict management styles such as self-help and toleration. For example, individuals who exhibit self-help when they are exposed to hate material often tell others to stop being mean or offensive or they defend the person being targets (Hawdon et al. 2017). Individuals who exhibit toleration as a conflict management style would ignore the person who is being mean and offensive (Hawdon et al. 2017). Despite the extensive research of the capable guardian in online environments, there still exists an ambiguity in the best way to operationalize the concept in the online world (Räsänen et al. 2016).

#### *Routine Online Activities*

Research that examines the types of activities individuals participate in online offers insight into victimization. Similar to offline victimization, an examination of the

similarities in these online activities aids in our understanding of who is victimized. Costello et al. (2016a) argues that these patterns of online activities reveal that some “feathering and flocking” is related to victimization. For example, individuals who distrust the government will often seek out like-minded others, termed *flocking* (Costello et al. 2016a). Once the individual becomes associated with others who have similar ideas, they will then be exposed to their beliefs and values, what social learning theorist call *feathering* (Costello et al. 2016a). Due to this exposure, an internalization of these beliefs and values occurs which leads to an adoption of a similar ideology (Costello et al. 2016a). According to Costello et al. (2016a), this leads to an increased risk of exposure to online hate material. The increased risk of exposure results from what is termed the “filter bubble,” or the process by which the information that individuals view has been selected for them based on prior internet searches or website visits (Pariser 2011). Cybertechnology allows news organizations, search engines, and social networking sites to collect information from users, such as search history or post history, to tailor the information presented to them (Pariser 2011). As time goes by, the algorithms used become more sophisticated and the information an individual views begins to polarize such that they are presented with information that most closely aligns with their attitudes and beliefs (Costello et al. 2016a; Pariser 2011). As such, the likelihood of exposure to hate material either decreases or increases based on whether or not an individual actively seeks out hate material (Costello et al. 2016a).

Like in the offline world, some elements of feathering and flocking occur (Costello et al. 2016a). The beliefs and values that individuals hold often dictate their behaviors in such a way that it determines every element of their social and psychological

behaviors. Therefore, individual behaviors are dictated by these beliefs and values so much so that it determines the SNS sites they frequent, the websites they visit, and the shopping habits they espouse online. Research that examines the feathering and flocking of individuals will aid in understanding exposure to online hate material and the role that race plays in the ideology of hate groups.

### ***Racial Implications***

Race has been a defining factor in American history. Race is obviously a well-studied topic. Specifically, studies of group threat, color-blind narratives, and whiteness have proliferated (Blalock 1967; Bonilla-Silva 2001; Costello et al. 2016a). Despite this research concerning interactions among individuals from different racial groups, few studies exist that analyze race and exposure to hate material online. Yet, there is reason to believe that race would pattern exposure to hate material. For example, Costello et al. (2016a) state that race-related content accounts for forty-five percent of those individuals exposed to hate material online. The examination of exposure to hate material pertaining to race provides a look into who is exposed to hate material online. Exposure to race-related hate material online allows for a more complete understanding of the role that race plays in the emergence and persistence of hate groups.

In an examination of race and exposure to hate material online, Costello et al. (2016a) find interesting results. More specifically, Blacks and Asians were less likely to be exposed to hate material online while Whites and Hispanics reveal similar patterns of exposure (Costello et al. 2016a). For example, when “White” is used as the reference category, there is relative similarity between Whites and Hispanics; yet, when the reference category is changed to “Blacks,” Hispanics have an increased likelihood of

being exposed to hate material online. Patterns of association and attitudes can account for online routines and thus affect exposure to hate material online. This provides an important look into the role that race plays in who is exposed to hate material online and how that connects to the emergence and persistence of hate groups. Bonilla-Silva (2002) argues that individuals who hold an “honorary white” title, such as light-skinned Hispanics and Asians, benefit from this title and become socialized towards whiteness. However, Costello et al. (2016a) assert that the results do not support this theorization as they note the rise in anti-immigrant rhetoric in the mainstream destabilizes their “honorary white” title (Costello et al. 2016a). Therefore, this leads to an examination of the role of race as theorized by group threat theory.

Blalock (1967) introduced group threat theory and focuses on racial threat. Three types of threat were put forth to explain discriminatory social control practices (Dollar 2014). However, the racial threat approach has been extended to a vast array of topics, including victimization. Racial threat identifies three types of threat: economic, political and symbolic (Dollar 2014). Largely, the research has utilized threat as a perceived concept that is operationalized as proportion of the minority population relative to the majority group population, i.e. white population (Blalock 1967; Dollar 2014; King and Wheelock 2007). In addition, economic threat refers to instances where the majority group population believes that the minority group is taking their jobs, destabilizing the job market or deflating wages (Dollar 2014). Political threat occurs when whites believe they are losing political power, such as when minorities hold political offices at higher proportions or when political policies grant additional benefits or rights to minority groups (Dollar 2014). Lastly, symbolic threat takes place when whites believe that

minorities should be regarded as the problem behind crime and deviant behavior, such as only seeing black and brown faces in relation to criminal and deviant behaviors (Dollar 2014).

Race-motivated violence has been prominent throughout the history of the United States (Mulholland 2013). This violence is often fueled by racial bias that is projected onto racial minority groups. According to Akers (1977), individuals who hold prejudicial beliefs often seek out like-minded others who then act as a mechanism of reinforcement for their beliefs. This leads to an internalization and further adoption of said bias (Akers 1977). Thus, exposure may act as a precursor to violence and can lead to the emergence of or persistence of hate groups. More specifically, race can help determine who is a suitable target for exposure, and can help explain how individuals become virtually proximate to motivated offenders by way of feathering and flocking. Therefore, race may play a crucial role in predicting exposure to hate material online and thus aid in our understanding of the emergence and persistence of hate groups. To understand the relationship between race and exposure to hate material online it is important to explore the components of RAT with a specific focus on race.

#### *Race and Proximity*

According to Costello et al. (2016a), our individual attitudes help pattern our online behaviors. Our online behaviors include frequenting certain websites, shopping at certain online stores, utilizing certain email services, and using certain social networking sites. Which sites we use is dependent on our individual attitudes. For example, if an individual enjoys a certain music genre, then they will frequent music sharing sites that offer that specific genre, just as individuals who participate in deviant behaviors will

frequent sites that offer them the ability to explore that interest. Our attitudes are influenced by our characteristics, such as race, gender and class, which in turn affect our online behaviors. For example, according to Jones, Johnson-Yale, Millermaier, and Pérez (2009) despite equal rates of ICT use by gender, women spend more time on communicative sites than men. Additionally, men spend more time online for entertainment purposes (Jones et al 2009). As well, Jones et al. (2009) report whites being more likely to use the internet for communicative purposes than are blacks and Hispanics. Therefore, it makes sense that Costello et al. (2016a) claim that whites are more likely than blacks to be exposed to hate material online where SNS, such as Facebook, are the sites where most individuals report being exposed. Jones et al. (2009) also report that whites are more likely than blacks to own a computer, use a computer for entertainment purposes, and first learn to use a computer at home even after controlling for income. As such, race patterns computer use and likely exposure to hate material online. This research theorizes that whites are more likely to use SNS and computers, and are therefore more likely to be exposed to hate material online. In addition, groups that hold “honorary white” status (see Bonilla-Silva 2002), such as Hispanics and Asians, would also be more likely to be exposed to hate material.

From the research, it becomes evident that our individual characteristics affect our online behaviors, which in turn may either increase or decrease an individuals’ likelihood of exposure to motivated offenders. How proximate an individual is to motivated offenders is dependent on certain characteristics such as race. Specifically, if an individual holds discriminatory racial attitudes and frequents sites that reinforce those attitudes, then their online behaviors place them virtually proximate to hate material.

Thus, an individual's likelihood of exposure to hate material online will increase due to their online activities.

That online behaviors increase or decrease proximity to motivated offenders is well documented (Costello et al. 2016a; Costello et al. 2016b; Hawdon et al. 2017; Henson et al. 2011; Leukfeldt 2014; Ngo and Paternoster 2011; Oksanen and Keipi 2013; Räsänen et al. 2016; van Wilsem 2013). As well, individual characteristics affect proximity to motivated offenders by placing some individuals, due to certain characteristics, proximate to motivated offenders online. Therefore, race serves as an indicator used to predict exposure to online material and aids in understanding the likelihood of exposure to hate material online. More specifically, variables used to predict proximity to motivated offenders online in prior research prove useful. Time spent online, and social networking site use (Costello et al. 2016b) are used as proxy measures of proximity to motivated offenders (Costello et al. 2016a; Holt and Bossler 2009; Henson et al. 2011; Oksanen and Keipi 2013; Räsänen et al. 2016). To understand the role that race plays in exposure to hate material it is important to explore these in relation to race.

#### *Race and Target Suitability*

Certain characteristics, such as race, class and gender, can offer insight into the ways in which motivated offenders target victims online. As well, understanding who is exposed and to what type of material a target is exposed to online prove important. Finkelhor and Asdigian (1996) argue that when an individual fulfils the needs of the motivated offender, they become a suitable target for that offender. They postulate that individual characteristics are the primary point of focus for target suitability such that a person's race can increase or decrease the likelihood of exposure. Individuals who

express views online or confront others online can increase target suitability (Hawdon et al. 2017). This occurs by way of visibility and antagonism. When individuals make their presence known to others in the virtual world, it opens the opportunity to be victimized. Even more, when individuals confront others online, parts of their identity are revealed, thereby increasing the likelihood that the motivated offender will use that information to victimize the individual in some way through virtual means.

As discussed previously, race may pattern target suitability and exposure to hate material online. According to Finkelhor and Asdigian (1996), individual characteristics determine target suitability in three important ways and, in doing so, pattern victimization. Target vulnerability, target gratifiability and target antagonism all influence target congruence and the likelihood of exposure to hate material online. Target vulnerability relates to individual characteristics that compromise the targets ability to resist victimization (Finkelhor and Asdigian 1996). As such, some racial groups may be more or less vulnerable targets for a number of reasons.

One such mechanism that can relate race to vulnerability can be varying levels of social trust. According to Näsi et al. (2015), levels of trust have important implications for exposure to hate material. Despite this, more research is needed that furthers our understanding of race and exposure to hate material online by examining the role that race plays in social trust. Salmi, Smolej, Kivivuori (2007) argue that there is a link between trust and exposure to violence. More specifically, individuals who frequently view crime television, news related to violence, and reality crime shows have lower levels of trust (Salmi et al. 2007). This research assumes that individuals who experience higher rates of exposure to violence and crime, such as those who live in crime-prone

areas or encounter the criminal justice system at higher rates, will have lower levels of generalized trust. This assumption stems from our understanding of racial neighborhood segregation, and violent crime. It is well documented that blacks are more likely to be exposed to violent crime and to come into contact with the criminal justice system (Kuhl, Krivo and Peterson 2009; Morenoff and Sampson 1997). Therefore, it is argued that some racial groups may be exposed to violence at higher levels and would have lower levels of trust. It has been documented that contact with the criminal justice system and news related to violence are disproportionality experienced by some racial groups over others, such as blacks. As such, individuals with lower levels of trust, i.e. blacks, may be more likely to be exposed to hate material. Levels of trust can influence target vulnerability where individuals who trust others in general or those met only online, i.e. whites, may report decreased exposure to hate material online. Not trusting others, whether online or offline, may increase vulnerability and the likelihood of victimization. Therefore, this research argues that trust, by influencing target vulnerability, increases exposure to hate material online. This occurs because as trust levels decrease, vulnerability increases. Therefore, whites, who trust others met online or people in general, are less likely to be exposed to hate material online, while blacks may be more likely to be exposed to hate material online because they have lower levels of trust.

In addition, target gratifiability relates to individual characteristics that increase risk by possessing some attribute that the offender seeks to manipulate (Finkelhor and Asdigian 1996). Little research exists that examines target gratifiability and exposure to hate material online. As such, this research expands on target suitability by exploring what makes a target gratifiable. Specifically, some research examining risk-taking

behaviors, well-being and self-esteem in relation to exposure to hate material does exist (Oksanen et al. 2015; Räsänen et al. 2016). This dissertation will investigate aspects of target gratifiability by examining risk-taking behaviors and self-esteem. The assumption can be made that individuals who enjoy taking risks would be targets that are more gratifiable because they can be easily manipulated into going along with the motivated offender. This risk-taking behavior may increase the likelihood of exposure to hate material because individuals who enjoy taking risks may place themselves in dangerous situations online (Hawdon et al. 2014; Slater 2003). In addition, risk-taking behaviors may vary along racial lines and add to our understanding of exposure to hate material online. Measures of self-esteem may also offer insight into exposure via its influence on target gratifiability. For example, individuals with lower levels of self-esteem may be more impressionable and therefore more gratifiable targets because the amount of victimization may be heightened and more pleasurable for the motivated offender. Individuals who hold negative self-images may seek out others more readily and be more susceptible to go along with others and when victimized may internalize that victimization and respond more than those with higher levels of self-esteem, thus garnering a reaction that is more rewarding for the offender. Despite widely accepted beliefs regarding race and levels of self-esteem, blacks generally hold higher levels of self-esteem than do whites (Rosenberg and Simmons 1971). Gray-Little and Hafdahl (2000) argue that blacks have higher levels of self-esteem when compared with whites. Thus, whites may have higher levels of exposure because they have lower levels of self-esteem and therefore would make more gratifiable targets.

Finally, race may have a direct effect on target gratifiability. That is some races may be seen as more gratifying victims than other races. According to racial threat theory, blacks would be considered a threat (economic, political or symbolic) and therefore be a more gratifiable target for white supremacist hate groups because it would enact far more victimization on the vary group they seek to victimize. Since white supremacist based hate groups are the most prevalent online today, we can therefore predict that blacks will be targets of hate more frequently than will whites. This research examines risk-taking behaviors and self-esteem to examine the racial variations of target gratifiability.

Target antagonism, according to Finkelhor and Asdigian (1996), refers to individuals who possess characteristics that evoke or incite anger in the motivated offender. Research examining exposure to hate material online uses prior online and offline victimization (Räsänen et al. 2016), and conflict management styles (Hawdon et al. 2017) as factors that influence target antagonism. Specifically, individuals who enact social control online may also aid in our understanding of target antagonism. Individuals who tell others to stop or defend others when people are being mean or offensive online increase their risk of being victimized (Hawdon et al. 2017). This increased risk of victimization is a result of target antagonism. That is, when individuals enact self-help, they risk irritating potential offenders and therefore increase their likelihood of victimization (Hawdon et al. 2017). As noted by Hawdon et al. (2017), whites are more likely to engage in self-help by telling others to stop and defending others when people are being mean or offensive online. Therefore, this research assumes that because whites enact self-help online more often than do others, they may be more likely to be exposed

to hate material online. However, it should be noted that blacks and other minorities might be at an increased risk of victimization if their racial identity is made visible or known to the motivated offenders online. Blacks and other minorities would likely antagonize white supremacist hate groups by their mere presence rather than through the form of self-help. Despite this, the anonymity of the online world often obscures racial identities and thus changes the patterns of victimization. As such, self-help is seen as reflective of the concept of target antagonism.

Lastly, taking into account individual characteristics to understand exposure aids in our understanding of what makes a suitable target and therefore allows for the prediction of victimization. According to Costello et al. (2016a), almost half of all individuals exposed to hate material online report that material as being race-based hate material. It is important to understand whether individual characteristics pattern victimization online. More specifically, research examining whether or not an individual's race influences target suitability and in what ways is necessary. According to racial threat theory, threat results in an increase in social control enacted by others. This threat (economic, political, and symbolic) can also increase victimization if others feel as though others, specifically minorities, have targeted their racial group. For example, white supremacists may feel threatened by blacks and other minorities and use virtual mediums as a way to enact their own social control to reduce this perceived threat.

### *Race and Guardianship*

Examining the guardianship component of RAT in relation to race also provides an understanding of the role that race plays in exposure to hate material online. As discussed previously, guardianship is examined in many ways among the research with

conflicting results. Many researchers use living situation as a measure of guardianship. Specifically, if an individual lives alone then they likely spend more time online or frequent dangerous websites versus someone who lives with parents or a spouse. Reynolds et al. (2015) argues that individuals who live with parents are more likely to be victimized. At the same time, Hawdon et al. (2017) finds that single parents are more likely to be victimized online. This is important to note because of the relationship between race and family structure. Vast amounts of research exist that explicates patterns of family structure; particularly whites are more likely to be married while blacks are more likely to be single parents (Eshleman and Bulcroft 2006). Therefore, the assumption that whites are more likely to be exposed to hate material online relates to guardianship because whites are more likely to live with parents.

Further analysis of the three components of RAT along racial lines is important to understanding the role that race plays in exposure to hate material online. Even more, it furthers the research on the relationship between race and hate material online. It is important that researchers examine how race affects victimization online. It also offers insight into the ways that individuals become proximate to hate material online, how hate groups target individuals both as a tool for recruitment and as a tool for victimization, and factors influencing guardianship across racial lines. Research examining race and exposure to hate material online is needed to further our understanding of race-motivated victimization.

## CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

This chapter will outline the quantitative approach used to understand exposure to hate material online. It will also explain the routine activity theory variables used to predict exposure to hate material online and whether that varies by race. The following is a detailed outline of the research design for this dissertation.

### *Research Design*

This study will examine the role that race plays in the emergence and persistence of hate groups by specifically looking at exposure to hate material online. The Online Extremism Survey (Hawdon et al. 2015), Wave 2, will be utilized for this study. Waves 1 and 2 utilized the same methods of administration; Wave 2 was administered in 2016 and has a sample size of 1031 respondents, aged 15-35. The sample was drawn from a demographically representative panel population where respondents agreed to participate in the survey. Survey Sample International (SSI) recruited panel members and administered the survey using random-digit dialing, banner ads, and other permission based tactics. In addition, SSI offers rewards in exchange for completing surveys to some participants. The rewards, range from earning “points” to small cash incentives. Panel members were selected using stratified proportionate sampling methods to ensure a sample that is representative in age, gender, and region of the country. The sample is within the expected margin of the U.S. racial composition and respondents with foreign-born parents. These data have been used in numerous studies (e.g. Costello et al. 2016b; Hawdon et al. 2017; Costello et al. 2017b).

A series of logistic and linear regression models were performed to answer the following research questions:

R1: Does an individual's race directly influence whether they are exposed to hate material online?

R2: Does race affect routine activities that are correlated with exposure?

To answer these questions, I will investigate one dependent variable: exposure to hate material online.

### Dependent Variable

#### *Exposure to Online Hate Measures*

To measure exposure to hate material online, a two-question indicator was used. First, respondents were asked, "In the past 3 months, have you seen hateful or degrading writings or speech online that attacked certain groups of people or individuals?" Additionally, respondents were also asked, "In the past 3 months, have you seen or heard any materials online that expressed negative views about any group because of the group's race, nationality, ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender, political views, immigrant status, or religion?" The response options for to these two questions were zero or one, where one indicates exposure to hate material online. These two questions were recoded into a new variable that measures exposure to hate material online. After summing the two dichotomized variables, responses of one or two were recoded as one and responses of zero were recoded as zero.

### Independent Variables

The central variable of theoretic interest in this work is race. To measure respondents' race, respondents were asked to self-identify their race based on a list of categories that allowed respondents to select more than one racial identifier (see Appendix A). This resulted in seventeen variables for race. These seventeen variables

were coded as dichotomous variables and then were used to create several dummy variables for race. Each of these were coded as zero or one. The analyzed groups were Whites, Blacks, Native Americans, Asians, and ‘other races.’ ‘Asians’ consisted of several groups, including Korean, Asian Indian, Chinese, Filipino, Japanese, Other Pacific Islander, Guamanian or Chamorro, Vietnamese, Samoan, Native Hawaiian and Other Asian were coded as one. These indicators for race were used to explore the relationship between race and exposure to hate material online.

### **Routine Activity Variables**

To explore the RAT variables, various measures that tap notions of proximity to hate materials, target suitability, and lack of a capable guardian are discussed. Each measure discussed will be included in the model.

#### *Proximity to Online Hate Material*

Two measures that reflect proximity to hate material online are used: SNS use and time spent online. To identify SNS use, individuals were asked to select from a list of choices the social media and internet platforms they frequent (see Appendix B). This was recoded where individuals not selecting a social networking site were coded as zero, indicating no SNS use. Individuals who selected between one and five SNS choices were coded as 1, indicating low SNS use, those selecting six to ten SNS choices were coded as 2, indicating moderate SNS use, and those selecting eleven or more were coded as 3, indicating high SNS use. To measure number of hours online, respondents were asked to select, from a provided list of choices, the amount of time they spend online ranging from “less than one hour” to “ten or more hours.” It was explored to see if these two measures could be combined into a measure of proximity to hate material online. A Pearson

correlation between SNS use and time spent online reveals a weak positive relationship( $r=.204$ ) indicating that combining the measures into one measure for proximity to hate material online is not useful. Therefore, both indicators will be included in the model separately.

*Suitable Target Measure*

Several indicators are used to measure aspects of the three components of target congruence. It was argued that levels of trust increased target vulnerability, therefore a three-question indicator for levels of trust was created. Respondents were asked if a series of groups “can be trusted, or that you can’t be too careful in dealing with these people.” These groups included people in general, people met only online, and the police. Respondents were asked to select on a scale from one to ten with 1 being “can’t be trusted” and 10 being “can be fully trusted.”

**Table 1:** Pearson Correlation for Trust (n=862)

Variable	M (SD)	Trust-General	Trust-Online Only	Trust-Police
Trust-General	6.01(2.686)	1	.759**	.563**
Trust-Online Only	4.96(2.979)		1	.490**
Trust-Police	6.64(2.588)			1

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

A Pearson Correlation test was used to determine if the three measures are correlated and serve as a good composite measure for target vulnerability. Table 1 reports the Pearson correlations for the three measures of target vulnerability. Based on the results of the correlation, trust in general, trust in others met only online, and trust in the police have a strong positive relationship. Trust in people in general has a strong positive relationship with trusting people met only online ( $r=.759$ ). Trust in people in general also

has a strong positive relationship with trust in police ( $r=.563$ ). Finally, trust in people met only online and trust in police have a moderate positive relationship ( $r=.490$ ). Cronbach's alpha for trust is 0.821 indicating a high level of internal consistency. Therefore, combining the three indicators into a composite measure for trust was appropriate. As argued above, trust reflects notions of target vulnerability.

I argued above that risk-taking and self-esteem would be aspects that enhance one's target gratifiability, and these two concepts were measured. First, respondents were asked to assess on a scale from 1 to 10, with one being "not very true of me," if they enjoy taking risks. Respondents were also asked to assess on a scale from 1 to 10, "I have high self-esteem." These two measures reflect different aspects of target gratifiability.

Last, as explained above, target antagonism is related to using self-help. Self-help was measured using a two-question indicator for self-help. First, respondents were asked, "When people on social networking sites are being mean or offensive, how often do you tell the person who is being offensive to stop?" The variable was coded as "1= Never, 2= Only once in a while, 3= Sometimes, or 4= Frequently." Second, respondents were asked, "When people on social networking sites are being mean or offensive, how often do you defend the person or group being attacked?" This was coded as "1= Never, 2= Only once in a while, 3= Sometimes, or 4= Frequently." A Pearson correlation test was used to determine if telling others to stop and defending others online were correlated and serve as good measures for target antagonism. Based on the results of the correlation, telling others to stop and defending others has a strong positive relationship ( $r=.711$ ). Therefore, combining self-help stop and self-help defend into a new composite measure of self-help was appropriate. Again, these concepts are seen as aspects of target antagonism.

### *Guardianship Variables*

To examine aspects of the capable guardian in RAT, living arrangements, offline attachments and collective efficacy were used as measures. To measure living arrangements, respondents were asked to identify their current living arrangement from a list that included living alone, living with parents, living with a partner or spouse without children, living with a partner or spouse with children, living alone with children or other family type. These attributes were recoded as lives with others, 1, or lives alone zero. I anticipate those who live alone will be more vulnerable because there are no guardians in their immediate environment to offer protection.

To measure offline attachments, a two-question indicator was used. First, respondents were asked to identify how close they feel to their family. Second, respondents were asked to identify how close they feel to their friends. Specifically, respondents were asked to rank on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 is “not at all close” and 5 is “very close.” A Pearson correlation test was used to determine if feeling close to family and feeling close to friends were correlated and serve as good measures for offline attachments. Based on the results of the correlation, feeling close to family and close to friends have a moderate positive relationship ( $r=.476$ ). Therefore, combining close to family and close to friends into a new composite measure for offline attachments is appropriate.

Collective efficacy was measured using a two-question indicator. First, respondents were asked, “When people on social networking sites are being mean or offensive, how often have others told the person who is being offensive to stop?” Second, respondents were asked, “When people on social networking sites are being mean or

offensive, how often have others defended the person or group being attacked?” These variables were coded as “1= Never, 2= Only once in a while, 3= Sometimes, or 4= Frequently.” A Pearson correlation test was used to determine if witness-tell stop and witness-defend were correlated and serve as good measures for collective efficacy. Based on the results of the correlation, witness-tell stop and witness-defend have a strong positive relationship ( $r=.685$ ). Therefore, combining witness-tell stop and witness-defend into a new composite measure for collective efficacy is appropriate. Living arrangements, offline attachments, and collective efficacy are used as reflections of guardianship, and I will investigate how each of these influence exposure to online hate materials.

### *Demographic Measures*

Categorical variables for demographic information such as gender, educational level, and occupation are included as controls. Age was included in the model and measured continuously from 15 to 35. Gender was coded as a dichotomous variable, where female was coded as zero and male was coded as one. Education level was measured by having respondents select their highest level of education from a list (see Appendix C). Occupation was measured by asking individuals to select whether they were in school, working part-time, working full-time, or unemployed. This variable was recoded into a series of dummy variables, where one indicates selection of a category (in school, working part-time, working full-time, unemployed-looking, or unemployed-not looking), else zero. These demographic variables were used as controls.

All of these measures were used to construct eight logistic regressions models and three OLS regression models to allow for a prediction of exposure to hate material online. Logistic regression allows for the prediction of relationships between variables when the

dependent variable is dichotomous. Ordinary Least Squares(OLS) regression or linear regression allows for the prediction of relationships between variables when the dependent variable is continuous. Model one regresses exposure to hate online on the demographic measures. Models two through six regresses exposure to online hate material on race. Model seven regresses exposure to hate material online on the routine activity variables. Model eight regresses routine activity variables and race on exposure to hate material online. Model nine through eleven regresses significant RAT variables on race. Each of these models will be discussed further in Chapter Four.

### **Model 1**

Model 1 explores the relationship between the demographic measures and exposure to hate material online. The dependent variable, exposure to hate material online, is a dichotomous variable. The demographic measures to be included in the model are age, gender, education, and occupation. The results are discussed in Chapter Four.

### **Models 2-6**

Models two through six explores the relationship between race and exposure to hate material online. The model regresses exposure to hate material online on race. The central predictor variable (IV) is race. Each model will explore the relationship between each race category and exposure to hate material online. The results of each model are discussed in Chapter Four.

### **Model 7**

Model seven explores the routine activity variables and exposure to hate material online. SNS use, time online, social trust, risk taking, self-esteem, self-help, living alone, offline attachments, and collective efficacy are used to predict exposure.

### **Model 8**

Model eight explores routine activity variables and race. It examines the relationship between the routine activity predictors of exposure to hate material online and race. The results will be discussed in Chapter Four.

### **Models 9-11**

Model 9-11 explores the significant routine activity variables and race. It uses OLS regression to regress RAT variables on race to determine the relationship between these and race. The results will be discussed in Chapter Four.

These models are useful in understanding who is exposed to hate material online. They also assess the applicability of routine activity theory and exposure to hate material online. Moreover, it aids in our understanding of how exposure to hate material online varies by race to put forth a more complete understanding of how individual characteristics influences victimization online. Chapter Four will review the results.

## CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Binary-logistic regression analysis allows for the exploration of the relationship between one dichotomous dependent variable, and one or more categorical independent variables. These models were constructed to examine exposure to hate online using race and routine activity theory variables as predictors. Model 1 focuses on the relationship between demographic measures and exposure to hate material online. Models 2-6 focuses on the relationship between race and exposure to hate material online. Model 7 regresses routine activity variables on exposure to hate material online. Model 8 focuses on the relationship between routine activity variables, race and exposure to hate material online. Models 9, 10 and 11 are OLS models exploring the significant routine activity variables and race. Chapter 4 begins with the descriptive statistics for all the variables. Table 2 reports the descriptive statistics for the demographic variables.

**Table 2:** Descriptive Statistics for Demographic Variables (n=862)

<i>Variable</i>	<i>Observations</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>Minimum Value</i>	<i>Maximum Value</i>
Age	862	24.23	6.534	15	35
Male	859	.52	.500	0	1
Education	849	3.10	1.373	1	5
In school	862	.33	.469	0	1
Full-time Job	862	.43	.495	0	1
Part-time Job	862	.15	.356	0	1
Unemployed/Looking	862	.07	.253	0	1
Unemployed/Not Looking	862	.06	.240	0	1

### Demographic Measures

There were 1,031 respondents to the Online Extremism Survey (Hawdon et al. 2015) however; only respondents between the ages of 15 and 35 were included in the analysis that resulted in a sample size of 862. The mean age of the sample was 24 years

old ( $SD=6.534$ ). The sample distribution by gender was fifty-two percent male and forty-eight percent female. Respondent education levels reveal nineteen percent report having less than a high school diploma, thirteen percent report having a high school diploma, twenty percent report having some college education, twenty-nine percent reports having a college degree, and sixteen percent report having a graduate degree. The sample distribution for occupation reports thirty-three percent being in school, fifteen percent report being employed part-time, forty-three percent report being employed full-time, seven percent being unemployed/looking and six percent being unemployed/not looking.

### Race

The central variable of interest in this study is race. The frequency distribution for race is reported in Table 3. The majority of the sample reported being White (82.1%). The second largest category was Black (11.1%) and the remaining categories of Asian (5.5%), Other Race (3.2%), and Native American (1.4%) comprised the remainder of the sample.

**Table 3:** Frequency Distribution for Race (n=862)

<i>Category</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
White	708	82.1
Black	96	11.1
Asian	47	5.5
Other Race	28	3.2
Native American	12	1.4

Note: Respondents were able to select more than one category.

### Exposure to Hate Material Online

To measure the dependent variable, respondents were asked to select whether or not they have been exposed to hate material online. This was measured using a two-question indicator that was dichotomized. Respondents that indicated exposure to hate material was seventy-seven percent of the respondents and twenty-two percent report that

they had not been exposed to hate material online. A cross-tabulation was run to understand exposure to hate material online by race. Table 4 reports the results of the crosstab for those respondents exposed to hate material online by race.

**Table 4:** Crosstab: Exposure to Hate Material Online by Race (n=862)

Race	No Exposure to Hate Material Online	Exposure to Hate Material Online
White	(164) 23.1%	(544) 76.8%
Black	(15) 15.6%	(81) 84.3%
Native American	(3) 25.0%	(9) 75.0%
Asian	(11) 23.4%	(36) 76.6%
Other Race	(4) 14.3%	(24) 85.7%

Note: Percentages are reported from within racial category totals.

In addition, when respondents indicated that they had been exposed to hate material online they were subsequently asked to indicate the target of that material. Table 5 reports the targets of online hate material and the percent of the total of each category exposed. The most common target of hate material online pertains to ethnicity or race (65.6%). Respondents report that hate material also commonly targeted individuals for their political views (50.9%), nationality (48.6%), and sexual orientation (45.7%).

**Table 5:** Targets of Online Hate Material (n=652)

<i>Category</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Ethnicity or Race	428	65.6
Political Views	332	50.9
Nationality or Immigrant Status	317	48.6
Sexual Orientation	298	45.7
Sex/Gender/Gender Identity	207	31.7
Religious Conviction/Belief	189	28.9
Appearance	120	18.4
Disability	63	9.66
Other	5	0.76

Note. Percent's are calculated from those exposed to hate material.

### Routine Activity Variables

The following is a report of the descriptive statistics for all the variables included in the analysis.

#### *Proximity to Online Hate Material Variables*

Two indicators reflect notions of proximity to online hate material: time spent online and number of social networking sites used. Respondents were asked to select how much time they spend online and what social networking sites they used. About thirteen and a half percent of respondents report spending one to two hours online per day, while four percent report spending less than one hour per day online. Over thirty-two percent of respondents report spending between three and five hours online per day. Twenty-one percent of respondents report spending between six and seven hours online per day. Sixteen and a half percent of respondents report spending ten or more hours online per day. Table 6 reports the frequency distribution for number of hours spent online.

**Table 6:** Number of Hours Spent Online Frequencies (n=862)

<i>Category</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Valid Percent</i>
Less than one hour per day	34	4.0
One to two hours per day	115	13.4
Three to five hours per day	280	32.6
Six to seven hours per day	180	21.0
Eight to nine hours per day	108	12.6
Ten or more hours per day	142	16.5
Total	859	100.0

Social networking site use was also used as a measure for proximity to hate material online. The indicator for social networking sites used was recoded to assess the number of social networking sites respondents used. Forty-three percent of respondents fall into the moderate SNS use category indicating use of six to ten different social networking sites. The most common social networking sites respondents reported using

were Facebook (89.79%), YouTube (86.89%), and Instagram (73.31%). Table 7 reports the frequency distribution for the type of social networking site used.

**Table 7:** Frequency Distribution for type of Social Networking Sites Used (n=862)

<i>Category</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Percent</i>
Facebook	774	89.79%
YouTube	749	86.89%
Instagram	632	73.31%
Email	616	71.46%
Twitter	497	57.65%
Snapchat	452	52.43%
Wikipedia	405	46.98%
Skype	361	41.87%
Google+	298	34.57%
Pinterest	288	33.41%
First Person Shooter Games (FSP)	239	27.72%
Instant Messengers	227	26.33%
Tumblr	198	22.96%
Online Role-Playing Games	180	20.88%
Blogs and Forums	141	16.35%
Reddit	105	12.18%
General Message Boards	101	11.71%
Dating Services	82	0.095%
Newspaper Message Boards	74	0.085%
MySpace	61	0.070%
Image Boards	60	0.069%
Anonymous Network	30	0.034%

### Target Suitability

The variables that reflect target vulnerability, target gratifiability and target antagonism are discussed below. Each concept is reflected by several indicators. The results from each component are discussed below.

### *Target Vulnerability Variables*

To measure levels of trust, a composite variable was used. The mean for trust in general was 6.01 ( $SD=2.686$ ). Twelve percent of respondents report full trust in people and nine percent report no trust in people. The mean for trust in people met only online

was 4.96 ( $SD=2.979$ ). Less than six percent report full trust in people met only online and nineteen percent report no trust in people met only online. The mean for trust in police was 6.64 ( $SD=2.588$ ). Less than twelve percent of respondents report full trust in the police and six percent report no trust in the police. The three trust indicators were used to create a new composite measure. The mean for trust was 17.60 ( $SD=7.094$ ) and the range was twenty-seven.

#### *Target Gratifiability*

The mean for self-esteem was 7.43( $SD=2.409$ ) and the range was nine. The sample mean for risk-taking was 6.74 ( $SD=2.498$ ) and the range was nine.

#### *Target Antagonism*

To measure target antagonism, a composite measure using self-help stop and self-help defend was used. The sample mean for self-help stop was 2.33 ( $SD=.978$ ). About thirteen percent of respondents report frequently telling others to stop when people are being mean or offensive online. Thirty-two percent of respondents report sometimes telling others to stop when people are being mean or offensive online. Thirty-one percent of respondents report only telling others to stop when people are being mean or offensive online once in a while. Twenty-four percent of respondents report never telling others to stop when people are being mean or offensive online. The sample mean for self-help defend was 2.46 ( $SD=.988$ ). Sixteen percent of respondents report frequently defending others when people are being mean or offensive online. About thirty-five percent of respondents report sometimes defending others when people are being mean or offensive online. Thirty percent of respondents report only defending others when people are being mean or offensive online once in a while. Twenty percent of respondents report never

defending others when people are being mean or offensive online. A new composite measure for target antagonism was created using self-help stop and self-help defend by adding the two indicators. The target antagonism composite mean was 4.79 ( $SD=1.819$ ).

### Guardianship

To tap notions of guardianship, living arrangements, offline attachments, and collective efficacy were used, each with one or more measures. To measure living arrangements, respondents were asked to identify whether they lived alone or with others. Ninety percent of respondents report living with others and ten percent report living alone.

To measure offline attachments, two indicators were used. The sample mean for close to family was 4.44 ( $SD=0.932$ ). About sixty-five percent of respondents report feeling very close to family, over twenty-one percent report feeling pretty close, over eight percent reports feeling moderately close to family, about three percent report feeling somewhat close to family, and about three percent report not feeling close to family. The sample mean for close to friends was 4.13 ( $SD=0.936$ ). About forty-two percent of respondents report feeling very close to friends, thirty-seven percent report feeling pretty close, sixteen percent report feeling moderately close, about four percent report feeling somewhat close and less than two percent report not feeling close to friends. These two measures were combined to create a single composite measure for offline attachments. The sample mean for offline attachments was 8.57 ( $SD=1.604$ ).

To measure collective efficacy, two indicators were used. Witnessing people telling others to stop being mean and witnessing people defend others when others are being mean or offensive online were both used as measures for collective efficacy. The

sample mean for witness-tell others to stop was 2.67 ( $SD=0.930$ ). About twenty percent of respondents report frequently witnessing people telling others to stop being mean or offensive online. Forty percent of respondents report sometimes witnessing people telling others to stop being mean or offensive online. Twenty-eight percent of respondents report witnessing people telling others to stop being mean or offensive online once in a while. Twelve percent report never witnessing people telling others to stop being mean or offensive online. The sample mean for witness-defend others was 2.75 ( $SD=0.923$ ). Twenty-two percent of respondents report frequently witnessing others defending people when being mean or offensive online. Forty-one percent of respondents report sometimes witnessing others defending people when being mean or offensive online. Twenty-five percent of respondents report witnessing others defending people when being mean or offensive online only once in a while. Eleven percent of respondents report never witnessing others defending people when people are being mean or offensive online. The two indicators were summed and computed into a new composite measure for collective efficacy. The sample mean for collective efficacy was 5.41 ( $SD=1.702$ ).

## **MULTIVARIATE RESULTS**

The results of all the logistic and OLS models are reported below. First, the Pearson correlations are reported for all the variables included in the models. The results from the Pearson correlation for the demographic variables with exposure to hate are reported in Table 8. From the Pearson correlation, all of the demographic variables were unrelated to exposure to hate material online.

**Table 8:** Pearson Correlation for Exposure to Hate and Demographic Variables (n=862)

Variable	M (SD)	Exposure to Hate	Male	Education	Occupation
Exposure to Hate	0.77(0.42)	1	-0.038	-0.027	-0.020
Male	0.52(0.50)		1	0.025	0.124**
Education	2.10(1.37)			1	0.066
Occupation	0.87(0.34)				1

\*\* . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

A Pearson correlation was run for exposure to hate material online and all race variables. All of the race variables failed to gain significance for exposure to hate material online. In addition, a Pearson correlation was run including all routine activity variables. Table 9 reports the results of the Pearson correlation. The only routine activity variables to gain significance with exposure were SNS use, trust, self-help and collective efficacy. SNS use, self-help and collective efficacy all have a weak positive correlation with exposure to hate material online. Trust has a weak negative correlation with exposure to hate material online.

**Table 9:** Pearson Correlation for Exposure to Hate and RAT Variables (n=862)

Variable	M (SD)	Exposure to Hate	SNS USE	Time Online	Trust	Self-esteem	Risk-taking	Self-help	Living Arrange.	Offline Attach.	Collective Efficacy
Exposure to Hate	0.77(0.42)	1	.105**	.016	-.082*	-.058	-.038	.174**	.005	-.063	.263**
SNS USE	1.87(0.753)		1	.202**	0.008	.040	.156**	.125**	.040	.137**	.101**
Time Online	3.74(1.393)			1	-.110**	-.129**	-.054	.027	.014	-.101	.046
Trust	17.6(7.094)				1	.390**	.404**	.140**	.048	.274**	-.050
Self-esteem	7.43(2.409)					1	.506**	.107**	.047	.381**	-.004
Risk-taking	6.74(2.498)						1	.204**	.023	.208**	.024
Self-help	4.79(1.819)							1	.031	.107**	.517**
Living Arrange.	0.90(0.300)								1	.105**	.027
Offline Attach.	8.57(1.604)									1	.057
Collective Efficacy	5.41(1.702)										1

Note. \* p<.05. \*\* p<.01. \*\*\* p<.001. (2-tailed test).

Eight logistic regression models and three OLS regression models were used to explore exposure to hate material online. Model 1 regresses exposure to online hate material on demographic measures. Model 2-6 regresses exposure to hate material online on various racial categories. Model 7 regresses exposure to hate material online on the routine activity variables. Model 8 regresses exposure to hate material online on RAT variables and race. Model 9 regresses SNS Use on race. Model 10 regresses offline attachments on race. Model 11 regresses collective efficacy on race. In Model 1, the Nagelkerke's  $R^2$  of 0.025 indicates a weak relationship between exposure to hate material and the variables included in the model. The full model was not statistically significant, indicating that the predictors as a set are not able to distinguish between exposure to hate material online and no exposure to hate material (chi-square = 14.051,  $p=0.050$  with  $df=7$ ). Table 10 reports the odds ratio and standard error for regressing exposure to online hate material on demographic measures.

**Table 10: Logistic Regression Results: Exposure to Hate and Demographics (n=862)**

Variable	OR	SE
Age (15-35)	0.972	0.017
Male	0.878	0.171
High School Diploma	1.574	0.324
Some College	2.376*	0.311
College Degree	1.283	0.299
Graduate Degree	1.364	0.347
School/Work	1.062	0.272

*Note.* OR= odds ratio. \* $p<.05$ . (two-tailed tests).

Model 1 demonstrates that age and gender failed to gain significance and are therefore not adequate predictors of exposure to hate material online. It also shows that education has an interesting relationship with exposure to hate material online. Having a high school diploma, college degree or graduate degree failed to gain significance and are not adequate predictors of exposure to hate material online. However, having some

college education is significant ( $p=0.005$ ) in predicting exposure to hate material online. Compared to having less than a high school diploma, people who have some college education are 2.3 times more likely to be exposed to hate material online. Occupation failed to gain significance. Respondents indicating that they are economically engaged outside the home and those who are not economically engaged outside the home reveal no differences in exposure to hate material online.

Models 2-6 regresses exposure to online hate material on race. These models were constructed to understand the role that race plays in exposure to hate material online. Each race category was exclude, individually, from the model and used as a reference category. Table 11 reports the odds ratio and standard error for the models. Model 2 uses the white category as the reference. Nagelkerke's  $R^2$  of 0.009 indicates a weak relationship between exposure to hate material and the race variables included in the model. The full model was not statistically significant, indicating that the predictors as a set are not able to distinguish between exposure to hate material online and no exposure to hate material (chi-square = 4.848,  $p=0.303$  with  $df=4$ ). This model reveals that when white is used as the reference category, race is not a significant predictor of exposure to hate material online. Second, the black category was excluded from the model used as the reference category. Nagelkerke's  $R^2$  of 0.003 indicates a weak relationship between exposure to hate material and the variables included in the model. The full model was not statistically significant, indicating that the predictors as a set are not able to distinguish between exposure to hate material online and no exposure to hate material (chi-square = 1.762,  $p=0.779$  with  $df=4$ ). Model 3 reveals that when black is used as the reference category, race is not a significant predictor of exposure to hate material online. In Model

4, the American native category was excluded from the model and used as the reference category. Nagelkerke's  $R^2$  of 0.012 indicates a weak relationship between exposure to hate material and the variables included in the model. The full model was not statistically significant, indicating that the predictors as a set are not able to distinguish between exposure to hate material online and no exposure to hate material (chi-square = 6.849,  $p=0.144$  with  $df=4$ ). Model 4 reveals that compared to American natives, blacks are 2.8 times more likely ( $p=0.029$ ) to be exposed to hate material online. In Model 5, the Asian category was excluded from the model and used as the reference category. Nagelkerke's  $R^2$  of 0.011 indicates a weak relationship between exposure to hate material and the variables included in the model. The full model was not statistically significant, indicating that the predictors as a set are not able to distinguish between exposure to hate material online and no exposure to hate material (chi-square = 6.150,  $p=0.188$  with  $df=4$ ). Model 5 reveals that compared to Asians, blacks are 2.2 times more likely ( $p=0.036$ ) to be exposed to hate material online. In Model 6, the other race category was excluded from the model and used as a reference category. Nagelkerke's  $R^2$  of 0.007 indicates a weak relationship between exposure to hate material and the variables included in the model. The full model was not statistically significant, indicating that the predictors as a set are not able to distinguish between exposure to hate material online and no exposure to hate material (chi-square = 3.924,  $p=0.416$  with  $df=4$ ). From the five race models, blacks are exposed to hate material online more than American natives and Asians are. All other race categories are exposed to hate material online at equal rates.

**Table 11: Logistic Regression: Exposure to Hate Material Online and Race (n=862)**

Race	Model 2		Model 3		Model 4		Model 5		Model 6	
	OR	SE	OR	SE	OR	SE	OR	SE	OR	SE
White	-	-	0.876	0.257	1.895	0.434	1.415	0.347	1.285	0.355
Black	1.680	0.296	-	-	2.840*	0.478	2.206*	0.791	2.053	0.414
American Native	0.718	0.686	0.789	0.681	-	-	0.757	-0.279	0.802	0.690
Asian	0.940	0.354	0.820	0.402	1.592	0.513	-	-	1.156	0.458
Other Race	1.842	0.553	1.703	0.566	2.752	0.629	2.283	0.825	-	-

Note. OR= odds ratio. \*p<.05. (two-tailed tests).

Model 7 regresses exposure to online hate material on the routine activity variables. Table 12 reports the results of all the variables included in model 7. Nagelkerke's  $R^2$  of 0.133 indicates a weak relationship between exposure to hate material and the variables included in the model. The full model was statistically significant,

**Table 12: Logistic Regression Results: Exposure to Hate Online and RAT (n=862)**

Model 7		
Variable	OR	SE
SNS Use	1.463**	0.131
Time Spent Online	0.915	0.068
Trust	0.980	0.015
Self-esteem	0.987	0.049
Risk taking	0.963	0.045
Self-help	1.112	0.063
Lives Alone	0.979	0.308
Offline Attachments	0.869*	0.068
Collective Efficacy	1.352***	0.065

Note. OR= odds ratio. \*p<.05. \*\*p<.01. \*\*\*p<.001. (two-tailed tests).

indicating that the predictors as a set are able to distinguish between exposure to hate material online and no exposure (chi square=70.879, p=0.000 with  $df=9$ ). Model 7 demonstrates that time spent online, trust, self-esteem, risk taking, self-help, and living arrangements failed to gain significance and are not related to exposure to hate material online. SNS Use is significant at the 0.01 level. People who use social networking sites

are 1.463 times more likely ( $p=0.004$ ) to be exposed to hate material online than those who do not use social networking sites. Offline attachments was also a significant predictor of exposure to hate material online. Respondents who report being close to family and friends are 13.1% less likely ( $p=0.04$ ) to be exposed to hate material online than those who report not being close to family and friends. Collective efficacy was also a significant predictor of exposure to hate material online. Respondents who witness others telling people to stop being mean or offensive online or witness others defending people when others are being mean or offensive online are 1.352 times more likely ( $p=0.000$ ) to be exposed to hate material online than those who do not experience collective efficacy.

Model 8 assesses the relationship between routine activity measures and race. This model regresses exposure to hate material online on the routine activity variables and the race variables, using black as the comparison to avoid multicollinearity. Table 13 reports the results of the model. Nagelkerke's  $R^2$  of 0.134 indicates a weak relationship between exposure to hate material and the variables included in the model. The full

**Table 13: Logistic Regression Results: Exposure to Hate, RAT and Race(n=862)**

Model 8		
Variable	OR	SE
SNS USE	1.453*	0.131
Time Spent Online	0.917	0.068
Trust	0.980	0.015
Self-esteem	0.990	0.049
Risk taking	0.962	0.046
Self-help	1.112	0.063
Lives Alone	0.961	0.316
Offline Attachments	0.868*	0.068
Collective Efficacy	1.354***	0.065
White	1.159	0.303
American Native	0.828	0.756
Asian	1.250	0.456
Other Race	1.237	0.607

*Note.* OR= odds ratio. \* $p<.05$ . \*\* $p<.01$ . \*\*\* $p<.001$ . (two-tailed tests).

model was statistically significant, indicating that the predictors as a set are able to distinguish between exposure to hate material online and no exposure to hate material (chi-square = 71.326,  $p=0.000$  with  $df=13$ ).

SNS use, offline attachments, and collective efficacy were significant in model eight. All other variables in the model failed to gain significance. SNS use was significant at the  $p<0.05$  level. Respondents who use social networking sites are 1.456 times more likely to be exposed to hate material online than those who do not use social networking sites. Offline attachments was also significant at the  $p<0.05$  level. Respondents who report being close to family and friends are 13.2% less likely to be exposed to hate material online than those who report not being close to family and friends. Collective efficacy was also significant at the  $p<0.001$  level. Respondents who report experiencing collective efficacy online are 1.354 times more likely to be exposed to hate material online than those who do not experience collective efficacy online. In Model 8, race was not a significant predictor of exposure to hate material online.

To explore the relationship between race and exposure to hate material online, the significant routine activity variables were used as dependent variables in three OLS regression models. Model 9 regresses SNS use on the race variables, excluding the black category. Table 14 reports the results of the OLS regression model for SNS use. A significant regression equation was found ( $F(4,857)=4.332$ ,  $p<.002$ ), with an  $R^2$  of 0.020. Compared to blacks, whites use more social networking sites ( $B=0.268$ ;  $p=0.001$ ). All other race categories were not significant.

**Table 14: Linear Regression Results: SNS Use and Race (n=862)**

Model 9			
Variable	B	SE B	$\beta$
White	0.268	0.077	0.136***
American Native	-0.325	0.219	-0.051
Asian	0.073	0.125	0.022
Other race	0.312	0.151	0.073

Note.  $R^2=0.020$ . \* $p<.05$ . \*\* $p<.01$ . \*\*\* $p<.001$ . (two-tailed tests).

Model 10 regresses offline attachments on the race variables, excluding the black category. Table 15 reports the results of the OLS regression model for offline attachments. A significant regression equation was not found ( $F(4,813)=1.421$ ,  $p<0.225$ ), with an  $R^2$  of 0.007. From Model 10, all race categories have similar offline attachments.

**Table 15: Linear Regression Results: Offline Attachments and Race (n=862)**

Model 10			
Variable	B	SE B	$\beta$
White	0.252	0.174	0.059
American Native	0.088	0.471	0.007
Asian	0.460	0.273	0.066
Other race	-0.337	0.330	-0.038

Note.  $R^2=0.007$ . \* $p<.05$ . \*\* $p<.01$ . \*\*\* $p<.001$ . (two-tailed tests).

Model 11 regresses collective efficacy on the race variables, excluding the white category. Table 16 reports the results of the OLS regression model for collective efficacy. A significant regression equation was not found ( $F(4,839)=2.257$ ,  $p<.061$ ), with an  $R^2$  of 0.011. Compared to whites, blacks score 0.479 higher on the collective efficacy scale, on average ( $p=0.01$ ). The American native, Asian, and Other race categories were not significant.

**Table 16: Linear Regression Results: Collective Efficacy and Race (n=862)**

Model 11			
Variable	B	SE B	$\beta$
Black	0.479	0.187	0.089*
American Native	0.140	0.499	0.010
Asian	-0.230	0.258	-0.031
Other race	0.311	0.328	0.033

*Note.*  $R^2=0.011$ . \* $p<.05$ . (two-tailed tests).

These eleven models provide a look into the relationship between demographics, routine activities online, and race in predicting exposure to hate material online. These findings will be discussed in Chapter Five.

## CHAPTER FIVE: DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Seventy-five percent of respondents report being exposed to hate material online at some point in time. The SPLC reports a fifty-percent increase in the number of active hate groups since 2000 (Potok 2009). As information and computer technology becomes more prevalent, so too does its use. Not only by individual users but also by groups and organizations deemed hate-based. The amount of hate material posted on ICT platforms as a tool for recruitment will only increase as hate groups begin to utilize the World Wide Web. Therefore, exposure to hate material online is of growing concern due to the psychological and socio-cultural harm it produces.

While not all exposure results in victimization, some research indicates that exposure can have some psychological effects, either short or long-term (Gerstenfeld et al. 2003; McNamee et al. 2010). Research also demonstrates that individuals exposed to violent imagery or rhetoric can lead to psychological harm. Some of these psychological problems include erosion of trust (Näsi et al. 2015), anger, fear, mood swings (Tynes 2006), and can lead to the transmission of hate ideologies to subsequent generations (Foxman and Wolf 2013). Thus, it becomes important to ascertain the predictors of exposure to hate material.

This research sought to understand how race influences exposure to hate material online, and as a test of routine activity theory. The goal was to understand proximity to hate material online, online target suitability and online guardianship. More specifically, it sought to understand what online habits place individuals proximate to hate material online. In addition, it also explores the ways in which demographics influence exposure to hate material online. Online guardianship was also examined to assess the relationship

between the presence of others and exposure to hate material online. The following is a discussion on the implications of the results.

## **Discussion**

The results of this study reveal that age and gender are not predictors of exposure to hate material online. Regardless of age or gender, exposure is similar across all groups. This makes sense due to the veil of the virtual world. Often age and/or gender are obscured behind the veil of technology. It is not always clear whether someone is young or old, or male or female. Conversely, some patterns of exposure to hate material online emerge from education level and occupation. Educational level reveals that those individuals with some college education are more likely to be exposed to hate material online. This result is interesting but understood due to an increase in computer use during college. Jones et al. (2009) reports that eighty-six percent of individuals in college use the internet versus just 59% of individuals not in college. The risks disappear as individuals obtain a college degree. This could be due to the latent functions of education. Education may influence exposure to hate material online by increasing protective measures taken online. In addition, education may increase an individuals' understanding of hate material as hate speech may become more refined. College education equips individuals with a vast amount of indirect learning that enables them to become more informed which may affect their recognition of hate material online. Less educated individuals may not be aware that many people, especially those targeted, may consider some material posted on ICT to be hate material. Therefore, a more complete understanding of hate material and hate speech may result in online behaviors that seek to reduce proximity to hate material

online. More research on education and exposure to hate material online is needed to assess the relationship between education and exposure.

Considering race, the results reveal that race does pattern exposure to hate material online. This research reveals that blacks are more likely to be exposed to hate material online compared to American natives and Asians. This finding is surprising considering that demographics are not good predictors of exposure to hate material online. However, it should be noted that the American native category was comprised of twelve respondents and Asian was comprised of forty-seven respondents. Because of these small numbers, we should be cautious when interpreting these results. We do not want to overstate this relationship.

Race is also often obscured by the anonymity of the online world. More often than not, an individual's race is not evident in the virtual world. This research reveals that 65.6% of those exposed to hate material online identify race as the target for the exposure. The current state of race relations would likely anticipate that minority populations might be exposed to hate material more and this research supports this claim. This may be due to the prevailing systemic racism in the historical United States. Race relations, having almost exclusively been discussed in terms of black and white, virtually excludes American natives, Asians, and Other races from the discourse. Blacks as a racial group have experienced discrimination, marginalization, and systemic racism throughout the history of the United States. Nationally, the way we talk about race rarely takes into account other racial categories and usually focuses on the black-white binary. There is no denying the pervasiveness of white supremacy in the United States. The embeddedness of whiteness into every social institution in this country has allowed for the permeation and

persistence of the white ideal so much so that even some whites are unaware of its existence. These same individuals, as well as others, embody white supremacy. During the course of our everyday routines, individuals reinforce, perpetuate, and uphold this system of racial inequality. These everyday routines lead to posting opinions or beliefs on social media, forming homogenous relationships, and solicits feelings of efficacy with like others that reinforce white racial superiority. These social media posts, exclusionary intergroup relations, and bonds with like others leads to exposure to hate by those in the minority, i.e. blacks. That blacks are exposed to hate material at higher rates than other minority groups is highlighted by the prevailing systemic racism in the United States and globally. That blacks are exposed 2.8 times more than American natives are and 2.2 times more than Asians are speaks to the construction of a racial hierarchy that grants ‘honorary white’ (see Bonilla-Silva 2002) status to some groups thus allowing them to benefit indirectly from white superiority. However, this research does not explore this idea. More research into this explanation is necessary to understand exposure to hate material online.

In addition, routine activity theory variables were tested to understand how proximity, target suitability and guardianship affect exposure to hate material online. SNS use was a significant predictor of exposure to hate material online but time spent online failed to gain significance. Looking at measures for proximity to online hate material, individuals who utilize social networking sites are 1.46 times more likely to be exposed to hate material online than those who do not. This finding is consistent with the most frequent places individuals witnessed hate material online. Facebook, YouTube, Instagram, Email and Twitter are the most frequently used social networking sites

respondents report using. That individuals who use social networking sites are exposed to hate material more than those who do not is understood because SNS use places individuals virtually proximate to a greater number of people. Social networking sites create a network of people that can range from a few people to thousands or more in a virtual network that allows for exposure to a wide range of ideologies. Posting information on social networking sites can range from the mundane to xenophobic or bigoted ideologies. When individuals view, like, or share material online it opens up the possibility of increased exposure to online hate material. This network allows for an endless amount of links between people and ideas. It is important that more research be conducted that explores the role of social networking site use in exposure to hate material online. In addition, research that explores other online habits such as shopping habits, downloading apps/programs or music listening/downloading habits can aid in our understanding of exposure to hate material online and provide a better picture of the ways exposure to hate material impacts the persistence and emergence of hate groups.

Target suitability measures reveal that trust, self-esteem, risk-taking, and self-help are not predictors of exposure. Determining what makes a suitable target online is difficult due to the anonymity of the online world. The veil of technology obscures individual vulnerability, delays gratifiability and shields antagonisms. ICT acts as a shield for targets. It is not clear what factors influence target suitability from a routine activity approach. More research is needed to put forth a better understanding of the suitable online target.

Guardianship is often viewed as the most important routine activity measure for predicting victimization (Choi 2008). This research finds significance for guardianship,

specifically among collective efficacy. This finding reveals that individuals who witness people defending others when people are being mean or offensive online are more likely to be exposed to hate material. This measure was part of the collective efficacy measure for guardianship and notes that when individuals feel connected to others online and part of a community then exposure increases. While this finding is interesting, it is understandable that individuals who feel a strong sense of collective efficacy are more likely to be exposed due to proximity. When individuals witness people defending others then they are more likely to be proximate to hate and to become a target themselves. According to this research, blacks experience collective efficacy at higher rates compared to whites but there is no difference in exposure to hate material between whites and blacks. One possible explanation could be that blacks are more victimized online than whites are and therefore others defend them more or tell others to stop which creates a sense of collective efficacy. Whites may be targeted less and therefore do not need to be defended online. This would then result in a lack of collective efficacy formation. However, the research does not support this assertion. Blacks and whites are exposed to hate material online at equal rates. More research on collective efficacy and race are needed.

Research examining exposure to hate material online is necessary to allow for the prediction of target suitability. It also aids in our understanding of the ways that hate groups recruit new members, and establish a presence online. It also allows for a more accurate understanding of the ways that hate groups emerge and persist online. If hate groups utilize exposure to hate material as a means of recruitment then patterns of exposure along racialized lines would emerge. As Costello et al. (201b) reports and this

research supports, the most common target in hate material is race. Therefore, in terms of race-based hate groups organizing in polarized ways, whites and blacks should be exposed to hate material at higher rates than other racial groups. In terms of sheer numbers, more pro-white and pro-black hate groups exist than other race-based hate groups (Splcenter.org 2017). Therefore, if exposure were used as a recruitment tool then whites would be exposed to hate material that reflected a pro-white, anti-other races undertones. Again, if exposure were used as a recruitment tool then blacks would be exposed to hate material that reflected pro-black, anti-other races undertones. However, the research does not support this claim. Blacks are exposed to hate material more than American natives and Asians but at equal rates to whites. The idea that exposure is related to recruitment to race-based hate groups is not explored by this research. Future research that examines targeting in hate material as it relates to race will add to the literature on race, victimization and online habits. More research on exposure to hate material online and a routine activity approach is garnered.

This research is not without limitations and they should be noted. First, this research examined a limited sample of people aged 15-35 years old, and while representative of the U.S. population on important factors, the results cannot be generalized to older individuals due to the fact that they were not included in the sample and the fact they differ in many ways from younger individuals. At the least, younger individuals spend more time online and are targeted for hate more. Second, while this study attempts to use online habits to predict exposure, it does not explore all the activities individuals participate in online and therefore gaps still exist. Lastly, this research is not able to make claims about causality because the dependent variable

collects information about exposure at any point in time. It is possible that online habits affecting exposure to hate material online occurred before but the temporal order is not discernable from the research.

## **Conclusion**

This study advances our understanding of exposure to hate material online and online habits. Particularly, this research highlights the relationship between routine activities online and exposure to hate material. It becomes increasingly important that research explore the ways in which hate groups target others and disseminate hate material online. As the use of ICT becomes more prevalent and hate groups increase in numbers and size it becomes tantamount that research aid in our understanding of the predictors of exposure. Exposure to hate material is two-fold. First, it is used as a tool for recruitment and as a tool for victimization. It is evident that ICT is changing the ways in which hate groups can recruit and victimize others. In order to combat the rise in hate groups, hate crimes, and hate group activity, it is necessary that counter messages and tactics to limit exposure be used. This research also explores the relationship between race, and demographics and exposure to hate material. As such, who makes a suitable target for exposure and victimization reveals that in the online world education and race do matter. More so, this research reveals that race patterns collective efficacy and social networking site use. This patterns aids in our understanding of exposure to hate material online.

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## APPENDIX A: RACIAL CATEGORIES

1= White

2= Black or African American

3= American Indian or Alaskan Native

4= Asian Indian

5= Chinese

6= Filipino

7= Japanese

8= Korean

9= Vietnamese

10= Other Asian

11= Native Hawaiian

12= Guamanian or Chamorro

13= Samoan

14= Other Pacific Islander

15= Other Race

16= Don't Know

17= Prefer not to answer

## APPENDIX B: SOCIAL NETWORKING SITE

1= Facebook

2= YouTube

3= Instagram

4= Twitter

5= Google+

6= MySpace

7= Wikipedia

8= Tumblr

9= Pinterest

10= Snapchat

11= Newspaper message boards

12= General message boards

13= Image boards (e.g. 4chan)

14= Instant messengers (e.g. Windows Live messenger)

15= Online role-playing games or MMO (e.g. World of Warcraft, Runescape, etc.)

16= First-person shooter games or FPS (e.g. Call of Duty, Battlefield, etc.)

17= Dating services (eHarmony, Match, Kik, Tinder, etc.)

18= Blogs or Forums

19= Email

20= Skype

21= Anonymous network (e.g. Tor, Freenet, I2P, YikYak)

22= Reddit

## APPENDIX C: LEVEL OF EDUCATION

1= Less than a High School diploma

2= High School Degree

3= Some college

4= A college degree

5= A master's degree, professional degree or higher