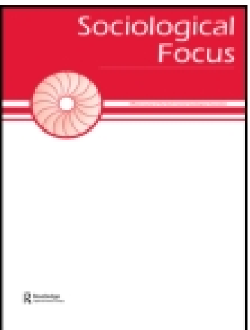

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Intersections of hate: Exploring the transecting dimensions of race, religion, gender, and family in Ku Klux Klan Web sites

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ABSTRACT
The United States has a historical legacy of oppression and subjugation spanning an array of social locations, including class, gender, race/ethnicity, sexual orientation and others. Contemporary research has documented a growth in themes of prejudice and racism present in popular media, such as the Internet. This study fills a gap in the literature by exploring Internet manifestations of a social group that has been historically organized around an ideology of intolerance, prejudice, and hatred: The Ku Klux Klan. Findings from an intersectional content analysis of KKK Web sites reveal that prejudice exists on multiple axes of hate. Major themes include emphases on white solidarity, the cult of Aryan Christianity, Aryan Klan masculinity and heteronormative nuclear family values. These dimensions intersect to create a complex picture of the Klan's self-proclaimed social supremacy. Implications regarding the use of the Internet as a vehicle of hate are considered.

The United States has a historical legacy of oppression and subjugation spanning a vast array of social locations, which includes class, gender, race/ethnicity, and sexual orientation among others. While inequalities across these social identifiers ebb and flow in intensity across generational eras, racial divides have characterized American life since the formation of the United States. Paradoxically, in a country that prides itself on "liberty and justice for all," racial and ethnic qualifiers are continually used as justification for discrimination, prejudice, segregation, and hierarchy formation. Despite the prevalence of conflicts based on race, primarily between blacks and whites, the historical record, as wells as the general public, has remained resistant to acknowledging the subjugation of persons of color (Bonilla-Silva 2010).

Contemporary research shows a growth in themes of prejudice and racism in popular media such as magazines, television, and advertisements (Wilson, Gutierrez, and Chao 2003). However, in contrast to this rise in overt displays of cultural racism and the persistence of social inequality based on race, models of color-blindness continue to dominate public policy, public opinion and legislation (Bonilla-Silva 2010). While intentional racism is often practiced on an individualized level that lacks social organization, a disturbingly large number of formalized hate groups continue to operate in the United States, ranging from neo-Nazis and Klansmen to self-appointed border patrols and anti-government factions (Southern Poverty Law Center 2014a). These groups often elect to operate Web sites as a means of message dissemination and recruitment, thus taking advantage of the free, ephemeral nature of the Internet.

Though several studies have analyzed race-based hate groups' online presence as white supremacists or extremists (Gerstenfeld, Grant, and Chiang 2003; Weatherby and Scoggins 2005), there is a paucity of research exploring the modern-day influence of the Ku Klux Klan. Studies have explored hate groups' use of racist humor and jokes (Billig 2001), their attempts to recruit and develop their communities (Bostdorff 2004) and their efforts to expand a culture of hate (Adams and Roscigno 2005). However,

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no study to date has systematically unpacked the complexity of a single, influential hate group through a lens examining multifaceted oppression. The present study fills this gap and extends upon previous literature by examining contemporary manifestations of a social group that has been historically organized around an ideology of intolerance, prejudice, and hatred: The Ku Klux Klan (KKK or the Klan). Through an intersectional content analysis of modern, functioning Web sites that claim affiliation with the KKK, this study delineates the intersections of hate present in their publicized beliefs and teachings spanning the categories of race, religion, gender, and the family. While popular opinion often asserts that racial hatred is less visible in contemporary society (Bonilla-Silva 2010), the presence of racism and hatred through the anonymous nature of Internet-based identities serves only to exacerbate its insidious nature (Southern Poverty Law Center 2000).

Intersections of hate

Intersectionality is broadly defined as the theoretical practice of taking into consideration "the multi-dimensionality" of people's complex social backgrounds rather than displaying them as "mutually exclusive categories of experience and analysis" (Crenshaw 1989:139). In other words, differences are conceptualized as having multiplicative effects that create unique, complex realities based on social categories (Walby, Armstrong, and Strid 2012). Dimensions of difference can hinge on the axes of race, ethnicity, gender, class, sexuality, geographical space, and ability status. Therefore, when these dimensions interact, statuses of inequality are often exacerbated to the extent that the product is greater than the single parts. This compounding effect is argued to create an "anticategorical complexity" that defies simple classification (McCall 2005:1773). Intersectionality generates "new conceptualizations of categories…rather than seeking an abolition of categories themselves" (Hancock 2007:66). Consequently, intersectionality as a social theory represents the capacity to develop a multifaceted framework of inequality that encompasses multiple dimensions of social difference.

The theoretical basis for intersectionality has generally been grounded in feminist theory, specifically, in African American women's studies (Collins 1998; McCall 2005). Because of these roots, considerations of gender and race are often central to applications of intersectionality. Most notably, race and gender are explored to capture the compounding effects of these two traits, creating distinctive social experiences (Collins 1998). An intersecting framework serves as a more comprehensive model that operates on practices of inclusion rather than exclusion (Choo and Ferree 2010). Intersectionality incorporates all dimensions of social statuses in lieu of selectively choosing which characteristics to highlight. Through an analysis of the multiplicity of social differences, the experiences of marginalized statuses can also be considered separately and within the dominant group's sphere of influence (Mehrota 2010).

An intersectional framework is thus a useful lens for examining the multiple dimensions of hate inherent to Ku Klux Klan Web sites because prejudice itself does not exist within a vacuum of social life. Rather, discrimination and prejudice hinge on complex ideologies of exclusivity spanning the gamut of socially unequal statuses. As such, the present study utilizes the theory of intersectionality to explore the following research question through an analytical content analysis: How do contemporary KKK Web sites strategically reinforce and reproduce their teachings of superiority across the axes of race, religion, gender, and the family? This is a novel approach as intersectionality is most often used to examine the marginalized experiences of various social statuses, rather than the perspectives of those who inhabit privileged societal positions. While the Ku Klux Klan is not a single entity, its many chapters are unified in their foundational ideologies which are grounded in social supremacy, exclusion, and hatred. The KKK primarily focuses its hateful ideals on racial diversity, which transects with religion, gender, and the family, thus creating an intersectional hierarchy of hate. The model for the Klan's intersections of hate is presented in Figure 1.

This content analysis will allow for a deeper understanding of how groups such as the Klan construct their public personae and develop both their written and visual ideologies in Web sites through the ever-growing influence of the Internet.

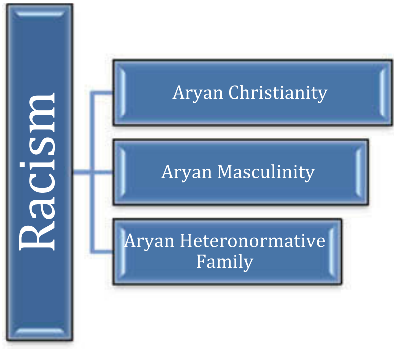


Figure 1. The Ku Klux Klan's intersectional hierarchy of hate.

Racist foundations of the Ku Klux Klan

Established in 1865 by James R. Crow, the Ku Klux Klan represents "the oldest single-purpose terrorist organization in the world maintaining the same title and focus" (Quarles 1999:8), a fact that underscores the group's longevity and its ideological strength. The Klan embodies a culture of hate and intolerance that manifests itself through teachings of prejudice and acts of discrimination and terror (Schroer 1998). Most prominently, the Klan promotes "Christian" values to support their white supremacist belief system (Wade 1998). Though the Klan originated in the Southern state of Tennessee and its influence continues to resonate most strongly in the South, the proverbial hood of the Klan has extended to states well beyond this region, such as Colorado and Michigan (Chalmers 1981).

Historically, the KKK has been credited with countless acts of violence and terrorism against minority groups in the United States from the Reconstruction era following the Emancipation Proclamation and into the civil rights period (Quarles 1999). This violence was primarily directed at African Americans in the form of public lynchings that were often sanctioned by local law enforcement and judicial systems devoid of due process (Dray 2002); other acts of intimidation included church burnings and constant harassment and threats (Quarles 1999). The Klan's systematic terroristic actions established its power in white supremacy and religious superiority that were augmented by the American social climate of political uncertainty (Fryer and Levitt 2012). More recently, analyses have shown a positive link between economic hardship and membership in KKK organizations (Gilliard-Matthews 2011). While the historical heritage of the Ku Klux Klan is laden with racial violence and hatred, it is necessary to understand its contemporary manifestations and influence that are facilitated by modern technology and forms of communication.

Hate groups and the internet

Hate groups are broadly defined as those that possess "beliefs or practices that attack or malign an entire class of people, typically for their immutable characteristics" (Southern Poverty Law Center 2014a). A number of groups fall into this category, such as white supremacists, Neo-Nazis, militia groups, and those that target specific social statuses, such as sexual orientation, religion, and class status (Schafer 2002; Schroer 1998). Gerstenfeld and colleagues (2003) found through content analytic methods that the Internet provides a unique platform for hate groups to disseminate their values and recruit new members. Through the Internet, hate groups are able to professionally manage their image at the same time that they are able to anonymously espouse extreme prejudiced teachings that are unacceptable in mainstream society (Schafer 2002). In these ways, the Internet represents an emerging venue for hate groups, one which offers new and unexplored opportunities for spreading ideological messages to audiences across the globe.

If not the most prominent active type, white supremacist groups are the most widely studied of hate groups in the United States (Daniels 2009). These groups' Web sites advocate for the racial dominance

of white people at the same time that they deem other races inferior, thus establishing shared Aryan identity as their source of solidarity (Adams and Roscigno 2005). While white supremacist groups on the Internet appear to operate within similar spheres of cultural logic, Burris, Smith, and Strahm (2000) found simultaneous disconnects in attempts to unite along the lines of Christian ideology and a growth in linkages across Neo-Nazi sentiments. Despite this apparent diversity in hate groups founded on white supremacy and their online presence, it is clear that the Internet possesses the potential to globally connect members across regions, cultures, and ideologies (Burris et al. 2000).

Modern day ideologies of the Ku Klux Klan and the Internet

The Ku Klux Klan continues to shape American ideologies surrounding race, religion, gender, and heterosexuality within one of the most prominent outlets of mass communication: the Internet. As a white supremacist group that spreads hate, the KKK's modern-day presence is unique because of its historical legacy in shaping white supremacy and racial hatred through the terrorism of people of color throughout the country. Few studies have exclusively focused on the Klan's online presence; rather, such examinations are often subsumed under the title of "extremist" or "white supremacist." According to Adams and Roscigno (2005), the KKK represents an "oppositional culture" that possesses a collective identity which has transitioned into the "relative anonymity of cyberspace" as a means of recruitment (775). In one study examining the "community-building" techniques of the KKK, findings revealed that hatred of minority groups was used as a means of unification, and though these groups encouraged violence, they rejected responsibility for the outcomes of violent behavior (Bostdorff 2004). Additionally, Billig (2001) explored the use of defamatory racial humor by Klan-affiliated Web sites and its connection to prejudiced ideology, as well as its potential in advocating violence. Though the Ku Klux Klan no longer enjoys the same political clout and social influence it once did (Southern Poverty Law Center 2014b), it remains a major player among race-based hate groups. As such, its online manifestations must be further examined to understand how it fits into the multiple intersections of contemporary prejudice rhetoric.

Method

To conduct this qualitative media content analysis, I chose the following 11 Ku Klux Klan–affiliated Web sites for the sampling frame: *The Knights Party* (kkk.bz), *Loyal White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan* (kkknights.com), *Traditionalist American Knights of the Ku Klux Klan* (traditionalistamerican-knights.com), *Imperial Klans of America* (kkkk.net), *An Educational Historical Study of the Ku Klux Klan* (kkklan.com), *United Northern and Southern Knights of the Ku Klux Klan* (unskkkk.com), *United White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan* (uwkkkk.com), *Aryan Nations Knights of the Ku Klux Klan* (aryannationsknightskkk.org), *Dixie Rangers of the Ku Klux Klan* (dixierangerskkk.com), *White Camelia* [sic] *Knights of the KKK* (wckkk.org) and *Mississippi White Knights* (mississippiwhite-knights.com). I chose these Web sites based on their active domain status and their accessibility through the search engine Google. It must be noted that several KKK Web sites still existed by domain name, but were no longer actively functioning at the time of this analysis, in that they had not been updated within a year and lacked analyzable content. The chosen Web sites were active at the time of data analysis during the months of March and April of 2014.

I employed a relevance sampling strategy to identify Web sites that explicitly claimed affiliation with the KKK label and excluded Web sites that were more generally organized around social prejudice and hate (Krippendorff 2012). For example, KKK affiliation was operationalized as having the phrase "KKK" present in the web address (n = 10) or clearly displaying the title "Ku Klux Klan" on the Web site's main page (n = 1). Furthermore, relevant KKK Web sites were chosen if they had been recently updated within one year of data analysis, as this highlighted the Web site's active online presence. This method is justified based on the current study's concentrated intersectional focus on the Klan and its contemporary presence in online Web sites. Therefore, a relevance

sampling strategy is the most efficient method to filter out Web sites that did not advertise association with the KKK. The units of analysis for this study consisted of theoretically relevant columns, articles, and images within the Web sites themselves (Altheide and Schneider 2013). Both text and imagery were included in this analysis to capture the multifaceted ideology of the Klan, as they are a group steeped in powerful symbolism and language that encompasses their core beliefs (Quarles 1999). To begin, I searched Google using the keywords "Ku Klux Klan," "KKK" and "Klan," since Google employs a complex algorithm that scours the Internet for the most relevant results and Web sites based on user popularity and Web site content (Patel 2014). Though these searches garnered a variety of results, I chose only Web sites that advertised themselves as a KKK-affiliated group that encouraged membership inquiries. As such, I was able to compile a sample of 11 Web sites that fit these criteria (n = 11).

Data collection

I collected data from the 11 KKK Web sites using both text and image sources as units of analysis. For the text-based data, I copied and pasted primary text from each Web site's home page and major subpages, if applicable, into Microsoft Word documents. Again following a relevance sampling strategy (Krippendorf 2012), I limited my inclusion of text-based data to articles and discussions that directly related to KKK ideology (i.e., racial conflict, religious beliefs) as well as those that encouraged membership (i.e., application forms). For the image-based data, I captured screen shots of each image displayed on the Web sites, cropped them and added them into their respective Web site's Word document, resulting in 11 separate documents. All Word documents were subsequently uploaded into QDA Miner for data analysis.

Sample characteristics

The 11 Web sites ranged in complexity from simple do-it-yourself, grassroots designs to more professional sites that resembled bureaucratic and capitalist organizations. Each KKK Web site encouraged education about their ideals and beliefs and offered links to provide readers with more information. However, these sites made it clear that only white, Christian, and, in most cases, male, individuals would be considered for membership. Additionally, the Web sites were careful to use vocabulary and phrasing that skirted prejudice and discrimination, such as "heritage not hate," which represented attempts at dispelling negative stereotypes about the KKK (*The Knights Party* 2010). Only two (18 percent) of the Web sites explicitly advertised the Klan to women; otherwise, the sites exuded a strict patriarchal message of hegemonic masculinity. Furthermore, three (27 percent) of the Web sites offered KKK-paraphernalia for sale through an online merchant.

Analytic strategy

While an intersectional framework guided the data analysis as I sought out relevant text and images that underscored the intersectionality of KKK ideology, the final themes emerged naturally from the data. This strategy resulted in a "hybrid" analytic approach that combined codes derived from both the theory of intersectionality as well as the data itself (Fereday and Muir-Cochrane 2008). I conducted all qualitative data analyses of both images and text using the computer software QDA Miner. All of the codes and ensuing themes emerged inductively from the data (Charmaz 1995). To begin, all Web sites were examined separately to develop an understanding of their multiple dimensions of prejudice as delineated through imagery and language. I examined imagery across the Web sites for common symbols that paralleled the intersectional, prejudiced language prevalent in the articles. Identical coding schemes were used for both the images and texts to enhance the rigor and validity of the qualitative analytic strategy (Morse et al. 2008). Processes of open coding followed by focused coding were completed to establish the foundations of emergent themes and create

linkages to identify commonalities between the Web sites (Charmaz 1995). Finally, representative examples of the major themes were extracted from the Web sites that best illustrated the concepts within each intersectional theme.

Findings: Intersections of hate

Prejudice and hate, as illustrated in Ku Klux Klan Web sites, span a wide array of intersecting domains of inequality. These Web sites primarily revolved around hierarchies established along the lines of race, religion, gender, and the heterosexual family. The four major emergent themes from the Web sites (text and images) included the following: *White Solidarity, Cult of Aryan Christianity, Aryan Klan Masculinity*, and *Heteronormative Nuclear Family Values*. Within these themes, it is also apparent that the KKK is continually employing impression management as they strive to reinforce their prejudiced teachings under the guise of deconstructing negative stereotypes (Gerstenfeld et al. 2003; Goffman 1959). Findings also support previous research that has underscored KKK Web sites' utilization of persuasive recruitment techniques framed around an ideology of social supremacy (Billig 2001; Bostdorff 2004). Demonstrative quotations from each theme are outlined in Table 1 and representative images are displayed in Table 2.

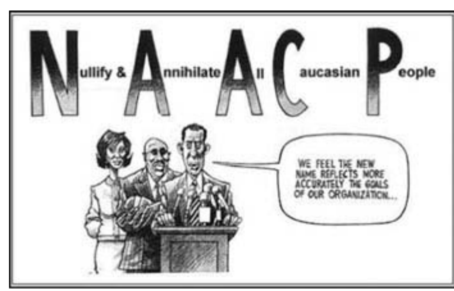
Foundations of racism: White solidarity

All of the Ku Klux Klan Web sites placed the issue of race at the forefront of their ideological teachings and practices (n = 11), thus constructing race as the hinge on which all of the Klan's axes of prejudice intersect with whiteness as the overarching structure guiding the KKK's ideology. Specifically, the call for "white rights" permeates the rhetoric of the Web sites as an issue of growing concern. One tactic that the Web sites use to reify the racial hierarchy in which whites dominate is the encouragement and celebration of "white culture." For example, *The Knights Party* (2010) advertises their annual "Culture Night" on its home page. In this event, the Klan seeks to counteract arguments that whites are acultural, or lacking a clear cultural history: "young people are educated to believe that white people have no culture to be proud of." As such, this celebration of white culture is intended to imbue young Klan members with pride in their cultural heritage and "view their historic ancestors as not 'just' Swedish, German, English, Russian, Irish, etc. but as different branches of the same tree." Further supporting this strategy, *The Traditionalist American Knights of the Ku Klux Klan* (2014) argue "distinction among the races is not accidental but designed." This sentiment not only rejects the value of cultural pluralism, but it also underscores the belief that growing racial and ethnic diversity poses a threat to white people, as evidenced in the following statement: "The supremacy of the White Race must be maintained, or be overwhelmed by the rising tide of color." In these ways, the Klan is simultaneously rejecting cultural diversity at the same time that it reinforces white supremacy over all other races and ethnicities.

Table 1. Intersections of hate: Sample quotes.

Qualitative Themes	Selected Qualitative Quotes
White Solidarity	"The supremacy of the White Race must be maintained, or be overwhelmed by the rising tide of color." (*Traditionalist American Knights of the Ku Klux Klan*)
Cult of Aryan Christianity	"This Order will strive forever to maintain the God-given supremacy of the White Race…to preserve the blood purity, integrity, cultural [sic], and traditions of the White Christian Race in America." (*Traditionalist American Knights of the Ku Klux Klan*)
Aryan Klan Masculinity	"We as Klansmen should never entertain the idea of failure. Failure should be shameful to us. Once a situation has been undertaken, follow it through to the end." (*United Northern and Southern Knights of the Ku Klux Klan*)
Heteronormative Nuclear Family Values	"A part of the disintegration of the family is due to the negative affects [sic] alien cultures have had upon our people." (*The Knights Party*)

Table 2. Intersections of hate: Sample images.

Qualitative Themes	Selected Representative Images
White Solidarity	 (*Aryan Nations Knights of the Ku Klux Klan* 2014)
Cult of Aryan Christianity	(*Dixie Rangers of the Ku Klux Klan* 2009)
Aryan Klan Masculinity	(*Mississippi White Knights* 2012)
Heteronormative Nuclear Family Values	(*The Knights Party* 2010)

Web sites also utilized strategic language and imagery to demonize nonwhite races and ethnicities. Whiteness is portrayed as the epitome of cleanliness and purity, while nonwhite races and ethnicities are depicted as unclean. Their Web sites repeatedly cast white people as victims suffering at the hands of people of color and cultures that deviate from the white Christian lifestyle. This reclamation of the victimhood of whites is a common tactic of white supremacist groups (Berbrier 2000). Through the use of racially demeaning language and of rhetoric blaming minorities for their own disadvantages, the Ku Klux Klan further reinforces their ideology that hinges on racial supremacy. For example, the Web site for the *Aryan Nations Knights of the Ku Klux Klan* (2014) displays a flier with an image that redefines the acronym for the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) as a group that intends to "Nullify and Annihilate All Caucasian People." This specific image and language use serves to delegitimize the NAACP as a civil rights group, thus reinforcing the KKK's strategy of highlighting their own victimization. In this way, African American people are conceptualized as not only the enemy of white people, but also an aggressor against white solidarity, which further embeds the ideal of the white/black divide in Ku Klux Klan teachings.

As a means of spreading their message of white supremacy and solidarity, the Klan Web sites also actively recruit additional members who represent their ideal follower—someone who is described as "honorable, intelligent, responsible, and of pure Aryan heritage" (*Imperial Klans of America* 2012). This description is directly focused on young people as sources of Klan growth and development (Bostdorff 2004). Several Web sites (n = 7) exemplified a specific emphasis on young people as the future of the Klan, which coincided with exhortations of adult members to provide youth with support. For example, the *White Camelia Knights of the Ku Klux Klan* (2011) argue that white history is "under constant attack" and this is especially harmful for "White youth" if the "past [is] stripped away from it." To challenge this assault on their cultural integrity and heritage, *The Traditionalist American Knights of the Ku Klux Klan* (2014) directly state, "The young people of today will determine the kind of nation we will have tomorrow." Young people, then, represent the future of the KKK and these Web sites emphasize early recruitment and education. The focus on white youth underscores a type of racist socialization that the KKK enacts by orienting their teachings towards young people to develop a Klan-based youth culture.

In these ways, racism acts a "core code" (Deegan 1998:8) of the organizations associated with the KKK as demonstrated in their Internet personae. A core code is broadly defined as a set of guidelines for dictating behavior on a societal level, which often leads to both oppression and repression of individuals and marginalized groups (Deegan 1998). An emphasis on white superiority and privilege is woven throughout the content and messages of the Web sites in both text and images that depict people with white skin as heroes or paragons and images that vilify people of color. Arguably, both racism and demands for white solidarity represent the foundation of the Klan's intersectional prejudice and its worldview as a social organization founded on hatred of difference and diversity in skin color. As such, the core code of racism transects with the multiple dimensions of hate inherent in KKK ideology.

Intersecting race and religion: Cult of Aryan Christianity

In addition to white solidarity interwoven with oversimplified conceptions of masculinity and family, Klan ideology is also characterized strongly by Christian doctrine. An "intercategorical" approach to intersectionality is seen here and in subsequent themes: race intersects with these additional axes of prejudice, transforming the way that these dimensions operate (McCall 2005). The focus on Christianity as a central concept to KKK teachings is evident in both the imagery depicted on the Web sites as well as in their text (n = 11). One consistent symbol across the majority of the Web sites (n = 9) is that of the burning cross (see Table 2 under the theme "Cult of Aryan Christianity"; *Dixie Rangers of the Ku Klux Klan* 2009). The fiery cross symbolizes the historical legacy of the Ku Klux Klan (Wade 1998) and its significance continues today in contemporary manifestations of the Klan. Rather than perceiving this as an intimidation tactic, the sites defend the KKK's use of the burning of the cross as a sign of their devout Christianity: "By fire of Calvary's cross we mean to purify and cleanse our

virtues by burning our vices with the fire of His Sword" (*Aryan Nations Knights of the Ku Klux Klan* 2014). While to outside observers the flaming cross may appear as the desecration of a holy icon, the Klan argues that instead it represents "a symbol of sacrifice, service" and "the blazing spirit of Western Christian civilization" (*Imperial Klans of America* 2012). Intersections of the Klan's beliefs related to cultural and racial superiority are also evident throughout the Web sites in that they specifically emphasize *Western* Christianity as a guiding ideology of their cause.

The KKK Web sites also utilize Christianity as a way to reinforce their ideology of superiority in the social order. Drawing from Christian rhetoric, the *United White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan* (2013) demand that "Klansmen are … bound by oath to honor the Klan … [which] was made before Almighty God." An example of the apparent manifest destiny of Klan teachings is captured in the following description of the *Traditionalist American Knights of the Ku Klux Klan* (2014): "This Order will strive forever to maintain the God-given supremacy of the White Race…to preserve the blood purity, integrity, cultural [sic], and traditions of the White Christian Race in America." From this standpoint, the KKK believes that its members have received divine commandments to maintain their lives separately from nonwhites, and that social diversity along the lines of race and culture is tantamount to racial suicide, if not outright blasphemy. Yet another Web site devotes an entire subpage to citing quotations from the Bible that helps the group to "preserve White heritage" through "major doctrinal beliefs as taught by the Holy Scriptures" (*Imperial Klans of America* 2012). By drawing from a narrow selection of Bible verses and promoting a selective interpretation of Christian doctrine, the Ku Klux Klan Web sites strive to establish their intersectional dominance hinging on whiteness and religion as a means to justify their racialist, xenophobic belief system.

A religious hierarchy is also inherent in the KKK belief system: Christianity is the only acceptable religious orientation within the Klan worldview depicted on these Web sites. Judaism and Jewish people are specifically attacked as threats to the strength of the white Christian movement, a common tactic among the Web sites (n = 7). The *White Camelia Knights of the Ku Klux Klan* (2011) go so far as to equate Judaism with worshipping the devil in their claim that "Jewish (Satanic) Holidays are taking precedent over Christian Holidays." Additionally, the *Dixie Rangers of the Ku Klux Klan* (2009) assert that "Zionist Jews" propagate negative stereotypes about the Klan based on their "agenda … [which] has nothing to do with uplifting or celebrating our White Christian heritage." Transgressions committed against Jewish people remain the most prevalent (60 percent) type of hate crime motivated by religious bias (Federal Bureau of Investigation Uniform Crime Report 2013); such attacks range from shootings at synagogues to the burning of Jewish religious symbols. It is likely that some aspect of KKK teachings motivates these crimes, as Klan ideology is the most pervasive rhetoric present in contemporary hate groups (Southern Poverty Law Center 2014b). The Klan establishes an "us versus them" mentality that pits the Klan's cult of Christianity against all others, which is similar to the antagonistic framing of all other races and ethnicities against whiteness as seen in the theme of "White Solidarity." In this way, the KKK further strengthens their philosophy of cultural and social superiority.

Intersecting race and gender: Aryan Klan masculinity

The Ku Klux Klan Web sites analyzed here are also characterized by their strong emphasis on strength, stalwartness, and unflinching dedication to their ideological cause. Through the predominant presentation of images of men in full Klan regalia (i.e., cape and hood) and the use of masculinized terminology and language present on many Web sites (n = 9), the KKK embodies a form of hegemonic masculinity that highlights a gendered hierarchy and places white men at the apex of privilege. Broadly defined, hegemonic masculinity refers to the idea that the domination of patriarchy is reified systematically throughout social institutions and is predominantly unquestioned by mainstream society (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). As described below, the Klan's brand of racialized hegemonic masculinity revolves around a mentality of aggression and sexism that awards men positions of leadership and relegates women to passive, auxiliary roles designed to support their male counterparts.

The KKK's racialized hegemonic masculinity serves as a useful model for urging members and government leaders to fight for the cause of white people, despite the potential for social backlash. As such, the *United Northern and Southern Knights of the Ku Klux Klan* (2014) Web site proclaims the following: "We as Klansmen should never entertain the idea of failure. Failure should be shameful to us. Once a situation has been undertaken, follow it through to the end." In this way, anything other than victory is deemed unacceptable by KKK standards, which highlights the key tenet of stereotypical masculinity that dictates men must avoid appearing emotionally weak as this is negatively equated with subservient femininity (David and Brannon 1976). This masculine, hegemonic rhetoric is further seen in the Klan's demands that the United States military be deployed to assist in protecting "the sons and daughters of the Republic": "We are urging President Obama to call out the national guard with orders to deport. We ask for a full military response" (*The Knights Party* 2010). The combative nature of white Klan masculinity is also established through the portrayal of Klan members as soldiers engaged in warfare "on the front lines … taking the heat while standing up for White people" (*Dixie Rangers of the Ku Klux Klan* 2009). This example suggests that KKK members may face "heat," or social sanctions, because of their beliefs, but that they should remain steadfast in their convictions and prepare themselves as soldiers for personal sacrifice. Concurrent to this notion is the proposition that white women and children are vulnerable groups requiring special protection, presumably provided by male Klansmen, from the evils of the outside world. The image of Klan masculinity from Table 2 depicts a white male Klansman posed in a threatening manner in full Klan attire that is replete with militaristic patches. From this perspective, Klan members are expected to persevere through social hardship; any sign of weakness is equated with inferiority.

Both the use of language and imagery on the Web sites highlights the prominence of men in KKK ideology and group membership. This is most likely a remnant of the Klan's history as a fraternal men's group (Quarles 1999); many Web sites (n = 8), however, specifically call for female members and include white women in their populations of interest. While the Women of the Klu Klux Klan (WKKK) was founded in the 1920s as a separate organization modeled on many of the KKK's ideological tenets (Blee 2008), it lacks the contemporary online presence of the Klan, as I was unable to locate any Web sites hosted by the WKKK in particular. In addition to using only the language of "Klans*men*" rather than "Klans*people*," the majority of KKK members pictured on the Web sites are male. Only two Web sites, *The Knights Party* and the *Loyal White Knights of the Ku Klux Klan*, depicted women as prominent Klan leaders and included information that was directly relevant to female members. The Web sites typically address women in separate sections of the sites, such as in a discussion forum entitled "Woman to Woman," which maintains the traditional distinctions between men and women by distinguishing "women's issues" from broader Klan concerns (*The Knights Party* 2010). Imploring men to stand up for white rights, the *Traditionalist American Knights of the Ku Klux Klan* (2014) poses the following question: "Our women are asking 'Where are our White Men? Who will stand for us and our children?'" Though women are actively involved in contemporary KKK organizations (Blee 1996), these Web sites' nearly exclusive focus on men reinforces the gendered hierarchy of power within the Klan's ideological and theological belief systems that categorize women as subordinate and unequal.

KKK terminology and core concepts also emphasize the patriarchal world of white supremacy and Klan masculinity. Social class is also interwoven in this masculine language, as working class men have historically comprised a large segment of Klan membership (Gilliard-Matthews 2011), and low-wage, manual labor can be emasculating for men if they are required to act in subservient ways that contradict norms of stereotypical masculinity (Nixon 2009). The masculinized language of the KKK can work to counteract this emasculation by situating white men at the top of the social hierarchy and more broadly reifying the Klan's rhetoric of supremacy. Leaders in Klan communities are referred to as "Imperial Wizards," which contrasts with the feminine counterpart of "witch." The Web site *An Educational Historical Study of the Ku Klux Klan* (2013) provides historical information pertaining to Klan lineage through a "Wall of Wizards and Other Prominent Men who Joined the KKK." The only mention of women on this Web site refers to white women as part of the "forgotten

slaves" of United States history. Men in the Klan are also elevated to a revered status as leaders, a sentiment captured through the description of a past Imperial Wizard's recorded speech: "Words of a great man, but of a bygone era" (*Aryan Nations Knights of the Ku Klux Klan* 2014). The above examples of Klan rhetoric reflect a process-based intersectionality, which emphasizes the unique influence of race on manifestations of gender and hegemonic masculinity (Choo and Ferree 2010).

Intersecting race and patriarchy: Heteronormative nuclear family values

Intertwined with the racialized, hegemonic nature of Klan masculinity and the marginalization of femininity is the repeated emphasis on traditional family values as a driving force of KKK ideology. First and foremost, Klan organizations consider themselves members of a wider community that is unified through a shared belief system. According to the *Imperial Klans of America* (2012) Web site, the word "klan came from the Scottish word Clan referring to a family or a likened group of believers." Expanding on this idea, the *White Camelia Knights of the Ku Klux Klan* (2011) describe themselves as "a group of men and women (families) that share a common belief in religion and race." In this way, Klan ties appear to supersede those of blood alone, creating a type of fictive or created kinship grounded in intersecting dimensions of prejudice. The Klan's version of fictive kinship reinforces unity and support through whiteness, which is unique in that fictive kin is most often empirically associated with socially marginalized groups, such as racial or ethnic minorities and gay and lesbian families (Nelson 2014). Echoing this sentiment, the *Dixie Rangers of the Ku Klux Klan* (2009) declare "Unity among our members makes us strong, as it does with any group." Paralleling the focus on white solidarity, Klan family values act as a type of connecting force among KKK members that serve to enhance group loyalty and dedication by drawing on people's sense of familial obligation and responsibility.

Furthermore, KKK Web sites repeatedly stress the importance of the preservation of the family as integral to the success of their social groups, namely white Christians. This "family" that the KKK espouses is a very specific form, however, that is distinctly restricted to the nuclear composition including a father, mother, and one or more children. The image from Table 2 representing the theme of "Traditional Family Values" also allows for an intersectional understanding of the KKK's conceptualization of "family." Showing a white father, mother, and two daughters, the image reflects the ideal heterosexually-defined Klan family (*The Knights Party* 2010). The lack of any depictions of family diversity among the KKK Web sites underscores the Klan's reliance on idealized notions of the primacy of the nuclear family, when in reality families are becoming much more complex and varied along the lines of structure and functionality (Teachman, Tedrow, and Crowder 2000). Heteronormativity, or the privileging of opposite-sex attraction and sexual orientation in social contexts (Jackson 2006), is the standard of decorum according to the KKK, and same-sex relationships are condemned as abominations of "natural law" and viewed as damaging to children: "When two men or two women adopt a child it only stands to reason that the child will be raised as a homosexual or lesbian" (*White Camelia Knights of the Ku Klux Klan* 2011). This discriminatory logic, which privileges the heterosexual nuclear family through the tactic of homophobia, helps the Klan establish their intersectional social hierarchy by establishing clear divides between themselves and groups deemed by the KKK as inferior and unnatural.

Just as the Web sites argue that the present social order threatens to dismantle white racial solidarity, a similar case is made for the contemporary dangers that the Klan family faces. In this way, race and traditional family are closely intertwined in KKK rhetoric and intersect to create complex axes of prejudice. The strategy of blaming the growth of multiculturalism for weakening family values is evident in the following statement: "A part of the disintegration of the family is due to the negative affects [sic] alien cultures have had upon our people" (*The Knights Party* 2010). As such, Klan groups cite it as an organizational crusade to uphold "the history of the Founding Fathers and of our Nation ... the history of a racially pure family ... The Klan seeks to preserve that history and family" (*The Traditionalist American Knights of the Ku Klux Klan* 2014). Families, then,

comprise both the membership networks of the Ku Klux Klan as well as foundational biological ties. These examples underscore the Klan's reliance on the traditional, heteronormative nuclear family as an "ideological code" similar to that of the Standard North American Family that operates to maintain the power of the privileged groups that inhabit those statuses (Smith 1993).

Discussion

Findings from this intersectional analysis of the contemporary Ku Klux Klan are in line with previous research that has confirmed the unique presence of hate groups within the ephemeral realm of the Internet (Adams and Roscigno 2005; Billig 2001; Bostdorff 2004; Gerstenfeld et al. 2003). This study also contributes to present understandings of contemporary hate groups by documenting the distinct impact of the Ku Klux Klan through a lens of intersectionality. Specifically, this analysis allows for a more nuanced understanding of the KKK's Web-based operations by unpacking the intersections of their ideology along the lines of race, gender, the family, and religion. Broadly, the KKK has built its online presence around a model of hate, prejudice, and discrimination that harkens back to its historical legacy as well as its continued social influence.

Intersectionality theory is a useful analytic framework for examining the dimensions of prejudice in the contemporary identity of the Klan as it highlights the complex, dynamic nature of modern-day social intolerance as well as the complicated effects resulting from the convergence of these statuses (Choo and Ferree 2010). For example, racism through *White Solidarity* was shown to operate as the foundational structure of prejudice underscoring all other axes of social enmity on KKK Web sites, thus acting as the core code of Klan ideology (Deegan 1998). The influence of racism is prominent in studies of intersectionality as it is the most pervasive form of discriminatory social categorization that emphasizes the black/white racial division (Nash 2008). White supremacy, therefore, intersects with the *Aryan Christianity* of the KKK by reinforcing the Klan's social hierarchy and providing justification for their teachings. The transection of race and religion has long been identified as a divisive factor in black-white race relations, from the historical era of slavery to the more contemporary concerns of evangelical leaders in deconstructing racial conflicts (Emerson and Smith 2000).

Additionally, the confluence of race and gender is evident in the Web sites' presentation of *Aryan Klan Masculinity* and the ways that the Klan constructs their victimized identity, despite their privileged social locations of being white men. The concept of hegemonic masculinity rests on the assumption that the socially privileged possess the greatest power (Connell and Messerschmidt 2005). However, the KKK casts their identity as a type of racialized "marginalized masculinity" (Coston and Kimmel 2012) that is unable to reap the benefits of their social locations as a result of problematic social forces, such as racial and cultural pluralism. Race and gender also intersect in the Klan's definition of the idealized family form of the *Heteronormative Nuclear Family*. The institution of the family operates as a gendered, racialized institution that propagates social stratification through processes such as the division of household labor, the transmission of intergenerational wealth, and public policies that favor privileged social statuses (Collins 1998). Similarly, the heteronormative nuclear family is often reproduced at the micro-interactional level through mundane conversation and exchange (Kitzinger 2005), which is evident in the KKK's subtle, yet forceful, portrayal of this family form as the ideal type deserving of social benefits and privilege.

The implications of this study speak to the growing prevalence of hate-based imagery and language that reinforces complex hierarchies across numerous, intersecting social locations, which is directly enabled by the anonymity inherent to the Internet. While the number of documented hate groups has been on the rise since 2000 (Potok and McCabe 2011), Internet-oriented hate groups are unique in that they allow for the broader dissemination of their teachings that is often immune from formal and informal social sanctions. Debate also continues concerning the legality of hate-filled language on these Web sites, even though this form of expression is technically protected under First Amendment rights when it does not directly condone violence (Leets 2001). A large proportion of hate Web sites, especially within the realm of the KKK, are careful to include disclaimers stating that

they neither encourage nor support violent action (Gerstenfeld et al. 2003). However, as these hate groups exist in contrast to public claims of equality and civil rights in American society, some have argued for a Web-centered "code of conduct" that could regulate hateful dogmas on the Internet while maintaining the ideal of free speech (Bailey 2003).

While the Ku Klux Klan has experienced a reduction in its membership rates in recent decades, in part because of in-group fighting and conflicts (Southern Poverty Law Center 2014b), their growing online presence and foray into Internet communities has the potential to legitimate them as a prominent social organization. The anonymity of the Internet can spread hate-filled speech and beliefs while allaying fears of negative repercussions. Group discussion forums and chat rooms readily enable environments in which it is socially acceptable to advocate for hate and violence from the safety of one's keyboard (Glaser, Dixit, and Green 2002). Individuals who can hide behind anonymous user names and encrypted IP addresses may be more prone to involvement with Internet-based hate groups when there is no risk of social stigma.

Despite this study's unique findings and contribution to understandings of contemporary KKK groups, it is not without limitations. The small number of currently functioning Klan Web sites restricts the sample size itself, as historically the KKK has operated under a veil of secrecy and exclusionism, despite its focus on the dissemination of its values (Blee and McDowell 2013). Furthermore, the extent to which these Web sites are reflective of the groups themselves must be considered with caution. The KKK groups analyzed for this study may choose to strategically create their online personae by either exaggerating their teachings and causes or by minimizing the scope of their hate or violent tendencies.

Future research should continue to examine the intersectional intricacies of contemporary KKK manifestations, both on the Internet and in their face-to-face interactions. While a more in-depth examination of class was beyond the scope of this study based on the lack of financial information on the Web sites, future analyses could attempt to obtain this information for both the groups' monetary records and members' class backgrounds. For example, stronger KKK membership in particular has been linked to regional contexts experiencing greater economic hardship (Gilliard-Matthews 2011). Furthermore, hate groups are notorious for being capitalist endeavors through the sale of merchandise (Gerstenfeld et al. 2003; Schafer 2002), and the additional focus on class could further strengthen an intersectional analysis of the KKK. Though a content analysis of Web sites is telling of its modern-day character, individual people create and sustain the KKK. As such, more research is also needed to understand the human side of the Ku Klux Klan and the motivations for joining and being an active member.

Overall, this intersectional analysis of the complexity of contemporary Ku Klux Klan Web sites broadens understanding of their dimensions of prejudice and discrimination. Through an exploration of their hateful ideologies within the realms of *White Solidarity, Cult of Aryan Christianity, Aryan Klan Masculinity* and *Heteronormative Nuclear Family Values*, it is clear that the KKK continues to operate on a subversive level to strengthen their ideology of social supremacy. The continued study of modern day Klan influence is needed to examine the breadth and depth of their supremacist ideologies, while also developing strategies to counteract the multiple dimensions of hate they create.

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