

# HATE UNMASKED: A PRACTICAL MODEL FOR UNDERSTANDING AND DEALING WITH HATE GROUPS

*JOHN R. SCHAFFER & JOE NAVARRO†*

The manifestations of hate are legion, but the hate process itself remains elusive. Since current research in this field is limited, no practical hate model has heretofore been proposed. Understanding the hate process is essential for the development and implementation of successful intervention strategies. During a seven-year FBI investigation of Skinhead groups in Southern California between 1992 and 1999, specific behavioral patterns emerged. The following presentation, based on the investigators' observations and interviews of several hundred self-described Skinheads, provides a practical model for understanding and dealing with hate groups.

## HATE DEFINED

Admittedly, a complex subject, hate can be thought of as dwelling within two general domains: rational and irrational. Unjust acts inspire rational hate. Hatred of a person based on race, religion, sexual orientation, ethnicity, or national origin is irrational hate. Both rational and irrational hate mask personal insecurities. Not all insecure people are haters, but all haters are insecure people. With respect to rational hate, the hater is not so much focused on the wrong done to him or others, but rather, on his own helplessness, guilt, or inability to effect change. The object of rational hate is often despised or even pitied.<sup>1</sup> In the same way, irrational hate elevates the hater above the hated.<sup>2</sup>

Everyone experiences personal insecurities in varying degrees throughout their lives. These insecurities are often masked by irrational hate. The more insecure a person feels, the larger

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† John R. Schaffer is a Special Agent for the Lancaster, California, office of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Joe Navarro is a Special Agent for the FBI in Tampa, Florida. Agents Schaffer and Navarro are members of the FBI's Behavioral Analysis Program.

1. See ERIC HOFFER, *THE TRUE BELIEVER-THOUGHTS ON THE NATURE OF MASS MOVEMENTS* 94 (1989).

2. *Id.*

the hate mask. The vast majority of people concentrate on the important issues in life such as earning a living, rearing a family, and achieving personal goals. These pursuits give meaning and value to life.<sup>3</sup> Nonetheless, irrational hate bleeds through day-to-day activities in the form of racial barbs and ethnic humor. With regard to Skinheads, who are typically uneducated, come from broken homes, and have no long-term prospects for success, a more extensive hate mask is required to camouflage a broader sense of insecurity. For the insecure, there is no better way to feel a sense of self-worth than to relegate a person or group of people to a lower status.<sup>4</sup>

### RITUALS, SYMBOLS AND MYTHOLOGY

Hate groups cannot be fully understood without first identifying and defining their unique symbols, rituals and mythologies. Symbols give greater meaning to irrational hate. Haters use symbols for self-identification and to form common bonds with other group members. Haters often swear allegiance to these symbols. For example, the swastika, a simple symbol, served as a powerful rallying point for the Nazi movement and helped mobilize an entire country.<sup>5</sup>

Each hate group adopts its own symbols or borrows them from others. Symbolic words and non-verbal behaviors not only reflect individual disdain but also serve as advertisement to attract fellow sympathizers. Offensive language is the most common expression of dislike for others. Contempt is also displayed by using nonverbal gestures such as a Nazi salute. Clothes, short haircuts, military boots, tattoos, and bumper stickers are also symbols that effectively communicate hate. Symbols, however, are not enough to unify a group, and so more organized hate groups incorporate rituals.

Rituals serve two functions. First, they relieve individual group members from deep thought and self-examination. Second, rituals reinforce beliefs and fortify group unity.

The hate group's experiences, beliefs, rituals, and use of symbols combine to create group mythologies. Mythologies not only serve to unify disparate thoughts; they also act as filters through which group members interpret reality.<sup>6</sup> Group mythologies can have profound effects on its members.<sup>7</sup> The more pow-

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3. *Id.* at 98.

4. *See id.* at 94-98.

5. William L. Shirer, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich: A History of Nazi Germany* 43-44 (1960).

6. DANIEL C. MAGUIRE AND A. NICHOLAS FARGNOLI, *ON MORAL GROUNDS: THE ART, SCIENCE OF ETHICS* 164-167 (1991).

7. JOSEPH CAMPBELL AND BILL MOYERS, *THE POWER OF MYTH* 31 (1988).

erful the mythology, the more resistant a group is to ideological challenges and, therefore, more dangerous. Mythologies that are nurtured, reinforced, and protected from outside ideas provide a forum wherein group members can escape individual responsibility. Eric Hoffer stated, "When we lose our individual independence in the corporateness of a mass movement we find a new freedom - freedom to hate."<sup>8</sup>

### *The Hate Model*

Jack Levin and Jack McDevitt, leading academic authorities on hate crimes in America, identify three types of bias crime offenders: the thrill seeker, the reactive offender, and the hard-core offender.<sup>9</sup> The hate model presented here incorporates the thrill seeker and the hard-core offender but redefines the concept of the reactive offender. Levin and McDevitt describe the reactive offender as one "who grounds his attack on a perceived transgression such as an insult, interracial dating, or a neighborhood integration."<sup>10</sup> This phenomenon is more aptly described as secondary justification.

Skinheads routinely use this technique to instigate attacks. For example, a group of Skinheads encounter a mixed-race couple and shout racial slurs. If the couple reacts in a manner other than submissively, the Skinheads perceive that behavior as an act of aggression. The Skinheads later tell the police they were merely defending themselves against aggressors. The Skinheads, of course, leave out the fact that they were the instigators. Secondary justification is difficult to detect because Skinheads can interpret a simple glance as aggressive behavior.

Secondary justification also exists on a larger scale. When a community reacts to a hate crime, Skinheads perceive that reaction as aggressive, which reinforces the notion that Skinheads must defend themselves against a common enemy. Secondary justification places the Skinheads in a victim status and rationalizes continued violence. For example, a Skinhead, with a swastika tattooed on his cheek, walked into a jewelry store to buy a ring for his girlfriend. The Skinhead became incensed when he was treated poorly by the Jewish clerk. The Skinhead later commented that if Jews treated him with more respect, he would not hate them so much. The Skinhead clearly saw himself as a victim

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8. See Hoffer, *supra* note 1 at 100.

9. See Brian Levin, *A Dream Deferred: The Social and Legal Implications of Hate Crimes in the 1990s*, 20 J. OF INTERGROUP REL. 2, 10 (1993) citing Jack Levin and Jack McDevitt, HATE CRIMES: THE RISING TIDE OF BIGOTRY AND BLOODSHED (1993).

10. *Id.* at 10.

although he openly displayed a provocative symbol of hate on his face.

Empirical observations indicate that hate groups go through seven stages in the hate process. Haters, if unimpeded, pass through these seven successive stages without skipping a stage. In the first four stages, haters vocalize their beliefs. In the last three stages, haters act out on their beliefs. There is a transition period between vocalization and acting out. This transition period is critical because violence separates hard-core haters from rhetorical haters.

#### STAGE 1: THE HATERS GATHER

Irrational haters seldom hate alone.<sup>11</sup> They feel compelled, almost driven, to entreat others to hate as they do. Peer validation bolsters a sense of self-worth and, at the same time, prevents introspection, which reveals personal insecurities.<sup>12</sup> Additionally, individuals who are otherwise ineffective are empowered when they join groups. Groups also provide anonymity and diminished accountability.

#### STAGE 2: THE HATE GROUP DEFINED

Hate groups form identities through symbols, rituals, and mythologies, which enhance the members' status while, at the same time, degrade the object of their hate. For example, Skinhead groups may adopt the swastika, the iron cross, the Confederate flag, or other supremacist symbols. Group-specific symbols or clothing often differentiate hate groups. Group rituals such as hand signals and secret greetings further fortify members. Hate groups, especially Skinhead groups, usually incorporate some form of self-sacrifice. Self-sacrifice allows the hater to willingly jeopardize their well being for the greater good of the cause. Giving one's life to the cause provides the ultimate sense of value and worth to life.<sup>13</sup> Skinheads often see themselves as soldiers in a race war.

#### STAGE 3: THE HATE TARGET IS VERBALLY DISPARAGED WITHIN THE GROUP

Hate is the glue that binds haters to one another and to a common cause.<sup>14</sup> By verbally debasing the object of their hate, haters enhance their self-image as well as group status. With re-

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11. See Hoffer, *supra* note 1 at 93-4.

12. *Id.*

13. See *id.* at 99.

14. See *id.* at 92.

spect to Skinhead groups, racist song lyrics and hate literature provide an environment wherein hate flourishes. In fact, researchers have found that the life span of aggressive impulses increases with ideation.<sup>15</sup> In other words, the more aggression is thought about, the greater the chance for aggressive behavior to occur. Thus, after constant verbal denigration, haters progress to the next more acrimonious stage.

#### STAGE 4: THE HATE TARGET IS TAUNTED WITH VERBAL INSULTS AND OFFENSIVE GESTURES

Hate by its nature changes incrementally. Time cools the fire of hate, thus forcing the hater to look inward. To avoid introspection, haters use ever-increasing degrees of rhetoric and violence to maintain high levels of agitation. Taunts and offensive gestures serve this purpose. In this stage, Skinheads typically shout racial slurs from moving cars or from afar. Nazi salutes and other hand signals often accompany racial epithets. Racist graffiti also begins to appear in areas where the Skinheads loiter. Most Skinhead groups claim turf proximate to the neighborhoods in which they live. A study by McDevitt indicated that a majority of the hate crimes occur when the hate target migrates through the hate group's turf.<sup>16</sup>

#### STAGE 5: THE HATE TARGET IS ATTACKED WITHOUT WEAPONS

This stage is critical in that it differentiates vocally abusive haters from physically abusive haters. In this stage, hate groups become more aggressive, prowling their turf seeking vulnerable targets. Violence coalesces hate groups and further isolates them from mainstream society. Skinheads, almost without exception, attack in groups and target single victims. Research has shown that bias crimes are twice as likely to cause injury and four times as likely to result in hospitalization, as compared to non-bias crimes.<sup>17</sup>

In addition to physical violence, the element of thrill seeking is introduced at this stage. Levin and McDevitt found that 60 percent of hate offenders were "thrill seekers."<sup>18</sup> The adrenaline "high" intoxicates the attackers. The initial adrenaline surge lasts for several minutes, however, the effects of adrenaline keep

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15. Charles W. Turner and John F. Layton, *Verbal Imagery and Connotation as Memory Induced Mediators of Aggressive Behavior*, 33 J. OF PERSONALITY AND SOC. PSYCHOL. 755, 763 (1976).

16. See Levin, *supra* note 6 at 11.

17. See *id.* at 9.

18. See *id.* at 10.

the body in a state of heightened alert for up to several days.<sup>19</sup> Each successive anger provoking thought or action builds on residual adrenaline and triggers a more violent response than the one that originally initiated the sequence.<sup>20</sup> Anger builds on anger. The adrenaline "high" combined with hate is a deadly combination. Hard-core Skinheads keep themselves pumped up to a level where the slightest provocation triggers aggression.

#### STAGE 6: THE HATE TARGET IS ATTACKED WITH WEAPONS

Several studies confirm that a large number of bias attacks involve weapons.<sup>21</sup> Firearms are used to commit hate crimes, but Skinheads prefer personal weapons such as broken bottles, baseball bats, blunt objects, screwdrivers, belt buckles, and other like objects. These types of weapons require the attacker to be close to the victim, which further demonstrates the depth of personal anger. Firearms can be discharged at a distance, thus precluding personal contact. A close-in attack requires the attacker to see his victim eye-to-eye and be bloodied during the assault. Hands on violence allow Skinheads to vent their hate in a way a gun cannot. Personal contact empowers and fulfills a deep-seated need to have dominance over others.

#### STAGE 7: THE HATE TARGET DESTROYED

The ultimate goal of the hater is to destroy the object of their hate. Mastery over life and death imbues the hater with feelings of god-like power and omnipotence, which, in turn, facilitate further acts of violence. With this sense of power comes a great illusion of self-worth and value, the very qualities haters lack.

Our experience suggests that this hate model has a wider application. For example, when a coworker becomes a hate target for reasons other than race, gender, national origin, religion, or sexual orientation, the hater immediately seeks out others in the office who dislike or can be persuaded to dislike the hated coworker (Stage 1). The group establishes an identity using symbols and behaviors. A lifted eyebrow, a code word to exclude the hated coworker from a lunch invitation, or any number of other actions are used to demean and isolate. The haters may even adopt a name for their group (Stage 2). At this point, the haters only disparage the hated coworker within their group (Stage 3).

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19. DANIEL GOLEMAN, EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE 60-62 (1997) *describing* Dolf Zillman's research.

20. *See id.* at 60-61.

21. *See* Levin, *supra* note 6 at 8.

As time passes, the haters openly insult the hated coworker either directly or indirectly by allowing disparaging remarks to be overheard from afar (Stage 4). One morning, the hated coworker discovers his desk rearranged and offensive images pasted over a picture depicting his wife and children (Stage 5). From the sophomoric to the terroristic, acts of hate have the same effect. Eventually, the haters sabotage the hated coworker's projects and attempt to ruin his reputation through rumors and innuendoes (Stage 6). In doing so, the haters make the work environment intolerable for the hate target (Stage 7). Scenarios like this one play out every day across America and, indeed, around the world. The targets of hate may change, but the hate process remains constant.

### *Skinhead Groups Described*

Skinhead groups typically comprise young, white males between the ages of 13 and 24. Skinheads are typically uneducated and come from single-parent, dysfunctional families, however, there are some exceptions. For example, members of the Western Hammerskins in Hemet, California chapter were high school educated and born into two-parent, middle class families. Further examination revealed that both parents made long, daily commutes to Los Angeles for work, leaving their teen-aged children unsupervised. The lack of parental supervision and guidance spawn personal insecurities similar to those found in Skinheads who come from dysfunctional, single-parent environments.

Fortunately, Skinhead groups are not well organized and lack the leadership structure found in most street gangs engaged in "for profit" criminal activities, however, there are exceptions. For example, the Western Hammerskins group has a stronger leadership hierarchy than most Skinhead groups and boasts a very active recruitment program. Potential members are given a recruitment package, which includes: white supremacist literature, a swastika armband, a T-shirt with white supremacist slogans, white supremacist band stickers, and other supremacist materials. Recruiters also pass out business cards embossed with the Western Hammerskin logo and the recruiter's name and telephone number. The group's higher educational level may explain the sophistication of its recruitment techniques.

Skinhead groups can be subdivided into two categories: criminally motivated and hate motivated. Criminally motivated Skinhead groups spend most of their time engaged in "for profit" criminal activities such as drug sales and burglaries. Incidental to their criminal activity, they commit hate crimes. The San Fer-

nando Valley Peckerwoods (SVP) is an example of a criminally motivated Skinhead group. SVP members primarily sold methamphetamine and committed residential burglaries. Periodically, SVP members attacked minorities with weapons and, on one occasion, placed packages resembling bombs near an apartment complex in which African-Americans lived. The intent of the fake bombs was to frighten current residents to relocate and to discourage other African-American families from moving into the complex.

Conversely, hate motivated Skinhead groups dedicate the majority of their time to hate crimes. Incidental to hate crimes, these hard-core Skinheads commit petty thefts or sell small amounts of narcotics to support daily needs such as food, drugs, cigarettes, alcohol, etc. The Nazi Low Riders (NLR) Skinhead group located in Lancaster, California, is a good example of a hate motivated Skinhead group. At one time, NLR members spent their time prowling the streets of Lancaster, looking for minorities to attack. The NLR matured to the point where their members routinely beat and stabbed minorities, and, in one instance, murdered an African-American.

As stated above, haters cannot stop hating without exposing their personal insecurities. This principle is evinced by the fact that hard-core members of the NLR were personally told at the onset of the FBI investigation that they would be arrested if their hate violence continued, yet, the hate violence continued. The members of the SVP were similarly warned. They, however, stopped or were more surreptitious concerning criminal activities, and their hate violence ceased. The reaction of the SVP members comport with general criminal deterrence literature.<sup>22</sup> The reaction of the NLR members did not, because hate, not criminal acts, was the motive.

Interviews of both criminally motivated and hate motivated Skinheads may explain this phenomenon. Criminally motivated Skinheads identified themselves as criminals first and haters second. They also expressed a degree of personal security in their status as criminals. The criminally motivated Skinheads possessed a certain sense of self-worth, hence, they had fewer insecurities. However, this was not the case with hate motivated Skinheads. The explanation put forth by Daniel H., a 15 year-old NLR member, typified the thought process of hate motivated Skinheads. Daniel H. said in effect that he dropped out of school in the eighth grade, but he stopped learning mid-way through the

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22. Raymond Paternoster and Alex Piquero, *Reconceptualizing Deterrence: An Empirical Test of Personal and Vicarious Experiences*, 32 J. OF RESEARCH IN CRIME AND DELINQUENCY, 251, 252-86 (1995).

sixth grade. He covered his body with hate tattoos. He couldn't get a good job if he wanted to. No one would hire him. Once, he tried to get a job at a fast food restaurant, but the manager refused to hire him because the restaurant served multi-racial customers. If he quit his involvement with the Skinheads, he felt that he had nothing else. He felt he had no choice but to be a Skinhead. He expected to die a young, violent death.

Skinheads are spontaneous. They converge, get drunk, do drugs, and, at some point, spontaneously seek out hate targets to attack. Little, if any, planning is conducted before committing hate crimes. There are exceptions but the majority of Skinhead hate violence is spontaneous. One hate motivated Skinhead put it best when he stated, "We don't look for trouble but somehow trouble always finds us and we're ready to deal with it when it comes."

### *Assessing Skinhead Groups*

Assessment and analysis of Skinhead groups is important in that intervention strategies can be tailored to each hate group, thus increasing the probability of successful intervention and rehabilitation. A Skinhead group can be assessed by first determining if the group is hate motivated or criminally motivated. The best method to establish motivation is through one-on-one interviews, although reviewing police reports and criminal histories are also good determining factors.

The second step in the assessment process is to measure the maturity of the group. The maturity of a Skinhead group is not determined by the chronological age of the group's members but by the collective actions of the group. Violence is an important maturation indicator. The maturity of a Skinhead group can be determined by comparing the group's activities to the stages in the hate model. Mature groups commit more violent acts than immature groups.

The next step in the assessment process is to gauge the strength of the group's mythology. Immature groups have simple mythologies while mature groups have mythologies that are more complex and stubborn. Studying group mythologies is not an easy task as they are the aggregate of a group's common beliefs, experiences, rituals, and symbols.

### *Interviewing Hate Motivated Skinheads*

Ironically, Skinheads, especially hate motivated Skinheads, talk to anyone who will listen, including law enforcement officers. One investigator, who knew little about white supremacist ideology, simply asked Skinheads why they hated, what their tat-

toos meant, and how Skinhead groups were organized. The initial information obtained by the investigator was substantiated over the course of numerous interviews and observations. On the other hand, criminally motivated Skinheads are less likely to talk because they act more like criminals. Determining the motivation of Skinheads is important when planning interview strategies.

Hate motivated Skinheads have well-rehearsed answers for questions such as, "Why do you hate? Can't you see what you're doing is wrong? How would you like it if someone picked on you because of your race?" Skinheads answer smugly because they are secure in being Skinheads. Since hate masks personal insecurities, the interviewer should temporarily forego questions about why Skinheads hate and strive to identify the Skinheads' personal insecurities. The interviewer can begin the probe for personal insecurities by asking Skinheads about their family relationships. This will probably be the source of the Skinhead's insecurities, because a sense of who one is, and where one fits in society is typically developed within the family structure. Other areas to explore are Skinheads' future plans, educational goals, and desired employment. The purpose of the questioning is to force the Skinheads to see themselves as they really are. If Skinheads are forced to look at themselves, they become vulnerable and are less resistant to rehabilitation and, in law enforcement settings, more likely to confess. This process could take several hours or many months depending on the resistance level of the Skinhead.

This strategy is less effective when interviewing criminally motivated Skinheads, because they view themselves as criminals who hate, rather than haters who commit criminal acts. More traditional interviewing strategies have proven successful with criminally motivated Skinheads.

#### INTERVENTION STRATEGIES

An accurate assessment of Skinhead groups is critical to developing intervention strategies. It is easier to dismantle unsophisticated Skinhead groups as opposed to sophisticated Skinhead groups. Levin and McDevitt found that Skinheads not solidly committed to supremacist ideology are more likely to respond to rehabilitation attempts than are hard-core Skinheads.<sup>23</sup> Skinheads who have not passed from rhetoric, (Stage 4), to violence (to Stage 5), will be more receptive to rehabilitation strategies than those Skinheads who commit to violence.

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23. See Levin, *supra* note 9 at 10.

Criminally motivated Skinhead groups should be approached using tactics similar to those used against criminal street gangs. Disrupting the activities of mature, hate motivated Skinhead groups requires time and more elaborate interdiction strategies because the group is more unified and committed to their beliefs. Conversely, aggressive prosecution is an efficient means to disrupt immature, hate based Skinhead groups.

This technique was used to dismantle Peer Pride, an immature, hate motivated Skinhead group in Palmdale, California. Peer Pride came to the attention of the FBI when a noose was hung from a tree in front of the home of an African-American family. Five Peer Pride members taunted the family with racial slurs and demanded that they move out of the neighborhood. Local law enforcement initially treated this incident as a prank, however, a neighborhood canvass determined that Peer Pride members periodically sat in front of a local fast food restaurant and shouted racial slurs at the African-American patrons. Aside from hanging the noose, this was the only reported hate activity by the group. Instead of leniency for the first time offenders, the Los Angeles County District Attorney's Hate Crimes Unit recommended harsh sanctions including jail sentences. The effect was immediate. The group disbanded and the neighborhood was again safe. The incident, in and of itself, could have been interpreted as a prank, but, in reality, the group was passing from Stage 3 to Stage 4 in the hate model.

In contrast, the Lancaster NLR group was a mature, hate motivated Skinhead group. As mentioned earlier, the FBI investigation uncovered a racially motivated murder. Four NLR members beat an African-American transient to death in order to earn the right to wear lightning bolt tattoos. According to the group's ritual, lightning bolt tattoos could only be earned by killing a minority. A review of police reports related to NLR criminal activities clearly showed the NLR group progressing through the seven stages of the hate model.

School administrators and teachers can use the hate model to informally assess hate group activities on campus. Identifying the stage in which a hate group is operating provides valuable information to determine how dangerous the group is and what type of intervention strategies to employ. Early intervention increases the probability of success, especially before the transition period from rhetoric (Stage 4) to violence (Stage 5). These strategies can range from informal sensitivity instruction to more formal programs such as the Juvenile Offenders Learning Tolerance (JOLT) program administered by the Los Angeles County District Attorney's Office Hate Crimes Unit. JOLT is a model inter-

vention program intended for first time, low level offenders who face potential criminal prosecution and/or school disciplinary action.

#### CONCLUSIONS

The hate model presented herein identifies the stages of the hate process. In doing so, haters who have not yet transitioned from hate rhetoric to hate violence can be identified and targeted with intervention programs, which have a higher probability of success. Likewise, hard-core haters can be identified and targeted with appropriate interdiction strategies. Additionally, knowing how the hate process works allows interviewers to penetrate the hate mask and address the hater's underlying personal insecurities. If these personal insecurities can be attenuated, haters will be more receptive to rehabilitation. Identifying and understanding the stages of the hate process is the first step in controlling hate violence.