Recovering from Racism:

Why and How White Supremacists Quit Hate

by

Jackson Beach Liguori

A Master’s Thesis Presented in
Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
The Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Approved December 2020 by the
Graduate Supervisory Committee:

Lisa Spanierman, Chair
Cheryl Warner
Joe Feagin

ARIZONA STATE UNIVERSITY

May, 2021

ABSTRACT

Although the topic of hate group radicalization processes has received significant attention in recent years, less research has been dedicated to hate group exit processes. This gap is concerning because the number of hate groups and violent hate crimes in the United States has increased dramatically over the last decade (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2020). Through in-depth, semi-structured interviews with nine former white supremacists, this study explores how and why former ex-white supremacists leave their hate groups, and why some choose to then speak out against their former racist ideologies. Using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as a methodological framework, I identified eleven themes related to the process of leaving one's hate group and becoming an anti-hate activist. These themes are organized into three categories consistent with the research questions: (a) participants' *exit* experiences (e.g., exit-precipitating interactions with members of marginalized communities), (b) participants' *post-exit* experiences (e.g., navigating personal danger and threats to safety), and (c) participants' experiences of *becoming anti-hate activists* (e.g., developing an activist identity). These findings may be used to guide the development of clinical interventions for supporting hate group members confronting pre- and post-exit consequences.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER Page

1 INTRODUCTION……………………………………………………………………1

2 LITERATURE REVIEW…………………………………………………………7

White Racial Frame……………………………………………………………7

Distinguishing Between Disengagement and Deradicalization…………..….......11

Push/Pull Factors…………..…………………………………………....................13

Models of Exit Processing……………………………………………………......15

Post-Exit Challenges………………………………………………………..........26

Summary and Limitations of Exit Process Theories……………………..………29

Purpose and Rationale for the Current Investigation……………………………31

3 METHOD………………………………………………………...........................32

Participant Selection and Recruitment……………………………………...33

Researcher Positionality...35

Data Sources...36

Procedures..37

Data Security...40

Trustworthiness...40

4 FINDINGS...43

5 DISCUSSION..65

REFERENCES..75

APPENDIX

A PARTICIPANT DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION TABLE.......................89

B STUDY PARTICIPATION FLYER..90

C STUDY RECRUITMENT LETTER..91

D DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION FORM..92

E STUDY PSEUDONYM ADDENDUM..93

F SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEW SCHEDULE...94

G TABLE OF THEMES AND DEFINTIONS..95

Recovering from Racism: Why and How White Supremacists Quit Hate

Chapter 1

Introduction

> *For one-third of my life, I'd chewed and swallowed grisly bits of twisted ideologies, and now all I felt like doing was jamming my fingers down my throat and vomiting them all up into the nearest toilet. I felt like a dope fiend, except I was detoxing from selfish power and control, always craving more and living on a razor's edge, perpetually looking to score the next hateful fix.*
>
> *-Christian Picciolini*[1]

White individuals who have joined and exited their former hate groups share experiences that point to an underlying path of moral transformation. Although no two individuals follow the same journey into and then out of racist extremism, scholars have identified salient stages that appear to apply broadly across radicalization experiences (Aho, 1988; Bubolz & Simi, 2015, Mattsson & Johansson, 2018). Far more is known about why people join violent hate groups than is known about why they leave, or the kinds of activism former extremists endorse upon disengagement (Hunter, Shortland, Crayne, & Ligon, 2017). As such, I am concerned primarily with (a) identifying significant factors that contribute to the successful exit processes of white Americans from white supremacist groups and (b) understanding their personal experiences after leaving their respective groups.

---

[1] Christian Picciolini is a former neo-Nazi who became an anti-hate activist/author and founded the Free Radicals Project, a global network dedicated to helping people disengage from hate movements and other violent ideologies.

The importance of investigating the nature of leaving hate groups and implementing subsequent strategies to facilitate exit processes is gaining traction (Bubolz & Simi, 2015). In addition to a growing body of scholarly literature on the subject, organizations are beginning to develop support systems for recovering racists. “Life After Hate” and “Free Radicals Project” in the United States and “EXIT” in Sweden, for example, are wholly dedicated to helping members disengage from their violent white extremist groups and reconnect to mainstream society. Importantly, these programs are led and staffed primarily by former extremists who successfully went through their own hate group exit processes. These organizations face an uphill battle to be taken seriously, even by their own country’s governments. In 2017, for instance, President Donald Trump’s Department of Homeland Security (DHS) cut all funding for Life After Hate (Rozsa, 2017). The group, which was expecting to receive $400,000 in grant money from the DHS, was forced to gather funding through a crowdsourcing campaign organized after the Charlottesville massacre, which occurred in August of that same year.

Although the term “hate group” is used broadly in public discourse, for purposes of my thesis I refer to Woolf and Hulsizer’s (2004) definition: “any organized group whose beliefs and actions are rooted in enmity towards an entire class of people based on ethnicity, perceived race, sexual orientation, religion, or other inherent characteristic” (p. 41). The majority of these kinds of organizations in the United States adhere to white supremacist ideologies (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2020). According to the Southern Poverty Center’s most recent extremist data, there are 940 hate groups in the United

States today, and 55% more white supremacist groups than there were in 2017 (2020). The threat of white supremacist terrorism has risen to such a point that in 2019, the United States Congress stated in the *Domestic Terrorism Prevention Act of 2019* that “white supremacists and other far-right-wing extremists are the most significant domestic terrorism threat facing the United States” (Cullen, 2019).

Online racial extremism is also on the rise. For example, 4chan.org, a popular online imageboard website, is well-known for hosting racist content on its /pol/ (politically incorrect) discussion forum. Though the forum’s stated purpose is the "discussion of news, world events, political issues, and other related topics," the conversations it hosts have promoted supremacist thought, Islamophobia, and misogyny (4chan, 2020; Wilson, 2017). Importantly, online fora like 4chan or Reddit have been found to have a significant impact on generating false information or “fake news” that makes its way into mainstream online networks and news outlets (Zannettou et al., 2017).

In some cases, racist content posted on these websites has been used to justify mass racial violence. For instance, the perpetrators of the Christchurch mosque shootings (March 2019), the Powaysynagogue shooting (April 2019) and the El Paso Walmart shooting (August 2019) were all linked to 4Chan (Voué, De Smedt, & De Pauw, 2020). Before Facebook livestreaming his mass shooting at the Christchurch mosque in New Zealand, Brenton Tarrant left a message for the users of 8chan, an offshoot of 4chan: “Well lads, it’s time to stop shitposting and time to make a real-life effort post ... Please do your part by spreading my message, making memes and shitposting as you usually do” (Perrigo, 2019).

Although such a call to white supremacist action might seem extreme at first glance, some of today's American politicians have been found endorsing similarly violent rhetoric. Müller and Schwarz (2019), for instance, found that after the start of his presidential campaign, Donald Trump's tweets about Islam-related topics were highly correlated with anti-Muslim hate crimes. Researchers have also discovered that in the years following Trump's election, the occurrence of online hate speech has risen sharply. For example, an analysis of 4chan's /pol/ discussion board revealed that the monthly number of recorded instances of the N-word had quintupled to 115,000 since Trump's bid for President (Thompson, 2018).

In a time when presidential tweets echo sentiments of white supremacist groups, the white radical might find it difficult to ascertain the validity or invalidity of their group's ideology in contrast to the "mainstream" rhetorical climate. As such, this blurring of ideological boundaries may affect their calculus in determining whether or not to leave the hate group. My study addresses how others came to make their exit decisions in order to help develop means of psychological support for people who are struggling to leave their hate groups.

Although white supremacists represent extreme racist and sexist views, their attitude is rooted in a traditional American sociological perspective. Feagin (2013) explained how white American men historically have dominated the U.S. social hierarchy by maintaining a mechanism known as the *white racial frame.* He describes this frame as an "overarching white worldview that encompasses a broad and persisting set of racial stereotypes, prejudices, ideologies, images, interpretations and narratives, emotions, and reactions to language accents, as well as racialized inclinations to discriminate" (Feagin, 2013, p. 3). It is important to note the ideological proximity white supremacists share with their typical American neighbor as it challenges us to investigate where the distinction lies between extreme racism and socially sanctioned racism. I expand on this subject in the literature review.

In the current study, I emphasize the importance of understanding hate group exit from a psychological perspective because psychological researchers have contributed relatively little to the exit process literature. Windisch and colleagues (2017) pointed out in their meta-analysis of one hundred peer-reviewed articles that only five appeared in psychological academic journals. It is important that psychology builds an understanding of the full process of deradicalization in its cognitive and emotional manifestations. Some scholars suggest that leaving hate groups may involve certain triggers that facilitate ideological relapse and that once disengaged, many of these ex-extremists require ongoing psychological maintenance and incorporation of coping skills (Hu, 2018; Prochaska, DiClemente, & Norcorss, 1992). Psychological research has the potential to elucidate the most prominent paths to full deradicalization of ex-white supremacists and thus raise awareness around renouncing racial hatred. Clinicians in turn can utilize these findings to begin establishing ethical and practical interventions for hate group exiting.

Using interpretative phenomenological analysis (i.e., a qualitative research approach that features participants' descriptions of their experiences regarding a given phenomenon), I examine descriptions from white individuals who have departed white supremacist hate groups. I emphasize participant exit experiences so as to understand the extremist life cycle beyond the attraction, indoctrination, and participation phases. Investigating the physical, psychological, social, financial, and spiritual consequences of leaving hate groups has the potential to illustrate the complexity of the exit process for ex-white supremacists who have ceased to follow the racist ideology they once espoused. Findings from this study have the potential to inform clinical interventions for supporting hate group members confronting pre- and post-exit consequences. Additionally, findings from this study show promise in supporting ex-hate group members in the process of becoming social justice advocates and/or contributors to hate group exit research.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Below, I discuss the theoretical significance of the white racial frame in relation to white supremacist ideology, distinguish disengagement from deradicalization, identify salient push/pull exit factors, and outline prominent models of exit processes from the literature. Finally, I review the literature on significant challenges former extremists experience after leaving their respective hate groups.

White Racial Frame

To grasp the complex nature of exit processes from hate groups, it is important to first contextualize white supremacist ideology in extremist groups within the United States' broader demographic ideology. Such contextualization provides us with an insight into the society from which former white supremacists originate and to which they return upon leaving their hate group. As mentioned earlier, the *white racial frame* is a white worldview that includes implicit encouragement of racial discrimination against minority groups (Feagin, 2013). This ideology has been a fundamental component of American culture for centuries. Today's white American racial frame is composed of three sub-systems: systemic sexism (heterosexism), systemic classism (capitalism), and systemic racism (Feagin, 2017). As such, Feagin suggests that white supremacist ideology is not a fundamental departure from, but rather a version of the broadly accepted white racial frame (Yancy & Feagin, 2015).

It is important to note that the frame is not monolithic in terms of its portrayal of diverse racial and ethnic groups. The broad white racial frame is composed of subframes. These subframes render racial and ethnic groups in unique and significant ways. For instance, white Americans continue to view Native Americans as lazy, drug or alcohol-addicted, criminal, somehow foreign, and not fully American (Feagin, 2013). Latino immigrants, on the other hand, are seen as animals and invaders (Ana, 1999).

Although the white racialized perspective is composed of numerous discriminatory renderings, anti-Black framing lies at the heart of the white racial frame. As Feagin (2013) explained, Black Americans have long represented “a central reference point, a negative racial framing against which most whites have consciously institutionalized racism and unconsciously defined themselves” (p. 98) As such, anti-Black sentiment serves as the ideological foundation upon which white supremacist perspectives were built and are reproduced. To measure the extent to which these internal biases persist today, psychologists from Harvard, the University of Virginia, and the University of Washington created "Project Implicit," a “virtual laboratory” for collecting implicit social cognition data on the Internet (Greenwald, Banaji, & Nosek, 1998). As of 2015, the researchers had compiled data from over three million tests. The results revealed that 68 % of participants showed automatic preference for European-Americans over African Americans, while only 14% showed automatic preference for African Americans over European-Americans (Sanford, 2018). These data suggest that the white racial frame continues to underpin contemporary Americans’ racial worldviews.

Daniels (1997) explicitly argues that white supremacy is an essential part of America’s sociological foundation. In other words, “white supremacy in the United States is a central organizing principle of social life rather than merely an isolated social movement” (p. 11). She notes that as a society, we are inclined to designate white supremacists as members of the extreme political fringe who are unworthy of our serious attention. But this very attitude creates a pernicious social state of racial camouflage: by using white supremacists as the symbols of racism, the average white American citizen believes that they are not racist and thus not responsible for addressing racial inequality (Daniels, 1997). Daniels argues that because we do not interrogate the more institutionalized white supremacist tenants of our society, we inadvertently foster the racial environment that supports overtly racist white supremacist ideology and activity (Daniels, 1997). As such, the mainstream American racial perspective not only shares basic principles with white supremacist ideology, but also buffers white supremacy's maintenance and growth.

I emphasize the ideological proximity white supremacists share with the general population, as it forces us to find where the distinction lies between extremist racism and socially sanctioned racism. hooks (2000) points to the nature of this ambiguity in her discussion concerning a white man shooting a young, lost, unthreatening Asian male:

> White supremacy has taught him that all people of color are threats irrespective of their behavior. Capitalism has taught him that, at all costs, his property can and must be protected. Patriarchy has taught him that his masculinity has to be proved by the willingness to conquer fear through aggression; that it would be unmanly to ask questions before taking action (pp. 194-195).

Reading hooks's description, one can quickly identify the three subsystems of Feagin's (2013) aforementioned everyday white racial frame: racism, capitalism, and heterosexism. Yet, the act of murdering an innocent person because of their race appears to be an extreme manifestation of this ideology. Thus, we might posit that an important element separating the acceptable white racial frame from the white supremacist's extreme racial worldview is not to be found in its narrative content, but rather in an absolute and dogmatic interpretation of its perspective.

Collective Memory and Collective Forgetting

The white supremacist racial worldview is not an innate information processing system. Rather, it is the articulation of a collective cultural memory set subsidized by multiple generations of white people. Assmann and Czaplicka (1995) described collective memory as, “a collective concept for all knowledge that directs behavior and experience in the interactive framework of a society and one that obtains through generations in repeated societal practice and initiation” (p. 126). In other words, collective memory is a type of remembering mediated by social context and shaped by communications with members of one’s social group.

White supremacist communities use collective memory as means of constructing their own unique cultural narrative. For instance, white supremacist groups have been known to use the term “Western civilization” as code for the white race and its cultural history in general. Within this broad historical framework, white supremacists point to ancient European cities like Rome and Greece as the birthplaces, and to men like Plato and Aristotle as the fathers, of Western civilization and the white race in general (Illing, 2019). Using their unique historical interpretation of Western civilization as synonymous with the history of the white race, white supremacists create a cultural narrative that is both supportive of their extreme ideology and empowering to their members and potential recruits.

While collective memory is important for building cultural narratives, collective *forgetting* is also essential for maintaining healthy cultural memories. By not passing certain knowledge on to younger generations, new spaces open and allow other images of communal identity in the present and future to come to the fore (Carsten, 1995). This kind of forgetting is particularly important when attempting to create new shared identities and social connections. For instance, members of cognatic societies of South East Asia do not remember a great deal about their ancestors, and instead invest in *creating* kinship with those around them. They have developed this kind of social system to fit with the high degree of demographic mobility between the islands. They leave behind details of past diversity for the sake of creating new connections in novel settings (Connerton, 2008). As such, collective forgetting serves as a complementary tool of collective memory for cultural construction.

When recruits enter white supremacist hate groups, they learn new rules and create new social bonds. Often, they disconnect from old friends and family members. As these recruits become more and more embedded in the hate group, they disconnect further and further from their prior social perspective. Importantly, those who choose to *leave* their white supremacist groups must abandon the racist cultural narrative they endorsed while inside the hate group and re-learn how to exist in the mainstream world. As such, one might view the journey from radicalization to deradicalization as an undulation between collective remembering and collective forgetting.

Distinguishing Between Disengagement and Deradicalization

Attachment to ideology is of the utmost importance when attempting to distinguish between two types of exit: disengagement and deradicalization. Though these two manifestations of distancing from former hate groups tend to be conflated, I will explain what makes them distinct and discuss the significance of these distinctions.

Disengagement

A member of an extremist group may first decide to *disengage* from the organization. For the purposes of my thesis, I use Ebaugh's (1988) definition of disengagement: "The process whereby an individual no longer accepts as appropriate the socially defined rights and obligations that accompany a given role in society" (p. 3). It is important to point out that although disengaged individuals free themselves specifically from "rights and obligations" associated with their group, they do not necessarily renounce the group's fundamental belief system. In terms of white extremist disengagement, this means that even though disengaged ex-white extremist individuals no longer participate in group activities, they do not necessarily renounce the group's racist ideology (Windisch et al., 2017).

Deradicalization

Deradicalization represents a further distancing from the extremist group. Rabasa and colleagues (2010) defined deradicalization as, "The process of changing an individual's belief system, rejecting the extremist ideology, and embracing mainstream values" (p. xiii). The emphasis on not only the renunciation of ideology, but also on the reintegration into mainstream culture is a key component of deradicalization as distinct from disengagement. As Koehler (2015) noted, successful deradicalization requires the member both exit the extremist group and also re-engage with the non-extremist environment. Establishing an identity in the non-extremist world is essential because it allows one to build a meaningful and satisfying social system outside of the hate group.

After establishing these external social ties, the member may not be as tempted to return to the hate group in search of community.

The distinction between disengagement and deradicalization illuminates a subtlety that may elucidate why some exit processes succeed and others fail. Those who exit extremist groups fall on a spectrum of disaffiliation ranging from disengaged to fully deradicalized. As the literature suggests, although there are broad similarities when looking at disengagement and deradicalization in general, individual exit processes are complex, multifaceted, and ambiguous (Simi, 2015; Simi, Blee, DeMichele, & Windisch 2017). This idea is important to keep in mind when investigating the idiosyncratic nature of individual exit processes. For this study, I utilized semi-structured interviewing to ensure that participants were afforded the flexibility to describe the nuances of their particular experiences from their own perspectives.

Push/Pull Factors

In both disengagement and deradicalization processes, hate group members' decisions to exit are influenced by what are called "push" and "pull" factors (Reckless, 1961; Reiss, 1951). Push factors refer to adverse organizational characteristics that lead someone to reconsider continued involvement with the group, whereas pull factors refer to features outside of the group that make exiting an attractive option (Windisch et al., 2017). Ultimately, a combination of these factors leads members to exit their respective groups.

Exit process literature in the disciplines of criminology, political science, psychology, information technology innovation, and sociology identify myriad factors found to both push and pull members to leave white supremacist organizations. Notably, some of these factors appear more often in the scholarly literature and media resources than others. Upon analyzing the available literature and media, I found the most prominent push factors to be: repudiation of violence (Simi, Windisch, Harris, & Ligon 2019; Windisch et al., 2017), disillusionment (Enzina, 2018; Picciolini, 2017; Windisch et al., 2017), and fear of physical confinement (Rohr, 2018; Windisch et al., 2017). To clarify, repudiation of violence refers to instances in which the individual disagrees with the use of violence or believes that violent action is no longer a viable means of political protest. The literature also points to instances where the individual has witnessed violent action or was subjected to violence that led him to reconsider continued involvement with the organization. Disillusionment refers to the realization that a consistent incongruence exists between one's idealized expectations of being part of the hate group and the everyday realities associated with those same expectations. Physical confinement denotes one's being impounded inside of a jail, prison, or mental health facility.

Importantly, in my investigation of scholarly research, personal accounts and memoirs, taped interviews, and other media resources, I found the number of pull factors was higher than that of push factors. Specific pull factors were: engaging familial, social, and romantic relationships outside of one's hate group (Blazak, 2004; Enzina, 2018; Gadd, 2006; Gross, 2018; HLN, 2012; OWN, 2019; Phillips, 2017; Picciolini, 2017; Saslow, 2018; Shortland & Taylor, 2016; Wilson, 2017; Zaal, 2017), return to employment and/or education (Windisch, et al., 2017), and contact with members of a hate target group (Patria et al., 2015; Picciolini, 2017; Rohr, 2018; Search For Common Ground, 2017; Wilson, 2017; Zaal, 2017). Although there are innumerable push and pull factors documented in the literature, the salient experiences mentioned here form the foundation of broadly applicable exit process models.

Models of Exit Processing

Keeping this context in mind, I now discuss the broad paths that former ideological extremists have traveled on route to ultimately exiting their respective hate groups as outlined by previous research. To ground our discussion in the broader field of group exit dynamics, I will first explore two models that concern exiting from groups in general (i.e., exiting from non-hate groups). I will then focus on models that detail the social, emotional, and cognitive mechanisms involved in leaving and not returning to hate group involvement in particular.

Non-Hate Group Exit Process Models

Much of the research concerning deradicalization is connected to studies that addressed non-extremist populations. The findings from these studies make up a theoretical framework that has been adapted and reformulated to help researchers outline hate group exit process. One of the contributions of my study will be to assess the ways in which these models apply to white supremacist exist processes. I discuss two of these non-extremist exit models below.

Role Exit Theory

Ebaugh (1988) focused her theory of group exit on what she describes in the title of her book as *Becoming an Ex*. Ebaugh gathered her data through semi-structured qualitative interviews ($N = 185$) with ex-members of religious orders, divorced persons, mothers without custody of their children, former physicians, teachers, police officers, mental health workers, ex-air traffic controllers, ex-members of political groups, former prisoners and alcoholics, and transsexual individuals (Ebaugh, 1988).

Based on her analysis, Ebaugh identified four stages of "becoming an ex:" *doubting, search for alternatives, the turning point,* and *creating an ex-role.* In the *doubting* stage, the current member cultivates a re-interpretive and critical attitude towards their role in the group. This contemplation is characterized by degree of awareness, social context, degree of control over the process, and the institutionalization of doubts. In the next stage, the *search for alternatives*, group members actually begin exploring alternative ways of thinking and living. One of the ways they do so is by rehearsing and trying out new roles. Members in this stage tend to rely on the support of significant others. At stage three comes the *turning point*, or an event where one realizes participating in the group is no longer satisfying and recognizes alternative opportunities. Ebaugh specified five major types of turning points: *specific events, time-related factors, excuses, either/or alternatives and what she calls "the straw that broke the camel's back"* (p.125). *Specific events* generally have to do with moments like death in the family or other emotionally charged occurrences. *Time-related factors* are scenarios wherein one's advancing age pushes them to make a particular life decision. *Excuses* are turning points sought by members looking to justify their group exit. *Either/or alternatives* often involve members making life or death decisions. Finally, there is an event that serves as the *last straw* for pushing the member to leave the group.

The last stage of Ebaugh's (1988) exit process involves creating an "ex-role," or leaving one's group-centered identity and creating a new one that corresponds with mainstream social expectations. This step can sometimes be the most arduous for former members who are caught between competing identities. Ebaugh (1988) describes this conflict below:

> The essential dilemma involved in the ex-role is the incongruity and tension that exists between self-definition and social expectations. The individual going through the exit process is trying to shake off and deemphasize the previous identity. An important moment in the exit process occurs when one's friends, family, and co-workers begin to think of one as other than an ex. (p.150)

The "ex" now must deal with issues such as lingering effects of social labels attached to the former identity, changes in friend networks, and role residual from time spent as part of the group. Ebaugh's role exit theory is unique in that it emphasizes the impact of previous role identification on current concepts of self as well as the impact of social reactions to an individual that are based on that individual's previous roles.

Investment Model

The second exit model derived from non-extremist groups is Rusbult and colleagues' investment model (Farrell & Rusbult, 1981; Rusbult, 1980, 1983; Rusbult & Farrell, 1983; Rusbult, Martz, & Agnew, 1998). These researchers were interested in investigating four particular constructs: commitment level, satisfaction level, quality of alternatives, and investment size. To do so, they conducted three separate studies by distributing questionnaires to undergraduate student participants from University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill (Rusbult et al., 1998).

Altier, Thoroughgood, & Horgan (2014) explain the investment model is based on traditional exchange theory and can be conveyed simply as:

$$\textit{Commitment} = \textit{Satisfaction} - \textit{Alternatives} + \textit{Investments}$$

$$\textit{Satisfaction} = \textit{Actual}[\textit{Rewards} - \textit{Costs}] - \textit{Expected}[\textit{Rewards} - \textit{Costs}]$$

Satisfaction is a measure of how positively one views the target entity (e.g., job, relationship, group, and so forth). According to the model, satisfaction increases as rewards from association increase and costs decrease, thus surpassing one's expectations or comparison level. Measuring satisfaction is important because of the effect it has on commitment levels, or the probability that one stays in, and feels psychologically bound to, a job, relationship, group, or organization. (Rusbult & Farrell, 1983).

It is important to note that while high satisfaction is correlated with higher level commitment, low satisfaction does not ensure lower commitment. Commitment is complex because it is affected by of two additional variables: alternative quality and investment size (Farrell & Rusbult, 1981). As the equation above describes, commitment is higher when one perceives poor alternatives to group participation and is deeply invested in the group. There are both intrinsic investments (e.g., time, money, energy) and extrinsic investments (e.g., friends, material objects, memories) (Altier et al., 2014). Thus, group members who benefit from high in-group rewards (e.g., sense of meaning and safety) and low costs (e.g., little in-group conflict and few perceived threats), which exceed their expectations for their role, will most likely experience a high level of satisfaction and subsequently maintain higher levels of commitment to the group. However, if a group member receives lower rewards and higher costs, thus experiencing lower satisfaction, they might remain in the group due to poor alternatives and high investments in the organization.

An important element of the investment model is its incorporation of emotional costs as an influence in terms of both remaining and exiting from former groups (Rusbult

& Buunk, 1993; Rusbult et al., 1998). For example, members experiencing high emotional costs (e.g., feeling insecure and uncomfortable) may become dissatisfied and decide to leave the group. On the other hand, members experiencing low emotional costs (e.g., positive or emotions like feeling emotionally attached and comfortable) may feel more connected to the group, experience higher satisfaction, and higher commitment levels, all of which persuade the member to remain in the group.

Hate Group Exit Models

Now that I have discussed broad theories of exit processes, I will focus on models that specifically address leaving white supremacist groups. I discuss three of these theories below.

Becoming, Belonging, Leaving

The first model is Mattson and Johansson's (2018) three-stage model, which traces the paths white supremacists take into, through and out of hate groups. Drawing from interviews with ten former neo-Nazis, the authors identified three salient levels within exit processes: becoming, belonging, and leaving (Mattson & Johansson, 2018). Although I am most interested in the leaving stage, this model illuminates how reasons for joining hate groups are often inextricably connected to reasons for leaving.

In the *becoming* stage, Mattson and Johansson (2018) identified a host of factors that influence people to enter extremist groups. These influences include problematic family situations, exposure to violence, failing/negative experiences at school, extremist ideology within one's biological family, low socioeconomic status, and feeling like an outsider. Interestingly, despite the numerous factors moving someone towards extremist membership, the sum of influences seems generally to funnel into a desire for identity and a longing for community (Mattson & Johansson, 2018). This struggle to formulate one's identity is a key component of both entry *and* exit processes for pre and post-extremists. In order for full de-radicalization to occur, former extremists must not only leave their group-affiliated identity, but also solidify a new mainstream-based persona (Ebaugh, 1988).

The second level of Mattson and Johansson's model is *belonging*. Ex-members describe being slowly absorbed into their extremist communities by way of a certain kind of schooling. Recruits are taught a strict worldview based on racial boundaries that serve as a subcultural and ideological home (Mattson & Johansson, 2018). Despite the multiplicity of indoctrination techniques, the authors note that extremist schooling is centrally important for instilling a sense of belonging that emerges in members over time.

Once a member joins, they are given a specific role or position within the hate group. Then, the member slowly replaces former friendships and out-group connections with the intense comradery of fellow members and the protective experience of in-group socio-emotional support. All of these elements combine to provide the new member with a sense of belonging and a feeling of being at "home." As one former neo-Nazi explained,

> The skinheads were always there, around the clock, if you needed somewhere to sleep or if there was a fight coming up, they could come and ... If you needed to be picked up, they made their parents pick you up, or they got access to a car and picked you up and ... So, they always welcomed you with open arms (Mattson & Johansson, 2018, p. 53).

So, not only do new recruits acquire a sense of belonging and identity, but they also experience a kind of surrogate family atmosphere in their new extremist home.

Most relevant to my proposed study, in the *leaving* stage members experience a negative change in attitude toward the organization/ideology and are slowly motivated to exit the group. This inclination does not follow a linear progression according to the authors. Even when these extremists realize their way of life is no longer functional, they may not be able to see a way out of the group. Some members experience a painful inner conflict: abandon the group and lose the community that once gave them friendship, safety, and purpose, or remain and endure the ideology and/or the violence they now find morally deplorable.

The researchers explained that to even get to the point of this emotional struggle sometimes requires happenstance events where members find themselves in situations distanced from their extremist environments. For example, Mattson and Johansson (2018) detailed how ex-hate group members discussed interacting with non-white supremacists anywhere from local barbeques to boxing clubs. These interactions with non-affiliated outsiders were often found to be instrumental in motivating members to take their first steps towards exiting. The researchers noted that often encounters with people such as girlfriends or mentors influenced the young person's decision to leave their particular group (Mattson & Johansson, 2018).

But the process does not end when a member disengages from extremist activities. In order to return to society, not only must the individual set aside and leave his old identity and position behind; he also needs to acquire a new identity. To complicate this exchange further, "the knowledge, attributes and feelings of belonging that were once gained when entering the neo-Nazi movement are now useless" (Mattson & Johansson, 2018, p. 60). The researchers describe former members struggling to convince people they are no longer affiliated with their former group. Not only do the ex-members suffer from subsequent isolation, but many of these members' partners and children also are subjected to ostracization.

Exit as Recovery

While Mattson and Johansson (2018) tackle disengagement and deradicalization as a process including all stages from entry to exit, Bubolz and Simi (2015) focus on the exiting component exclusively. Their study draws from interviews with 34 (31 male and 3 female) American ex-white supremacists. The authors identified two common factors that influence exit initiation: being incarcerated and leaving one's hate group collectively with others.

First, being incarcerated is one of the life events that appears to have an impact on ex-members' decisions to leave a given hate group. Despite previous research that suggested incarceration actually reinforced criminal behavior (Burnett & Maruna, 2004; Farrall & Calverley, 2006), the researchers found incarceration provided motivation for some white supremacists to exit their former group. They explained that imprisonment brings extremists to "see prison as a direct consequence of hate group involvement and solid evidence they had reached their lowest point" (Bubolz & Simi, 2015, p. 11). The authors argued that this kind of realization mimics the "rock bottom" moment that many alcoholics experience before deciding to enter treatment.

Another factor that emboldens white supremacists to leave their organization is exiting as part of a group of individuals. This kind of exodus generally occurs when factions of the community feel alienated after having disagreements with authority members within the group, and subsequently decide to disengage collectively. Members who leave in groups typically leave with friends, close acquaintances, and romantic partners. Having support within a desisting group is important in that it affords conflicted members the opportunity to deliberate, rehearse roles in anticipation for encounters in mainstream society, and diffuse the level of stigma attached to each individual leaving (Bubolz & Simi, 2015).

A unique aspect of Bubolz and Simi's (2015) perspective on exit processes is their idea that disengagement and de-radicalization can be viewed in relation to addictive behavior rehabilitation. This view is particularly potent when discussing life experiences of former white supremacists after their exits. Many of these ex-members experience lingering guilt related to the violence they committed, the racist beliefs they once held, and their perpetuation of these beliefs through propaganda (Bubolz & Simi, 2015). Many maintain contact with members of their former hate group (Bubolz & Simi, 2015). Finally, some individuals suffer what the researchers described as "ideological relapse," or a resumption of white supremacist beliefs (Bubolz & Simi, 2015). In their sample, 21 % of the participants returned to their movement after leaving (Bubolz & Simi, 2015). As such, the researchers emphasized that former white supremacists need ongoing psychological treatment to cope with post-exit consequences to support mental health and prevent ideological relapse. They encouraged further research in identifying risk factors that may increase the likelihood of ideological relapse. I will explore this concept further when discussing post-exit challenge experiences from the literature.

Defection Model

The final model I discuss is Aho's defection model (1988). It is important to note that Aho created this conceptual framework using data collected from six people who had abandoned their former white supremacist ideology. Because of the small number of participants, Aho emphasized that his research on exit processes should be interpreted heuristically to support further investigation (Aho, 1988). The six participants whom the researcher interviewed were formerly affiliated with the KKK, a White Student Union, Identity Christian, and the Aryan Nations Church (Aho, 1988). Before discussing the results of his interviews, Aho emphasized the distinction between expulsion, extraction, and exiting. Expulsion refers to one's being forcibly pushed out by the group's leader. Extraction describes one's being forcibly removed by people outside the group. Finally, exiting denotes one's voluntarily leaving the hate group. This particular model of defection is concerned with the exiting component specifically. Exiting takes place in two separate yet related dimensions: belief and socio-communal dimensions.

Aho (1988) describes belief in one's organization as an acceptance and integration of communal knowledge whose validity is necessarily grounded in group-sanctioned activities and rituals. As such, one's belief in a particular group ideology is dependent on participation and connection to these rituals/activities. Aho (1988) observed that the former group member first cuts ties with the organization; and then, as a consequence, the member's faith and belief in the validity of the group's ideological structure begins to disintegrate. When people lose contact with established cultural rituals, the root of their cultural knowledge, they enter a kind of cognitive chaos (Aho, 1988; Berger & Luckmann, 1966). So, many white supremacists begin to question group doctrine only after they physically remove themselves from the group and enter their own cognitive chaos. Aho's outline of this sequence points to the importance of disengagement in the process of full deradicalization. Though disengagement may seem an elementary version of rejecting white supremacy because the hateful ideology is maintained by the ex-member, it is this very disengagement that often unlocks the capacity for that same member to criticize his former doctrine. In my study, I intend to interview former white supremacists who have come to advocate against racism (i.e., those who have not only left their hate groups, but also renounced their former ideology publicly). As such, I will be investigating those who have already passed through the disengagement phase and who are now fully deradicalized.

One of the reasons disengagement often leads to renunciation of hate group ideology is because both recruitment and defection equally rely on intimate ties with influential people as well as a host of other "push" and "pull" factors. For instance, many neo-Nazi recruits *first* connect with an agent of the organization and *then* slowly morph their beliefs to fit the ideology to maintain the relationship. These relationships can take the form of romances, marriages, friendships, school ties, work partnerships, family connections, and so forth (Aho, 1988). Although many of these previously unaffiliated recruits find the extremist message shocking, revolting, or patently absurd at first, they may learn to entertain it to maintain the intimacy of their newfound relationships.

Conversely, crumbling relationships within the group and newfound intimacies outside it can serve to draw members back out of the organization. Similar to Rusbult et al.'s (1983) investment model, Aho (1988) outlined a social cost/benefit analysis that helps predict which hate group members will stay and which will leave. The member least likely to leave is one who experiences membership as relatively rewarding and imagines life outside of the organization to be worse. In a similar vein, an individual who finds membership socially unbearable but does not see any better social alternatives outside the group will most likely remain engaged. They may even "double down" in their dedication to the group's message in order to decrease the psychological dissonance they experience as a consequence of their social predicament (Festinger, 1957). Therefore, the member with the highest chance of defection is one who experiences low social rewards within the group and rewarding external social alternatives. Finally, the member with both rewarding in-group relationships and rewarding social alternatives is considered to be in an unstable condition within the group, and as such it is hard to predict whether or not this person will decide to exit.

It is important to note that defecting members are not merely victims of circumstance. They often make decisions based on enhancing public and private interests. Public interests refer to the political success a member experiences based on staying or leaving. Private interests are defined as one, the material rewards drawn from membership in a hate group (sex, money, sociability, and power) and two, "ideal" rewards like a sense of personal life direction, esteem, or experiencing oneself as "heroic" (Aho, 1988).

Post-Exit Challenges

Not only do ex-hate group members confront struggles when deciding whether or not to leave, but they also experience difficulties *after* they make the decision to exit.

Drawing from the extant literature, I describe identity residual and other hate group exit consequences.

Identity Residual

An important post-exit phenomenon that has received attention in the literature is group member *identity residual,* or lingering/habitual feelings, physiological responses, and behaviors formed in the hate group that follow members after exiting (Enzinna, 2018; Picciolini, 2017; Simi et al., 2017). Building from Bubolz and Simi's (2015) exit process research mentioned earlier in this paper, Simi et al. (2017) found further evidence to support the idea that hate group exit processing parallels that of addiction recovery. As part of their study, researchers interviewed 89 former white supremacists with 85 located in 24 states in the U.S. and four in Canada. Participants ranged in age from 19 to 61, including 68 men and 21 women (Simi, et. al, 2017). To begin their study, the researchers defined addiction as chronic unwanted and compulsive behavior that an individual does not feel they can control, and which persists despite negative consequences (Simi et al., 2017). Many of the ex-white supremacist participants interviewed shared experiences that mimicked these criteria. For example, one male interviewee described how many skinheads are "consumed by the idea of what they're embracing and espousing. It is an addiction because you order your life according to what you believe or think . . . your life is ordered according to that pattern" (p.9). Another ex-American Nazi Party affiliate described the addictive qualities of hate: "I guarantee you it's an addiction. I can listen to white power music and within a week be back to that mindset. I know it" (p.10).

This study is valuable in that it points to experiential factors from past hate group affiliation that are outside of ex-members' conscious control. These residual effects from one's group-affiliated identity manifest cognitively, emotionally, and physiologically (Cerulo, 2010; DiMaggio, 2002; Ignatow, 2014; Kluwe-Schiavon, Viola, Sanvicente-Vieira, Malloy-Diniz, & Grassi-Oliveira, 2017; Simi et al., 2017) Sometimes these effects can overtake the ex-member in the form of behavioral relapse as their hate-group behavior returns (Simi et al., 2017). As such, the study points to the fact that there are similarities between rejecting a deeply seeded, hateful identity and abstaining from addictive behaviors.

Hate Group Exit Consequences

In addition to identity residual, there are numerous less explicitly detailed consequences ex-hate group members experience upon exiting. The following experiences are those most commonly described in scholarly research, personal accounts and memoirs, taped interviews, and other media resources: death threats/harassment (AP Archive, 2015; Phillips, 2017), physical assault/attempted murder (Enzinna, 2018; New York Post, 2019), paranoia/concealing former identity (Goldstein, 2017; Picciolini, 2017), broken family/social ties (Picciolini, 2017; Saslow, 2018;), residual self-focused emotions (e.g., guilt, shame, and self-hatred; Bubolz & Simi, 2015; Saslow, 2018; Stern, 2014) ideological/behavioral relapse (Bubolz & Simi, 2015), and ongoing contact with active members of the white supremacist movement (Bubolz & Simi, 2015). Again, these are only the most commonly identified factors. There are innumerable accounts of post-exit consequences and no two ex-white supremacist experiences are identical.

Summary and Limitations of Exit Process Theories

Although drawn from different populations, the above-mentioned theories share some important commonalities. First, all point to a moment or time period when the hate group member experiences doubt about their movement's ideology. This doubt may be the result of unmet expectations as Rusbult and colleagues (1980,1981, 1983,1998) detailed, or a consequence of one's re-interpretation of their role in the group (Ebaugh, 1988). In either case, doubt is a fundamental aspect of the hate group exit process.

Next, the theories all mention moments, some definitive and some harder to pinpoint, that serve as catalysts for exit. For instance, Bubolz and Simi (2015) illustrated how certain events serve as "rock bottom" moments for hate group members that push them to leave the movement. The researchers parallel these events to the moments where someone struggling with addiction realizes they need to enter recovery. Ebuagh (1988) similarly emphasized the "turning point" where a hate group member realizes they are no longer satisfied in the group.

Finally, these theories all discuss the influence of social alternatives to the hate group. Mattson and Johansson (2018), for example, explained that many ex-hate group members were influenced to exit by people whom they encountered outside of their movement. Similarly, Aho (1988) ranked the likelihood of exiting one's hate group according to the respective levels of social rewards within the group and rewarding external social alternatives.

Although these models provide insight into the processes of hate group exit and post-exit experience in general, their scope is limited. First, of the five models only Aho's (1988) and Bubolz & Simi's (2017) explore *American* ex-white supremacists' exit experiences specifically. Mattson & Johansson (2018) interviewed Swedish ex-Neo Nazis and the other two models were not drawn from ex-white supremacist populations. I intend to build a deeper understanding of the unique exit experiences former American white supremacists have undergone.

Another important limitation is that none of the models examines American racial extremism further than one year into the Trump era. Historical hate crime data from the Federal Bureau of Investigations (FBI) suggests that President Trump's rise to the presidency was associated with one of the largest spikes of hate crimes in recorded American history, trailing only the hate crime surge that occurred after the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001 (Edwards & Rushin, 2018). In 2019, U.S. hate crimes rose to their highest levels in a decade (FBI, 2019) As such, it is crucial that we develop an understanding of contemporary American white supremacy and investigate possible exit strategies for those contemplating leaving their hate groups. I will expand on the potential impact the U.S. political climate may have on hate group exit processes later in this paper.

The final research gap in these models is that they do not address the former white supremacist' shift from deradicalization to public denunciation of their former racist ideology. Though Simi et al. (2017) describe how one's role in a hate group lingers even after exiting, they do not describe how one transitions through this residual state of identity. Ebaugh (1988) comes closer to addressing the concept, as she describes the necessary step of assuming a role that fits with mainstream societal norms after leaving one's hate group. But she does not approach the step of publicly denouncing one's former ideology. In this study, I identify the denunciation of one's former racist ideology as a significant step in the group exit and full deradicalization process. I also investigate similarities in the paths former white supremacists have taken to publicly denounce racism. Findings can be used to develop ethical and practical interventions for hate group exiting and to support former members who speak out against racism.

Purpose and Rationale for the Current Investigation

As discussed earlier, white supremacy is a growing threat in the U.S. (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2020). It is thus imperative to understand how former white extremists manage to leave their hate groups behind. Identifying common themes in ex-white supremacists' exit processes has the potential to support the development of ideological and social alternatives to hate group membership. Mental health professionals can partner with ex-members to facilitate rehabilitation and reintegration of recovered racists into a tolerant society. In turn, these individuals may serve as experts on the topics of radicalization and deradicalization, and thus provide resources for clinicians and researchers (Blumenstyk, 2018; Crilly, 2019; Ruszowski, et al., 2019; Sulkowski, 2018; Vohn Behr, et al., 2013).

The purpose of this study was to develop an in-depth understanding of the factors that underlie the experiences of ex-white supremacists who have left their former hate groups and became anti-hate activists. In the current investigation, I used interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) to answer three research questions:

1) What is the experience of leaving one's former hate group?
2) What post-exit supports/challenges does an ex-white supremacist encounter?
3) Why and how does one who has successfully exited their hate group come to advocate against their former hate group's ideology?

Chapter 3

Method

For the current study, I employed IPA, which offers a qualitative approach that allows for a deep understanding of people's perceptions regarding a particular phenomenon (Merriam, 2009). The purpose of phenomenological research generally is to grasp the nature, essence, or meaning *of* that phenomenon in terms of people's lived experiences (van Manen, 1990). Within the phenomenological approach, there are two branches: descriptive and interpretative (Lopez & Phillips, 2004). I chose the interpretative approach (i.e., IPA) as it allows one to explore how participants make sense of their worlds and to study the particular meaning that certain events, experiences, and states hold for these individuals (Smith & Osborn, 2009). The interpretative phenomenologist is focused on investigating each participant's subjective perception and interpretation of a given phenomenon (Smith, Flowers & Osborn, 1999).

IPA is uniquely suited for this study for two reasons. First, it has been noted by researchers that individuals from the general population I studied (i.e., former white supremacists) are difficult to access in that they tend to avoid being identified to protect themselves from consequences related to their former hate group affiliations. (Simi et al., 2017). As such, I expected to recruit a small number of participants. IPA is particularly well-suited to this kind of inquiry because it is dedicated to providing a detailed interpretative account of the participants' experiences, which actually *requires* researchers to work with small participant samples. In this study, I employed extensive interviewing to maximize the effectiveness of the data collection process with a small number of participants.

IPA also recognizes that the researcher’s cultural perspectives can both facilitate and block access to participants’ lived experiences. Thus, it was important for me to understand the extent of my own preconceptions before conducting this research and to also understand that I would not necessarily be aware of all my biases in advance of analysis (Smith & Flowers, 2009). Because I encountered unanticipated emotional reactions during interviews, I practiced self-reflection and cyclical bracketing, or setting aside my biases and preconceptions regarding the phenomenon in question (Moustakas, 1994; Smith & Flowers, 2009; Smith, et al., 1997). Throughout the conduct of the study, I aimed to stay as close as possible to participants’ intended meanings.

Participant Selection and Recruitment

I recruited nine participants, which allowed for sufficiently in-depth engagement with each individual while also providing the possibility for detailed examination of similarity and difference, convergence and divergence between participant experiences (Alase, 2017). Each participant met particular inclusion criteria. First, all participants were white American citizens over the age of eighteen years. Second, to ensure as much as possible that these interviewees were fully deradicalized, I only spoke with ex-members who have been removed from their respective hate groups for at least one year. Finally, all participants had engaged in at least one instance publicly advocating against the ideology of their former white supremacist organization. In terms of meeting the criteria for public advocacy, the instance(s) in which they denounced white supremacy must have been captured by or articulated through public media (e.g., newspaper articles, news footage, books, YouTube, etc.). I include this criterion to distinguish between the advocate whose intent was to communicate to a wide audience as opposed to one who quietly denounced white supremacy to their close friends or loved ones. I address the former in this study. See Appendix A for participant demographics.

I used two recruitment methods—internet searches and snowball sampling. I identified potential interviewees who had written about or had been the subject of writing concerning their experiences with leaving white supremacy (Picciolini, 2017; Saslow, 2018). I communicated with these individuals through contact information available on the internet (e.g., email, telephone, and social media). Additionally, I contacted U.S.-based organizations dedicated to helping white supremacists exit hate groups and asked members if they were comfortable reaching out to clients about the possibility of my interviewing them for this study. I also asked them to distribute a recruitment flyer electronically (see flyer in Appendix B).

I did the majority of my recruiting through *snowball sampling*, a technique in which the researcher draws on existing study participants to help recruit future participants from among their social networks (Goodman, 1961). This method was particularly well-suited for my study as it is designed to help the researcher approach sensitive issues that may concern a relatively private matter, thus requiring the knowledge of insiders to locate participants for study (Biernaki & Waldorf, 1981).

I contacted potential participants by phone, email, and social media to introduce myself, explain the purpose of the study, and request an interview. I conducted interviews via Zoom or over the phone. I used the recruitment script in Appendix C when contacting each potential interviewee. In terms of anonymity, I provided the opportunity for each participant to select a study pseudonym and enter it as part of their demographic form (see Appendix D). While some chose a pseudonym, others wrote down their legal names.

Upon consultation with IRB, I requested these participants sign a form to confirm their choice to be identified by their legal first name or initials (see Appendix E). I informed all participants that the interviews would be recorded and transcribed verbatim.

Researcher Positionality

Following Morrow's (2005) suggestions for building trustworthiness in qualitative research, it was important that I detailed my (the research instrument's) own background to explore how it might influence my interpretation of data from this study. I am a white, heterosexual, liberal arts-college-educated, American man of European descent who was raised in an upper-class socioeconomic environment in Los Angeles, California. I had never knowingly met or come into contact with any current or former members of white supremacist hate groups before this project. Though I reject and abhor racist ideologies and practices, I acknowledge that as a straight white man I benefit from immense privileges afforded to me by fundamentally white supremacist cultural norms (Daniels, 1997; Feagin, 2013).

I understand that my identity and social role are mostly the consequences of the social context in which I have lived. I was raised around mostly white, upper-class, highly educated, politically-left-leaning people. As such, my worldview has been imbued with many of the beliefs of those around me. I have been privileged in that my personal moral philosophy, which has its own limitations and deficits, fits within the mainstream American cultural narrative. As such, I have rarely been forced to overcome or reject the way I view the world.

In contrast, the people who have been through the full process of deradicalization from white supremacist groups have had to dissolve their previous hate group philosophies, roles, and identities, and also cultivate new ones for lives outside of their former hate groups. I sought to understand how participants confronted their racialized worldviews and developed new personal mythologies and social roles.

Because I was actively exploring the means by which people *leave* their hate groups, I understood it was possible that members of current white supremacist groups could read my study and take issue with its dissemination. In order to protect myself, I spoke with scholars who study white supremacy about the security measures I should take (e.g., removing my contact information from the recruitment flyer, publishing under a pseudonym, downloading anti-virus software, etc.) As the content and consequences of this research were emotionally jarring for me at times, I regularly spoke with Dr. Spanierman after interviews. I also kept a log detailing my personal experience during and after each interview.

Data Sources

The data sources for this study comprised a demographic form and a semi-structured interview protocol. I constructed these materials based on scholarly literature concerning IPA, and in collaboration with my research supervisor.

Demographics

Participants were provided brief demographic questionnaires (see Appendix D) to address their background information. Each participant answered a series of questions regarding age, marriage status, range of income, employment status, level of education, and religious affiliation and ethnicity. I also inquired as to participants' former organizations including: name of the group, entrance year, and year they exited.

Interview Questions

Consistent with IPA, I used a semi-structured interview format. The semi-structured interviewing approach allowed the maximum opportunity for them to tell their own stories as experiential experts (Smith & Osborn, 2009). I chose the questions and created the schedule order in adherence to Smith and Osborn's (2009) suggestions. First, I generated a list of domains that I want the interviewee to cover with pertinent questions addressing each topic. Second, I ranked the issues according to the order in which I planned to address them in the interview. The order of the questions paralleled the steps former white supremacists take from deciding whether or not to leave the hate group, to adjusting to life after leaving the group, to publicly denouncing racism. Third, I developed a set of possible probes and prompts. Consistent with IPA, all interview questions adhered to the following three criteria (Smith & Osborn, 2009): (1) Questions were neutral rather than value-laden or leading, (2) Questions were checked for inaccessible jargon, and (3) Questions were open as opposed to closed in nature. See semi-structured interview template in Appendix F.

Procedures

After obtaining approval from ASU's Institutional Review Board, I began recruitment as described above. Once the participants were identified, I sent an informed consent form to each. Before the interview, I reviewed the informed consent form with participants and answered any questions concerning the study. I also provided each participant with a copy of their informed consent agreement for their personal records.

After obtaining participant consent, I conducted the interviews via Zoom or telephone. Each lasted between one to two hours. I offered each interviewee the option for an additional follow-up interview if they were interested, but no participants requested one. I personally conducted each interview and referenced the interview schedule throughout the process. This interview style allowed me to engage in a dialogue with each participant and modify my follow-up questions according to the participant's responses. Such flexibility enabled me to explore the phenomenon of hate group exit processing through both general and idiosyncratic lenses. After conducting the interviews, I personally transcribed all interviews verbatim. I sent the appropriate transcript to each participant, who then ensured the accuracy of the text. As compensation for their participation, I donated of $100 in each participant's name either to their own advocacy organization or to an organization of their choice.

Data Analysis

Following Smith and Osborn's (2009) IPA recommendations, I analyzed the data by generating themes for each individual transcript, identifying thematic connections within individual transcripts, and then creating a master list of themes drawn from across the interviews.

Generating Themes in Single Transcript

I read through an individual transcript multiple times while annotating salient words, phrases, and statements that pointed to meaningful experiences in exit group processing (see Smith & Osborn, 2009). I then went through the same transcript and converted these annotations into theme titles that expressed the essential qualities found in the transcript.

Identifying Thematic Connections in Single Transcript

Following Smith and Osborn's (2009) approach, the next phases of analysis involved looking for connections among themes in an individual transcript. Themes whose essential qualities were similar were clustered together into superordinate concepts. I referred back to participants' descriptions to ensure the conceptual titles I created correlated with the actual words the participant spoke. Once I was confident in the connection between the superordinate concepts and the participant's description, I listed the new themes in a table. Superordinate theme titles were linked with data from the transcripts, and every instance in which a theme was seen in the transcript was marked with an identifier to assist with the analysis.

Generating Themes and Identifying Thematic Connections in the Sample

The above two steps were repeated for each transcript. After superordinate thematic clusters were generated for each transcript, I looked for connections between themes across lists (i.e., across transcripts). I clustered connected themes from these lists to create a master list of superordinate concepts pointing to the essential qualities expressed across participant transcripts. This final list was then reviewed through an external audit to ensure agreement between participant descriptions and their thematic correlates.

Write-up

Finally, I translated these themes into a narrative account. In the write-up, I referenced the themes from the master list to outline the essential meanings of the participants' described experiences. I made sure in my narrative to distinguish clearly between what the participant spoke and my interpretation as an analyst. The findings section of my thesis contains the emergent thematic analysis. In the discussion section, I link the findings to the extant literature to interpret further participants' experiences.

Data Security

To ensure security of the data, I followed Barnhill and Barnhill's (2015) suggestions for safeguarding qualitative research data. For interviews conducted over the phone, I used a landline from my private residence and recorded the audio onto my password-protected laptop using the Logic Pro X application. I carried out Zoom interviews with my personal password-protected laptop using a private password-protected Wi-Fi connection. I updated the passwords for both my laptop and Wi-Fi connection every three months. The passwords were at least eight characters in length, including upper- and lower-case letters and symbols to ensure they were secure (Merchant, 2014). Additionally, I installed anti-virus software to protect against malware. Finally, I locked my screen when away from my computer to make sure no passersby could view it.

Trustworthiness

I ensured that my study met qualitative research standards by making certain that my data were trustworthy and sound (Levitt at al., 2018; Levitt, Motulsky, Wertz, Morrow, & Ponterotto, 2017; Lincoln & Guba, 2000; Morrow, 2005). To do so, I employed four criteria: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Credibility

To enhance credibility, or the degree to which my results reflect participants' realities, I relied on several techniques. First, I utilized a well-established qualitative research method, the semi-structured interview, as suggested by Shenton (2004). I also described my role as an instrument of the study (i.e., my assumptions, expectations, and biases, how these attitudes may have affected my analysis, and how I managed them) (Morrow, 2005). Finally, I worked closely with Dr. Spanierman as an auditor of my interpretations to reduce the level of bias (Levitt et al., 2017, 2018).

Transferability

To maintain transferability, I provided sufficient information about my role as a research instrument, the research context, processes, participants, and researcher participant relationships so as to enable the reader to interpret how the results might have transferred (Morrow, 2005). As my study was qualitative in nature, I avoided implying generalizability to other populations or settings (Morrow, 2005).

Dependability

To carry out a dependable study, I maintained a detailed chronology of research activities, influences on the data collection and analysis, emerging themes, categories, or models, and analytic memos (Morrow, 2005). I also described all steps of data analysis. To ensure consistency, I systematically reviewed my notes with Dr. Spanierman.

Confirmability

Although my findings inevitably were affected by reflexive bias during interpretation, I strove to present findings that represented the participants' lived experiences (Carlson, 2010; Drisko, 1997; Gasson, 2004). To this end, I sent each participant their raw interview transcripts, which they verified for accuracy. As part of this process, I asked participants to edit, clarify, elaborate, or delete their own words from transcripts (Carlson, 2010). Three participants either edited, redacted, or added text to their transcripts. As mentioned above, I created an "audit trail" of data collection and analysis processes so that the reader could trace the decisions I made and procedures I employed (Shenton, 2004).

Chapter 4

Findings

Eleven themes emerged from the data that elucidated the process of leaving one's white supremacist group and becoming an anti-hate activist. These themes are organized into three categories consistent with my research questions: (a) participants' *exit* experiences, (b) participants' *post-exit* experiences, and (c), participants' experiences of *becoming anti-hate activists* (see Appendix G). In this section, I present each theme with pertinent interview data. Participants are addressed by either self-selected pseudonyms or their legal names (by which they explicitly asked to be identified).

Participants' Exit Experiences

The *Exit* category refers both to participants' experiences that inspired their exits as well as to the experiences of actually disengaging from their hate groups. The category is composed of four themes: (a) *exit-precipitating interactions with members of marginalized communities*, (b) *doubting personal faith in or commitment to white supremacy*, (c) *feeling disillusioned and dissatisfied*, and (d) *experiencing relief and clarity upon exiting the movement*.

Exit-precipitating Interactions with Members of Marginalized Communities

Numerous participants pointed to social interactions and relationships with members of marginalized communities that influenced their decisions to leave their hate groups. For example, Bill recalled the impact of listening to a Pakistani filmmaker's story about being victimized by racism as a child: "She's [the filmmaker] sitting across from me, and I can see and feel the pain, you know, in, in her face and how it affected her, and is still affecting her as an adult and that shook me pretty hard." As part of a rehabilitation program for convicted felons, Jonny was forced to live with and tutor a member of a rival Southern California-based Mexican gang. The interaction allowed him to see himself as a helpful human being and also pushed him to reflect on his racist beliefs:

> It felt so good to just help somebody that I didn't like politically . . . . From that day forward it just became clear to me . . . . I understood right away where my hate came from, why I lash out, like why I directed and projected it onto other people.

Upon moving to the southern United States, TZ explained that meeting Latinx and Black individuals who treated him respectfully challenged his negative preconceptions about People of Color. These interactions also helped him see the irrationality of his white supremacist community's racial paranoia. Similarly, Matthew reported that while he used to distrust Muslims in general, he became friends with some after meeting and chatting with them online. These relationships with people who were supposed to be targets of his racial hatred challenged his beliefs.

Five participants described having *romantic* encounters or relationships with a Person of Color or religious minority that influenced their decision to exit. Duke and Jonny, for instance, both fell in love with Black women. When Duke realized his attraction, he had to forcibly "bury all those feelings . . . . as a uniformed [SS] officer." Eventually however, the attraction became so overwhelming he left the movement to marry her. Jonny also developed a powerful relationship with a Black woman that ultimately became romantic. He explained:

> She smiled at me. And I never seen such a bright, like, just aura around somebody . . . . So, I connected with her and I spoke with her and I fell in love with her. And

> the more I talked with her, the more I wanted to be her friend and the more I wanted to have to do with her . . . . I connected with her romantically for a second. And for the first time in my life, I tested the waters. And I romantically connected with a woman who wasn't white . . . . That's when I truly realized, in that moment, that I wasn't racist.

TZ and Chuck both became romantically involved with Jewish women. After finding out his girlfriend was Jewish, TZ was surprised and unsure how to proceed given his white supremacist background. Ultimately, he left the movement to be with her. Chuck also realized how little his white supremacist ideology meant to him after finding out his girlfriend was Jewish:

> This realization came to me that, you know, I care more about this person than about the [Neo-Nazi] ideology I'm espousing says I should feel about her . . . . I didn't really care that much that she was Jewish, after all these years of believing this stuff [Nazism] . . . . I didn't care *at all*, honestly, I cared more about her and she meant more to me than all of that ideology ever had, that was kind of the turning point in my heart, in my mind.

Finally, Viktoria explained that their former partner attempted suicide after becoming traumatized by Viktoria's white supremacist lifestyle. They remembered "doing bleeding control [for their partner], and like, really, I think it kind of all hit like, I had never really noticed how the world saw me."

Doubting Personal Faith in or Commitment to White Supremacy

Eight out of nine interviewees explained that they began to doubt their white supremacist worldviews while inside their hate group. Three participants experienced these doubts suddenly in the form of “wake-up calls.” Chuck described a spontaneous and deeply moving experience. While driving in Los Angeles traffic, he was suddenly overcome by an “overwhelming sensation of togetherness with all of these drivers on the freeway,” which led him to realize how humans are all alike, an idea that directly contradicted his white supremacist worldview. After two and half years working inside of a rehabilitation center as a convicted criminal, Jonny suddenly realized he could no longer be a skinhead because of his newfound zest for helping others. As he explained, “Skinheads don’t try to steer people away from hate and anger and try to put them on a spiritual journey and quest. You know? So, I just had a wakeup call, you know? Spiritually.” TZ’s wakeup call came when he saw how his white supremacy was negatively affecting his young son:

> I was in the grocery store with my son. He saw a black man in the store. He said, “Daddy, there’s a big Black...” and he blurted out the N-word. And the ladies in the store were scolding me, “How dare you teach your child this sort of thing?” And my son looked up to me, and he said, “Aren’t you gonna beat them up, daddy?” Like I’m gonna beat up old women, you know? So that was a big shocker . . . . I kinda left thinking, “What the hell, this kid thinks it’s ok to beat up old, you know, women?” And, so that sort of started things, going for me.

After being diagnosed with cancer and suddenly facing the possibility of his own death, Duke went to church, confessed his white supremacist affiliations, and swore that if were cured he would live as a good Christian from then on. He explained this pledge to God as the "kind of a commitment that you don't break . . . . That really slammed the [white supremacist] door behind me and opened up several new doors." Matthew's turning point came after breaking up with his fiancé. Feeling isolated and suicidal, he became desperate to understand the meaning or "meta-narrative" of his existence and began to listen to left-leaning Youtubers who encouraged his shift away from white supremacy. He explained, "in times of that deep desperation like that, it can just cause shifts . . . . [I] had a bunch of emotional stuff that was going on and I had para-social relationships with [YouTube] content creators, and maybe that's what pulled me over."

In contrast to these sudden bursts of insight, other participants' ideological doubts arose as the product of questioning the fundamental tenets of the movement's ideology. While Dougie had originally been swayed by scientific racism, his attitude changed when he began looking into the methodology of some of the studies. He found that the science was flawed, which led him to begin doubting its claims that race and IQ were connected. After watching countless alt-right YouTube videos, Matthew realized white supremacists saw the world "as essentialist tropes and narratives, and then they build off of those. . . And once I realized that, I was like, 'Well I can't believe in this stuff because, to me, that's a really silly way, of like, forming your worldview or your politic.'" When faced with criticism from leftist adversaries, Viktoria found that "all of my counterarguments were nonsensical. And to me, that kind of gave me an idea that perhaps maybe I might be in the wrong position." TZ grew tired of hearing about what, to him, were ludicrous white supremacist conspiracy theories. He began to reject ideas like "White people come from aliens and . . . the Holocaust never happened . . . . Deep down inside I was like, 'Man, something ain't right here.'" Lastly, after years of watching how white supremacy had traumatized so many people, Bill simply asked himself, "Why am I doing this?"

These doubts led some participants into states of cognitive dissonance. For example, Duke and Bill struggled to justify the fact that while they endorsed white supremacy, they did not want their families involved in the movement. Duke explained, "I didn't want my grandchildren to develop an interest in [the movement] . . . . because, inwardly, or subconsciously I knew what I was dealing with, what I was doing, was most certainly not a good thing." In the past, when reporters asked Bill why he did not want his children in the movement, he replied, "This is not a life that I wish upon any of [my children] . . . . It's not healthy. It's incredibly, it's dangerous . . . . I'm sacrificing my life for this cause, but I don't want my kids doing it." Dougie had friends of Color and Muslim family members. Yet the scientific racism he endorsed claimed the genetic inferiority of these very people. He admitted, "the cognitive dissonance I experienced was fucking astronomical." Similarly, Matthew recalled how discovering the invalidity of the white supremacist worldview he had once endorsed was deeply unsettling:

> It felt like my world was falling apart . . . . I thought that I'd gotten to the bottom of the rabbit holes and I thought that I'd figured it all out . . . . That was shattered. It was like an existential crisis.

When participants decided to exit, some disconnected from their racist philosophies and *then* disengaged from their hate group, while others disengaged *first* and *then* slowly let go of their prejudiced beliefs. Bill, Jonny, and Dougie noted that they had relinquished some, if not all, of their racist perspectives years before they disengaged physically. Bill reduced his anti-Black racism before exiting but retained residual anti-

Semitic views post-exit. Jonny moved away from his racist worldview years before his exit. Dougie stopped adhering to scientific racism before he quit visiting his racist online community. Other participants, such as Scott, Chuck and TZ, *first* physically left their hate groups and *then* worked to eliminate their racist perspectives. Scott, for example, admitted that he was still transphobic when he left the movement. Chuck and TZ retained their racist beliefs towards People of Color after exiting their hate groups. It took years for both men to break down these residual prejudices.

Regardless of their path towards exiting their white supremacist groups, some participants confronted a powerful hesitation when deciding to leave. Duke explained that surrendering the power and prestige he had accumulated inside the movement was difficult:

> You're on top of the world looking down on creation . . . . Finding myself in a position of growing power, where people would stand at attention and salute me when I'd walk into a room, this was a whole new thing to me. This was a whole new frontier. And these things do become emotionally and psychologically intoxicating. And if for no other reason, this was pretty much why stayed in it.

TZ echoed this sentiment, admitting that despite wanting to leave, he was still transfixed by "*ego*-driven rewards, you know, power, *perception* of power, control, you know, popularity, whatever you wanna call it, *fame*." Bill explained that even though he wanted to leave, he manufactured reasons to delay his exit: "I'm making up excuses for myself, much like an alcoholic that's saying, 'Well, I'm gonna quit next week . . . or I'll quit after this last bender.' You know?" Although Jonny no longer wanted to participate in hate and racism, he did not want to lose the sense of personal affirmation he had gained from being part of the group: “I still wanted people to accept me, you know? I still wanted to be liked, and I still wanted to be, you know, viewed a certain way.”

Feeling Disillusioned & Dissatisfied

Numerous participants described a creeping sense of disillusionment with the movement that ultimately led to their exit. Scott explained that being around so many violent people began to take a toll on him. He grew “sick of the violence . . . . sick of constantly having to distance myself from mass shooters . . . . I was sick of being around people like that.” Bill also grew tired of having to constantly justify mass killings done in the name of white supremacy, especially after a series of mosque and synagogue shootings. TZ reported that like many other white supremacists, he dealt with significant trauma as a child that he had covered up by immersing himself in the Neo-Nazi community. Eventually, the hate group lost its power to camouflage his pain: “It got to a point where it didn’t work. It didn’t, it didn’t cover up the underlying issues.”

Experiencing Relief and Clarity Upon Exiting the Movement

The final theme participants described in terms of exiting was the emotional relief and personal clarity they experienced after leaving their white supremacist group. Duke, Viktoria, Bill, and TZ recalled that once they left, they encountered a sense of relief and serenity. Duke explained:

> It was like having chains removed from me. I had a sudden feeling of freedom. It was like walking out into a field of flowers and taking a deep [breath], filling your lungs with fresh air . . . . feeling the freedom of what you just released yourself from. It [being a high-ranking member of a Neo-Nazi organization] was a position of power, but was also a position of wearing a ball and chain . . . . I felt like

> someone riding on the back of a tiger that he wouldn't dare dismount. Because once he would dismount it, that tiger would turn and devour him.

In addition to relief, participants also experienced a renewed clarity after exiting. While Bill described this clarity as similar to the lucidity someone who has left a cult might experience, Viktoria emphasized how exiting allowed them to finally see the depravity of white supremacy. They noted that it is impossible to "see how miserable the far-right makes you, how much it strips you of humanity, until you're not in it . . . . When you leave that, it becomes apparent, and you get this certain kind of clarity."

Participants' Post-Exit Experiences

The *post-exit* thematic category refers to participants' life experiences after disengaging from their hate groups and comprises four themes: (a) *navigating personal danger and threats to safety*, (b) *experiencing social network shifts*, (c) *unlocking intense emotional experiences*, and (d) *healing through introspection and connection with others*.

Navigating Personal Danger and Threats to Safety

A number of participants endured violent threats and actions from hate group members and the mainstream public. While Jonny's family was threatened, Scott was personally harassed and doxed online (i.e., his personal information was hacked and published on the internet). Viktoria traced the violent nature of their post-exit experience in the following passage:

> You don't get to walk away. I mean it's very much like gang violence. It's blood in, blood out. I mean I took blood oath. And, I mean, you don't get to leave . . . . I don't get to exist . . . . Your blood is only able to leave the movement when it's buried in the ground . . . . My own family [who is in the movement] threatened

> me. I got a . . . Facebook message, that if they [their family] saw me, they'd put a bullet in my head . . . . Since [coming out as queer and exiting the movement], it's been harassment, doxing, people have broken into my home and assaulted me in my sleep.

Two participants reported being protected from threats and violence on the basis of their aggressive reputations inside their respective hate groups. For example, members of Duke's former hate group understood that he (an ex-Rikers Island prison guard, former professional wrestler, head of security for a powerful Neo-Nazi organization, who was licensed to carry a firearm in all fifty states) was fully capable of defending himself from attacks, so they kept their distance from him after he left. Chuck explained that the combination of being known as "pretty much the craziest SOB involved anywhere close" as a skinhead mixed with the fact that he associated with the Hell's Angels kept him safe from post-exit retribution.

Experiencing Social Network Shifts

All participants experienced changes in their social networks after exiting their white supremacist groups. Some endured periods of post-exit isolation. For example, cut off from the white supremacist community in which they had been born and raised, Viktoria found themself alone. They became homeless and "slept on the streets." Bill made a conscious decision to turn off his phone and speak to as few people as possible. Chuck distanced himself from the hate group members, which left him feeling isolated: "I didn't have a circle of friends . . . . because I didn't have anybody that was, that had any real common experience, you know? I didn't have anybody who had ever been involved in [over a decade of white supremacy]." Finally, Jonny recalled the discomfort he felt being around the groups of mainstream people to which he was introduced after exiting: "Looking at all these people, all these successful people around me just made me realize just how much of a loser I'd been . . . . And it shut me down and I went into extreme isolation after that. And I ultimately relapsed because of it."

Despite wanting to disengage from the movement, environmental circumstances *forced* Jonny and Scott to maintain some contact with hate group members after they disengaged. When Jonny began distancing himself from white supremacy, he was still living in an area with a large skinhead population. He described how difficult it became to avoid them: "Try to go to the movies, run into another couple [skinheads]. Try to go to the store, there's another six [skinheads] that I come in contact with. So, it's a constant." Scott had been a recruiter for his white supremacist community and lived with the new members he brought in. After quitting the group and before moving out of the state, he continued to live with the recruits as they had nowhere else to go.

At different points after disengaging, most participants integrated into new, non-movement communities. Duke married his wife, a Black woman, and became part of her family. Having endured an abusive childhood that left him estranged from his own relatives, he emphasized the importance of being part of a new family unit:

> Family closeness: that was a whole new thing to me. This was a completely new experience . . . . Her family, you know, they took me right in. They accepted me immediately. And, it was, it was a very warm feeling when you really come right down to it.

Bill integrated into a social network of non-white supremacist friends and family he had maintained while inside the movement. He noted how fortunate he was to have a social group into which he could transition, as many ex-white supremacists he knew did not have the same opportunity. After being homeless, Viktoria was taken in by a friend's family with whom she lived for some time. Other participants actively sought out new communities after leaving. For example, Scott enrolled in college, came out as non-binary and queer, began dating, and connected with the LGBT community. Matthew and Dougie both looked for healthier internet communities. While Matthew began associating more with politically left-leaning online fora, Dougie started to connect with the "family-friendlier boards" within the Reddit community.

Unlocking Intense Emotional Experiences

Participants recounted experiencing heightened emotional sensitivity and expression after exiting the movement. Viktoria described the catharsis they experienced the first time they ever publicly presented as queer and severed their connection from the movement:

> I remember actually having the police called on me because they thought I was having a mental breakdown. I remember falling to my knees and just, like, painfully crying. And . . . I remember the *pain*. My whole body shook. I was crying so hard. It was one of the, the worst and best feelings at the same time.

Dougie also described an intense emotional experience in which he cried for hours after reading the Christchurch shooter's manifesto and reflected on the racist beliefs he himself had once endorsed. Bill offered insight as to why ex-white supremacists are *more* emotionally sensitive than average people:

> Some of us coming out of the movement seem to be more compassionate than the average person . . . . We've been that intolerant force, and now we feel like the emotions of the other side, and the people that we were against before, we feel all that, like, what we were missing before. So, it's like a harder, not harder, but a more intense, connection to some of these feelings that we didn't have before. The only way that I can compare it is maybe like the blind person that . . . . got their sight back and now they can see again, and the colors and everything are so much more vivid . . . . If you lost it, and it was gone for a while, and now it's back and you see again, you appreciate it that much more . . . . I feel like, some of those repressed feelings are more intense now.

Healing Through Introspection and Connection with Others

Participants described dedicating themselves to self-reflection and personal healing after exiting their hate groups. Most engaged in some prolonged form of rigorous self-analysis. For example, Chuck spent a decade trying to understand how or even *if* he still believed in white supremacy. He remembered grappling with "who I was and what I believed and what it all meant." He also attended counseling, which helped him understand the origins of his racism: "Once I realized that it was kind of rooted in self-hatred, I learned to get past that self-hatred . . . . [and] forgive myself for people I had harmed." After distancing himself from the skinheads, Jonny met a woman who shortly thereafter revealed that she was racist herself. By observing her, he was able to examine the racist aspects of who he used to be:

> Watching her hate, and her anger, and her racism really helped me see just how ugly that side of me used to be . . . . I would see the ugliness of her. And like, I

> just saw, I saw me . . . . It just made me realize just how much I didn't wanna be that. So, it was a horrible relationship, but it was good for me to be in because it helped me, it helped me better understand myself.

After losing his role as a skinhead authority figure, TZ experienced himself in an unfamiliar context. Without the position of power he had in the movement and the affirmation that came along with it, he asked himself, "What am I left with? I'm left with *me.* So that was very difficult." Bill went through what he called a "decompression period," where he spent "several months just, rethinking my whole life and trying to get my own head straight." Finally, Scott dedicated themself to undoing the white supremacist psychological conditioning they had received like "feelings of being the victim," "fear of the other, fear, fear of everything really."

To support their personal healing, some participants cultivated more emotionally supportive environments for themselves. For example, Jonny and TZ no longer indulged in television, especially political programs. When asked why, Jonny explained:

> When I don't focus on politics and what's going on in the world, I find myself to be a happier person . . . . I can relax and just be myself. If I'm fixated on people and what's going on and I know that there's an issue, then I start focusing on other people's issue with me. And it makes me act entirely different. So, I don't want to front and pretend to be some negative person anymore 'cause I just like to be happy and normal.

TZ also avoided political media as a means of maintaining his mental well-being:

> I try not to indulge in consumption of media material. Because it’s just too much . . . . So, for my own mental health perspective, I know when I go without for an extended period of time, I have more serenity.

Chuck emphasized the importance of maintaining his *inner* emotional environment. He admitted that he could no longer trust his own intuition, as it had once led him into white supremacy. Consequently, he now talks to others about his reactive thoughts and feelings before acting so as to avoid relapsing into aggressive behavior.

Other participants also credited the healing power of connecting with others through forgiveness and reconciliation. For example, Viktoria was once approached at a public speaking event by a student who recognized them from a white supremacist march years earlier. The student, who was Black and had been traumatized by the racist march to the point of attempting suicide and dropping out of school, explained to Viktoria that their evolution from being a racist to an anti-hate activist was deeply healing for her:

> [The student] just accepted me. There is no comparison on the far-right to that feeling. Because I believe that radical acceptance that she offered, that is probably the strongest piece of humanity that we have. And, that radical acceptance is antithesis to the far right . . . . We both became overwhelmingly emotional. It was such a weird and blessed thing to have happened. To come in contact with somebody who I had, at the same time, so utterly destroyed, and in this time, so utterly helped. The paradox [laughs] was overwhelming.

After the Christchurch shooting, Dougie confided in a Muslim friend about having been a white supremacist himself. He described the experience of being heard and forgiven by his friend as “cathartic.” Bill, who sought to eliminate his anti-Semitism, admitted the mistakes of his racist past and apologized in front of a synagogue audience. He admitted to the crowd, “I said and did some really bad things, for a really long time, as a man, or as a human being.” He noted that publicly acknowledging the violence he had committed was “hard as hell to do . . . . And even though it’s right, and it’s truthful and it’s accurate, it’s still hard to admit.” Similarly, Scott exposed their transphobia on a podcast hosted by a trans adult actress.

Participants’ Experiences of Becoming Anti-Hate Activists

The final superordinate category, *becoming an anti-hate activist*, refers to participants’ experiences related to the process of coming to publicly denounce their former ideologies. *Becoming an anti-hate activist* includes three themes: (a) *connecting with former white supremacists and/or an activist network*, (b) *publicly speaking out against hate,* and (c) *developing an activist identity.*

Connecting with Former White Supremacists and/or An Activist Network

Most participants were connected with their first social advocacy opportunities through former white supremacists who were anti-hate activists themselves. For instance, Dougie and Scott both communicated with perhaps the most prominent ex-white supremacist-turned activist, Christian Picciolini. Dougie emailed Picciolini for advice when he was deciding whether or not to speak to the media about his past. Scott reached out to Picciolini at the behest of an organization looking to host a public discussion for racism in their town. In both instances, Picciolini connected them with resources that kickstarted their activism. He connected Dougie with a major news network for an interview and introduced Scott to an anti-hate activist community. Though Scott did not remain in the group they originally joined, they continued their partnership with

Picciolini and eventually created their own hate group exit program. Viktoria's introduction to the activist community came when they were asked by an anti-hate activist to moderate an online discussion on the topic of white supremacy. Subsequently, Viktoria also co-founded a hate group exit program. TZ connected with an ex-skinhead from his group who helped him establish a speaking residency at an anti-hate educational organization. After being inspired by his book, *Autobiography of a Recovering Skinhead,* Chuck called ex-Skinhead Frank Meeink. Meeink subsequently introduced Chuck to an anti-hate activist community as well.

Participants emphasized how the community atmosphere of these activist groups positively impacted them. Chuck described how connecting with an anti-hate activist community was "very freeing." Viktoria pointed out how being part of an activist network mimicked the togetherness they had felt as part of their white supremacist group:

> When I was in the movement, you always have somebody next to you, you know? You, you really are a legion of people. And when every individual is that much stronger than the one in front of it, than the one behind it, you kind of feel indestructible . . . . I think that when I was in that [activist] community I felt that again.

Matthew compared being part of his online activist team to "the feeling that people have when they go to war together. Like, that camaraderie, like that togetherness and that you're fighting a common enemy."

Publicly Speaking Out Against Hate

Multiple interviewees explained how they overcame their own fears as well as family members' fears about them speaking publicly against hate. For instance, Chuck feared both retribution from his former hate group members and damage to his career if he exposed his racist past. However, after witnessing the activists around him speaking out against hate themselves, he was inspired to proceed. After being connected with his first public speaking appearance, TZ also recalled being afraid: "I got a phone call that there was an emergency. They needed me to speak somewhere . . . . It was scary as hell. My knees were buckling the whole time." Dougie and Jonny had to confront the fears of their *family members* about publicly speaking about their racist pasts. Jonny grappled with the fears of his mother and brother:

> I remember my mom and my brother were extremely scared . . . . All they know is that I have put them in so many dangerous situations joining the movement and exiting the movement that, you know, they feel like targets now too, which they *did* become targets. . . [But] there was a burning desire inside of me to wanna come out to try to help . . . I was just kinda hopin' that it [media interview] would get put into the right light, that maybe somebody's life would get touched in a way that they will try to be themselves too and stop pretending to be some hateful bigot.

When Dougie explained his plan to speak on the radio about his racist past, his father was vehemently opposed. Though Dougie was distressed by his father's disapproval, he also felt deeply compelled to speak out. Conflicted about how to proceed, he emailed Christian Picciolini. After speaking with him, Dougie decided to take part in an interview with a major television news network.

Speaking publicly helped some participants cope with negative emotions while it triggered painful emotions in others. Viktoria's experience was therapeutic: "I think that's [speaking out against hate] what works best to heal the pain . . . . to combat it." Matthew's public speaking helped him address the guilt he held about his racism as well as the anger he had about feeling misled into those beliefs: "I felt duped. I wanted to do something about it." Jonny described his speaking out as a means of healing through giving back: "[Helping others is] how I deal with those emotions today . . . . I just try to pay it forward and teach other people and give back." For Chuck and TZ, speaking publicly triggered painful emotions. Chuck described how speeches precipitated extreme swings in his mood:

> It was kind of like a high going into it [public speaking events] but then a really hard crash afterwards. And a lot of it was *from* talking about all the past stuff and dredging it up and reliving it kind of . . . . It would be a couple of, you know, two, three days-worth of just, I don't wanna say, like, depression 'cause it wasn't really depression, but, just negative emotion and stuff following speaking about this, these kinds of things.

TZ was unique, as he often spoke publicly alongside a man whom he had beaten nearly to death years ago. While the pairing was powerful and inspiring, it forced TZ to endure painful emotions: "I was able to get the story out there and to show people that people can and do change. But at the same time, it, I went through that shame and that guilt stuff." After these speaking engagements, he would often feel like "a horrible person."

Developing an Activist Identity

Ultimately, a number of participants described developing an identity as an activist as a significant step in their deradicalization journey. Bill explained that being an activist gave him a second opportunity: "Now I have this new mission [anti-hate activism] . . . . I'm trying to do something good and noble again but actually, the *right* thing this time, not something that's harming others." Viktoria echoed this sentiment, explaining how activism replaced the "mission" they pursued as a white supremacist: "In the movement you're told to be bold and brave. You're told to put the higher goal above you. You just have a new higher goal: love and acceptance." Chuck explained that to re-enter society as a healthy individual, he had to actively leave behind his unhealthy hateful lifestyle. He acknowledged that, for him, speaking out publicly as an activist allowed him to redeem himself for his violent past:

> I did so much just horrible, horrible stuff, hurt so many people. It's sort of a redemptive thing . . . . giving back, trying to counteract the hate that I put out into the world with putting love into the world now . . . . If I can save one kid from going through the stuff I went through, you know, it would all be worth it.

For Scott, helping others navigate their way out of hate was necessary in his road to self-forgiveness. He admitted feeling "I don't want people to end up, me [a white supremacist]. You know? If I was to ever forgive myself, it would only be after I stopped people from basically being me."

For some participants, assuming an identity as an activist transformed the ways in which they related to current hate group members. Matthew noted the empathy he felt for people stuck in racism as he had been through it himself: "I know that they're in a really dark place. And it makes me upset . . . . I talk to them and I see that this is not an enjoyable path for them, and I know it wasn't for me." While he formerly communicated with fellow white supremacists from a place of shared hatred for minorities, Matthew now felt compassion for the pain that drove these people to take refuge in racism. TZ mentioned a similar empathetic drive that moved him to help those stuck in hate. He explained that it is essential when "the rubber hits the road . . . where they either continue to drag it out and go back to their old behaviors, or to step *out* of that comfort zone, to have somebody there with you, shoulder to shoulder, whether it be physical or online." Instead of rejecting the absurdities of white supremacists as he had as part of his exit, as an activist TZ now approached these same people as deserving of his understanding and support.

Dougie and Jonny established their activist identities as educators. Coming from an ethnically non-Christian, Eastern-European background (cultural characteristics that conflict with white supremacist values), Dougie thought of himself as an embodied warning of how seductive white supremacist ideology could be: "I'm a fucking child of refugees myself. How could I possibly, you know, have believed these things?" He also hoped to shed light on the scope and power of *online* white supremacist radicalization. Jonny's motivation centered more on using his experience to help people understand the roots of their own racial hatred:

> Anybody that has hate in this world, that hate comes from the same place. It comes from fear. It comes from your old lifestyle. It comes from your hate for yourself or your family or your own failures in life that you project onto other people. So, it became a mission for me to tell people about this.

Jonny explained that he was "just trying to help people try to understand themselves like the way that I've come to understand myself."

The final element of becoming an anti-hate activist was incorporating a novel, positive self-image. Bill, Dougie, and Matthew were surprised by the positive ways in which others began to see them once they started engaging in activism. Bill remembered people admiring him for his courageous stance as an activist:

> It was interesting to hear from somebody else that was on the other side saying, "Hey, what you're doing now takes a lot more courage, and lot more balls, and a lot more strength than *anything* you did before no matter how intense it was."

Dougie recalled finding it both flattering and strange to be considered a deradicalization expert by the media: "I'm still more or less a kid, like, I'm pretty smart in some aspects, and I know some things, but it feels really weird, I guess being viewed as an expert." Similarly, Matthew was amazed by the large online following he developed after creating a YouTube channel dedicated to helping others escape online extremism. Finally, Viktoria spoke about their activism as the opportunity for a positive transformation

> For me, activism, coming out of that [white supremacist group] is kind of like dawning a new layer of skin . . . This is a new me. And, who better to combat this [white supremacy] thing than somebody who has never not been that thing? It just seems right to me."

Chapter 5

Discussion

Findings from this study support and extend prior research about the push and pull factors that influence white supremacist group exit processes (Blazak, 2004; Ebaugh, 1988; Gadd, 2006; Horgan, Altier, Shortland & Taylor, 2016); Mattson & Johansson, 2018; Simi & Bubolz, 201). The current investigation also offers novel insight into the nature of ex-white supremacists' paths towards becoming anti-hate activists. Understanding the shift from extremism to anti-hate activism articulates a new dimension in the process of deradicalization. In this study, eleven themes emerged from interviews with former white supremacists regarding their exit processes and transitions into anti-hate activism. Below, I synthesize and connect these themes to the extant literature. I discuss limitations of the study and offer directions for future research. Finally, I conclude with implications for mental health practitioners.

Social Interactions Influenced Exit Processes

Social connections opened up new perspectives and triggered powerful emotions that challenged participant's white supremacist beliefs. For example, Duke, Jonny, Chuck, and TZ fell in love with Black and Jewish women. While Duke and TZ left their hate groups to marry their partners, Jonny and Chuck's relationships shattered their racist ideologies and eventually led them to exit. This theme is consistent with previous findings that suggested interactions with non-white supremacists were instrumental in motivating hate group members to take their first steps towards exiting (Blazak, 2004; Gadd, 2006; Horgan, Altier, Shortland & Taylor, 2016; Mattson and Johansson, 2018).

These relationships forced participants to *deframe*, or consciously critique and analyze, their extremist white racial frames (Feagin, 2013). Confronted with feelings they had for their partners that directly contradicted their racist ideology, participants engaged in an accelerated analysis in which they assessed the value and legitimacy of their white supremacist perspective. Choosing to commit to their partners and forgo their white supremacist ties represented their initial step to *reframe,* or create a new internal narrative, about their racial relationship with the world (Feagin, 2013).

Most participants also had profound experiences of connection with members of marginalized communities *after* exiting. They described these moments as both emotionally painful and deeply moving. Being forgiven and or accepted by those whom they had hurt represented an experience entirely antithetical to the white supremacist doctrine, which had trained participants to blind themselves to the humanity in non-whites. Such experiences introduced participants to aspects of the human experience (e.g., tolerance, forgiveness, and compassion) which had been denied to them while inside their white supremacist groups. Bill explained that after leaving their groups, many ex-white supremacists were uniquely compassionate because they suppressed these kinds of feelings while inside their hate groups. Exiting allowed participants to feel these emotions for the first time, so they experienced them much more acutely than the average person. Horgan et al. (2016) also encountered elevated emotionality in their case study of a former white supremacist who testified against her hate group.

For most participants, successfully integrating into new social networks provided a sense of relief, security, and purpose. Most joined activist communities after leaving their hate groups. Being part of these groups was healing for many participants, as they were around others who had been through the hate group exit process themselves. As such, participants were relieved to find people who could empathize with their experiences. These findings align with prior research from Rusbult et al.'s (1983), Aho's (1988) and Mattson and Johansson's (2018) observations on the importance of post hate group-exit community in successful deradicalization. Not only were the participants finally around people who could understand their story, but they also got to see what anti-hate activism looked like firsthand. Additionally, being connected to these groups provided participants with the resources (e.g., audiences, funding, infrastructure, etc.) they needed to work as activists. This experience inspired multiple participants to not only become activists, but also create their own hate group exit programs. Some explained that activism helped them cope with the negative emotions (e.g., guilt and shame) they felt about their past, a sentiment that was also identified in Horgan et al.'s (2016) findings.

While connecting with a new group appeared to have positive effects for participants, being *unable* to do so had detrimental psychological and physical consequences. For example, the one participant (Jonny) who did not find a post-exit community relapsed into a heroin addiction and became involved romantically with a racist partner. These findings support Bubolz and Simi's (2015) conception of hate group exit as akin to addiction withdrawal. They argued that the exit process involves triggers that facilitate ideological relapse, and thus former extremists need to be in an environment where there is an emphasis on forming coping strategies. Being part of a supportive post-exit social network seemed to provide both insolation from participants' former extremist environments and also a support system for self-healing and coping skill formation.

Personal Transformations

Another thread that permeated the findings was participants' personal transformations as part of their exit journeys. For most, these transformations began internally. While some became disillusioned by and/or dissatisfied with their hate group, others began to question the legitimacy of white supremacist ideology more generally. Doubt and disillusionment have been identified as prominent factors in hate group exit by other researchers as well (Ebaugh, 1988; Horgan et al., 2016; Horgan & Braddock, 2010; Simi and Bubolz, 2015). As a consequence of this doubt and dissatisfaction, participants from this study eventually left their groups and went through periods of introspection and personal healing that led to transformative experiences and new worldviews. These practices helped participants surrender their hate group identities, overcome residual prejudices, and understand themselves as positive human beings.

As mentioned earlier, Simi et al. (2017) describe the post-exit experience as similar to the withdrawal period for a recovering addict. For both the ex-white supremacist and ex-user, they endure a painful isolation from the substance that had guided their daily routine and sense of self for however long they used it. These findings are also supported by Horgan et al.'s (2016) research, which found former extremists attempted to break habitual thought patterns associated with their racist pasts and address lingering feelings of guilt. These periods of introspection appeared to serve as incubators inside of which participants analyzed, deframed, and reframed their white supremacist worldviews (Feagin, 2013). None of the participants in this study claimed they were completely “cured” of their racist past. In fact, those who have been disengaged the longest from their hate groups (Chuck, who was removed for years 21 and TZ, who was removed for 25 years) both noted how they must still consciously avoid triggers so as to refrain from “ideological relapse” (Bubolz & Simi, 2015).

Given the anti-LGBTQ stance of white supremacist ideology, I was not expecting to interview individuals who identified as non-binary or queer. But I gained some unique understanding on this subject area from Viktoria and Scott, whose personal transformations were intimately connected to coming out as non-binary and queer. For both participants, coming out as queer after being closeted in the movement added an additional dimension to their exit experience. Instead of merely being considered a traitor after exiting, they became targets of the very bigotry they used to endorse. Despite the similarities of their situations, Scott and Viktoria had drastically different experiences with coming out/exiting. Scott came out after exiting his hate group, then quickly began dating and integrating into the LGBT community at their new college. They received some online threats but were not the target any serious violence. Viktoria’s transition, on the other hand, was much more arduous. In addition to being violently attacked by group members for their gender identity and sexuality after coming out, they maintained a deep sense of shame about their queerness and remained distant from the LGBT community. It should be noted that while Scott had been involved in their hate group for 11 years, Viktoria spent their entire life (35 years) in the white supremacist movement. As such, coming out as queer for them may have represented a more total loss of their historical identity than for Scott, which could account for the difference in levels of residual self-hate and shame.

Creating an Anti-hate Activist Identity

A unique aspect of this study was its focus on themes relating to participants' becoming anti-hate activists. Although Kimmel (2007) found that some ex-Neo-Nazis became violent antiracists, in this study I explored the experiences of peaceful activists, most of whom worked within anti-hate organizations. Participants had to overcome their fear of consequences in order to publicly speak out against hate. They explained that when white supremacists leave their hate groups, they become outcasts. But when they publicly speak out against those hate groups, they become enemies of white supremacy. So, publicly denouncing racism was a significant step beyond merely disengaging from the group or privately abandoning racism. In addition to the fear of retribution, speaking publicly also triggered severe guilt and shame for participants as they repeatedly re-lived the traumatic acts they committed in their past.

Despite the consequences, they found that speaking out against racism gave them a new sense of purpose and a positive identity. While in their hate groups, they enjoyed the camaraderie of their community and the feeling of having a mission, albeit one of racial hatred and oppression. Being part of an activist community and speaking out against hate gave participants a new healthy version of the social cohesion and common goals their hate groups used to provide. Speaking out also recreated the sense of being part of an army at war against a common enemy. With this renewed sense of security, participants were able to approach current white supremacists from a new relational perspective. While inside their former hate groups, participants had related to fellow members on the basis of shared hatred for common racial enemies. When they exited these groups, participants rejected their former colleagues along with the ideology they used to share. But as activists, participants now empathized with hate group members' pain. They understood what it was like to be stuck in these groups, and as such they sought to help white supremacists find a way out of the hatred to which they were bound. In fact, in addition to public speaking, numerous participants worked directly with white supremacists who had either just recently exited or were considering exiting their hate groups. Using an approach of understanding and support, participants helped numerous people transition out of white supremacy back into mainstream society.

Participants' identities evolved to reflect the positive work they were doing. They began to see themselves as contributing something beneficial to the world, which increased their self-esteem. Some articulated that after years of interacting with the world through hate, they were now communicating through love. They also described the transition to activism as one of taking responsibility for themselves. Instead of using white supremacy as an emotional outlet, they now were addressing their flaws and their mistakes directly and publicly. This step symbolized the cornerstone of their deradicalization. As Aho (1988) Ebaugh (1988) and Mattson & Johansson (2018) described, completely separating from one's former group is predicated on the assumption of a fundamentally new identity tied to mainstream social expectations.

Importantly, the mainstream public confirmed and supported these new positive identities. For example, interviewees were shocked to hear themselves described as kind or compassionate by members of the public, as these were words with which they had never been associated. Participants also recalled being seen as brave in a way they had not been while in their hate group. Though they had faced physical danger as white supremacists, they now faced themselves. But instead of being chastised for exposing their vulnerabilities as they would have by members of their hate group, they were celebrated for their courage by their new mainstream audience. These affirming sentiments paralleled the “ideal” rewards that Aho (1988) described as being part of the former extremists’ decision to leave their hate group. As opposed to *material* rewards like money, sex, power, etc., *ideal* rewards refer to benefits like a sense of personal life direction, esteem, or experiencing oneself as “heroic.” These findings also support Ebaugh’s emphasis on *others* viewing one as an “ex” being an essential part of the exit process.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

While the current study serves as a critical step in understanding the phenomenological experiences of ex-white supremacists, there are some limitations. For example, this study did not have any female participants. It is important that future research identify the phenomenological experiences of women who have left white supremacy and become anti-hate activists. Another limitation has to do with the national context of the sample. Though this study explicitly focused on American ex-white supremacists-turned-anti hate activists, white supremacy is not a uniquely American phenomenon. It is necessary to understand the perspectives of ex-white supremacists in different areas around the world as well. Regarding the exploration of activism, the current investigation focused on public denunciation of one’s hate group. Future research could explore aspects of the hands-on hate group exit facilitation process as well. Finally, while this study emphasized the particular experiences of the individuals who left their hate groups, researchers should also explore the perspectives of the non-white supremacists who play active roles in facilitating hate group member exits. Cultivating such an understanding might help guide a systemic rather than individualistic approach to conceptualizing hate group exit.

Implications for Mental Health Practitioners

As white supremacist hate groups continue to multiply across the planet, we must develop approaches that support extremist deradicalization and rehabilitation processes. This study confirms prior research suggesting that former white supremacists need ongoing emotional support and skills training so they can reintegrate into mainstream society and remain separate from their hate groups. As such, findings from this study provide justification for increased communication between the mental health profession and deradicalization programs in the U.S. and abroad. Using findings from this study and further inquiries into the area, psychologists can work to develop therapeutic approaches for both hate group exit and post-exit rehabilitation

Findings from this study might also be used by psychologists to support ongoing exit programs in ways that former white supremacists suggest. For example, participants emphasized the need for more resident mental health professionals to work with former extremists in the programs. They suggested incorporating cognitive behavioral therapy, marriage counseling, anger management, drug rehabilitation, educational guidance and career counseling as therapeutic supports for those going through the exit and deradicalization processes. These suggestions point to the fact that despite the horrible acts some of these people have committed, former white supremacists are in fact humans in need of support. Participants in this study evolved from racist extremists into anti-hate activists because of the empathy, compassion, and forgiveness they received from others along their path. Using findings from this study and future research, we can create pathways out of hate for those who are ready to leave it behind.

References

4chan. (n.d.) /pol/ - politically incorrect. Retrieved from https://boards.4chan.org/pol/

Aho, J. A. (1988). Out of hate: A sociology of defection from neo-Nazism. *Current Research on Peace and Violence*, *11*(4), 159-168.

Alase, A. (2017). The interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA): A guide to a good qualitative research approach. *International Journal of Education & Literacy Studies, 5*(2), 9-19.

Altier, M. B., Thoroughgood, C., & Horgan, J. (2014). Turning away from terrorism: Lessons from psychology, criminology, and terrorism. *Journal of Peace Research, 51*(5), 647-661.

Ana, O. S. (1999). `Like an animal I was treated': Anti-immigrant metaphor in US public discourse. *Discourse & Society, 10*(2), 191–224.

Astin, A.W. (1993). *What matters in college: Four critical years revisited.* Jossey Bass.

Assmann, J., & Czaplicka, J. (1995). Collective memory and cultural identity. *New German Critique, (65),* 125-133.

Barnhill, G. D., & Barnhill, E. A. (2015). Data security in qualitative research. In M. de Chesnay (Eds.), *Nursing research using data analysis: Qualitative designs and methods in nursing* (pp.11–19). Springer.

Berger, P. L., & Luckmann, T. (1966). *The social construction of reality: A treatise in the sociology of knowledge.* Doubleday & Company.

Biernacki, P., & Waldorf, D. (1981). Snowball sampling: Problems and techniques of chain referral sampling. *Sociological Methods & Research*, *10*(2), 141–163.

Bjørgo, T. (2009) Processes of disengagement from violent groups of the extreme right. In Bjørgo, T & Horgan, J. (Eds.) *Leaving terrorism behind: Individual and collective disengagement.* Routledge.

Blazak, R. (2001). White boys to terrorist men: Target recruitment of Nazi skinheads. *American Behavioral Scientist, 44*(6), 982–1000.

Blumenstyk, G. (2018, March 11). A former neo-Nazi lays bare the campus strategy of white supremacists. Retrieved from https://www.chronicle.com/article/A-Former-Neo-Nazi-Lays-Bare/242791

Bubolz, B. F., & Simi, P. (2015). Leaving the world of hate: Life-course transitions and self-change. *American Behavioral Scientist, 59*(12), 1588–1608. https://doi.org/10.1177/0002764215588814

Burnett, R., & Maruna, S. (2004). So ‘prison works’, does it? The criminal careers of 130 men released from prison under Home Secretary Michael Howard. *Howard Journal of Criminal Justice, 43*(4), 390-404.

Carlson, J. A. (2010). Avoiding traps in member checking. *The Qualitative Report, 15*(5), 1102-1113.

Carsten, J. (1995). The politics of forgetting: Migration, kinship and memory on the periphery of the southeast Asian state. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute,1*, 317.

Cerulo, K. A. (2010) Mining the intersections of cognitive sociology and neuroscience. *Poetics, 38*(2), 115-132.

Cerulo, K. A. (2014) Continuing the story: Maximizing the intersections of cognitive science and sociology. *Sociological Forum 29*(4), 1012-1019.

Connerton, P. (2008). Seven types of forgetting. *Memory Studies*, *1*(1), 59–71.Creswell, J. W. (2003). Research design: Qualitative, quantitative and mixed methods approaches. Sage.

Creswell, J. W. (2007). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (2nd ed.). Sage.

Crilly, R. (2019, October 19) Former neo-Nazi leader joins al Qaeda recruiter to fight extremism. Retrieved from https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/news/former-neo-nazi-leader-joins-al-qaeda-recruiter-to-fight-extremism.

Daniels, J. (1997) *White lies: Race, class, gender, and sexuality in white supremacist discourse.* Routledge.

DiMaggio, P. (2002). Why cognitive (and cultural) sociology needs cognitive psychology. In K. Cerulo (Ed.), *Culture in Mind: Toward a sociology of culture and cognition* (pp. 274–281). Routledge.

Drisko, J. (1997). Strengthening qualitative studies and reports: Standards to promote academic integrity. *Journal of Social Work Education, 33*(1), 185- 197.

Ebaugh, H. R. F. (1988). *Becoming an ex: The process of role exit*. The University of Chicago Press.

Englander, M. (2012). The interview: Data collection in descriptive phenomenological human scientific research. *Journal of Phenomenological Psychology, 43*(1), 13–35.

Enzinna, W. (2018, July/August). Inside the radical, uncomfortable movement to reform white supremacists. Retrieved from https://www.motherjones.com/politics/2018/07/reform-white-supremacists-shane-johnson-life-after-hate/

Farrall, S., & Calverley, A. (2006). *Understanding desistance from crime: Theoretical directions in resettlement and rehabilitation.* Oxford, United Kingdom: Oxford University Press: Crime and Justice Series.

Farrell, D., & Rusbult, C. E. (1981). Exchange variables as predictors of job satisfaction, job commitment, and turnover: The impact of rewards, costs, alternatives, and investments. *Organizational Behavior & Human Performance, 28*(1), 78–95.

Feagin, J. R. (2013). *The white racial frame: Centuries of racial framing and counter-framing.* Routledge.

Feagin, J. R., & Ducey, K. (2017). *Elite white men ruling: Who, what, where, when, and how*. Routledge.

Federal Bureau of Investigations. (2018). 2018 hate crime statistics. Retrieved from: https://ucr.fbi.gov/hate-crime/2018/hate-crime.

Federal Bureau of Investigations. (2019) Incidents, offenses, victims, and known offenders by bias motivation, 2019. Retrieved from https://ucr.fbi.gov/hate-crime/2019/topic-pages/tables/table-1.xls

Festinger, L. (1957). *A theory of cognitive dissonance.* Stanford University Press.

Futrelle, D. (2019). The 'alt-right' is fueled by toxic masculinity — and vice versa. Retrieved from https://www.nbcnews.com/think/opinion/alt-right-fueled-toxic-masculinity-vice-versa-ncna989031.

Gadd, D. (2006). The role of recognition in the desistance process: A case analysis of a former far-right activist. *Theoretical Criminology*, *10*(2), 179–202.

Gasson, S. (2004). Rigor in grounded theory research: An interpretive perspective on generating theory from qualitative field studies. In M. Whitman & A. Woszczynski (Eds.) *The handbook of information systems research* (pp.79-102). Idea Group Publishing.

Giorgi, A. (2009*). The descriptive phenomenological method in psychology: A modified Husserlian approach.* Pittsburgh, PA: Duquesne University Press.

Goldstein, J. (2017, February 2). The rehabilitation of 'Pitbull,' a former wrestler and Neo-Nazi. Retrieved from https://www.nytimes.com/2017/02/02/nyregion/the-rehabilitation-of-pitbull-a-former-wrestler-and-neo-nazi.html?smid=fb-nytimes&smtyp=cur&referer=http://m.facebook.com&_r=0

Goodman, L. A. (1961). Snowball sampling. *Annals of Mathematical Statistics, 32* (1), 148–170.

Greenwald, T., Banaji, M., & Nosek, B. (1998). Project implicit. *Harvard University.* Retrieved from https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/aboutus.html.

Gross, T. (2018, September 24). How a rising star of white nationalism broke free from the movement. Retrieved from https://www.npr.org/2018/09/24/651052970/how-a-rising-star-of-white-nationalism-broke-free-from-the-movement

HLN. (2012, December 3). *Former skinheads: Erasing the hate?* [Video File]. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xzKx8KjvFK4.

hooks, b. (2000). *All about love: New visions*. William Morrow.

Horgan, J., Altier, M. B., Shortland, N. & Taylor, M. (2017) Walking away: the disengagement and de-radicalization of a violent right-wing extremist. *Behavioral Sciences of Terrorism and Political Aggression, 9*(2), 63-77

Hu, J. C. (2018, November 9). To deradicalize extremists, former neo-Nazis use a radical method: Empathy. Retrieved from https://qz.com/1457014/to-deradicalize-extremists-former-neo-nazis-use-a-radical-method-empathy/.

Hunter, S., Shortland, N., Crayne, M., & Ligon, G. (2017). Recruitment and selection in violent extremist organizations: Exploring what industrial and organizational psychology might contribute. *American Psychologist*, *72*(3), 242–254.

Ignatow, G. (2014). Ontology and method in cognitive sociology. *Sociological Forum, 29*(4), 990-994.

Illing, S. (2019, November 6). *Why the alt-right loves ancient Rome.* Vox. Retrieved from: https://www.vox.com/2019/11/6/20919221/alt-right-history-greece-rome-donna-zuckerberg

Kimmel, M. (2007). Racism as adolescent male rite of passage: Ex-Nazis in Scandinavia. *Journal of Contemporary Ethnography*, *36*(2), 202–218.

Klemm, D. (1983). *The hermeneutical theory of Paul Ricoeur. A constructive analysis.* Lewisburg Bocknell University Press.

Kluwe-Schiavon, B., Viola, T. W., Sanvicente-Vieira, B., Malloy-Diniz, L. F., & Grassi-Oliveira, R. (2017). Balancing automatic-controlled behaviors and emotional-salience states: A dynamic executive functioning hypothesis. *Frontiers in Psychology, 7,* Article 2067.

Koehler, D. (2015a). De-radicalization and disengagement programs as counter-terrorism and prevention tools. Insights from field experiences regarding German right-wing extremism and jihadism. In M. Lombardi, E. Ragab, V. Chin, Y., Dandurand, V. De Divitiis, & A. Burato (Eds.), *Countering radicalisation and* *violent extremism among youth to prevent terrorism* (pp. 120-150). Amsterdam, Netherlands: IOS Press.

Koehler, D. (2015b). Family counselling, de-radicalization and counter-terrorism: the Danish and German programs in context. In S. Zeiger & A. Aly (Eds.), *Countering violent extremism: developing an evidence-base for policy and practice* (pp. 129-136). Curtin University.

Koehler, D. (2015c). Radical groups' social pressure towards defectors: the case of right-wing extremist groups. *Perspectives on Terrorism, 9*(6): 36-50.

Levitt, H. M., Bamberg, M., Creswell, J. W., Frost, D. M., Josselson, R., & Suárez-Orozco, C. (2018). Journal article reporting standards for qualitative primary, qualitative meta-analytic, and mixed methods research in psychology: The APA Publications and Communications Board task force report. *American Psychologist, 73*, 26 – 46. http://dx .doi.org/10.1037/amp0000151

Levitt, H. M., Motulsky, S. L., Wertz, F. J., Morrow, S. L., & Ponterotto, J. G. (2017). Recommendations for designing and reviewing qualitative research in psychology: Promoting methodological integrity. *Qualitative Psychology, 4,* 2–22. http://dx.doi.org/10.1037/qup0000082

Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (2000). Paradigmatic controversies, contradictions, and emerging confluences. In N. K. Denzin, & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The handbook of qualitative research* (2nd ed., pp. 1065-1122), Sage.

Lopez, K. A., & Willis, D. G. (2004). Descriptive versus interpretive phenomenology: Their contributions to nursing knowledge. *Qualitative Health Research, 14*(5), 726–735.

Mattsson, C., & Johansson, T. (2018). Becoming, belonging and leaving: Exit processes among young neo-Nazis in Sweden. *Journal for Deradicalization, 16,* 33-69. *http://journals.sfu.ca/jd/index.php/jd/index*

Merchant, R. (2014). The illusion of personal data security in e-commerce: Dashlane Q1 2014 personal data security roundup. Retrieved from https://www.prweb.com/releases/2014/01/prweb11518688.htm

Merriam, S. B. (2009). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation.* Jossey-Bass.

Morrow, S. L. (2005). Quality and trustworthiness in qualitative research in counseling psychology. *Journal of Counseling Psychology, 52*(2), 250–260.

Moustakas, C. E. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods.* Sage.

Müller, K., & Schwarz, C. (2019, October 31). From hashtag to hate crime: Twitter and anti-minority sentiment. Retrieved from https://ssrn.com/abstract=3149103 or http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3149103

Nieswiadomy, R. M. (1993). *Foundations of nursing research* (2nd ed.). Appleton & Lange.

New York Post. (2019, March 28). *Former white supremacist dedicates his life to fighting racism | Reformed racist | New York Post* [Video File]. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9TrJGYJjL9E

OWN. (2010, April 1). *An unexpected update from a reformed racist | The Oprah Winfrey Show | Oprah Winfrey Network* [Video File]. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SaVZy1u2vE8

Patria, M., Pitts, B., Newman, B., James, C., & Effron, L. (2015, June 27). Meet Dixon White, the unlikely YouTube sensation who started the 'Racial Healing Challenge.' Retrieved from https://abcnews.go.com/US/meet-dixon-white-youtube-sensation-started-racial-healing/story?id=32052656

Perrigo, B. (2019, March 20). The New Zealand attack exposed how white supremacy has long flourished online. *Time.* Retrieved from: https://time.com/5554783/white-supremacy-online-christchurch/

Pew Research Center. (2011). United in remembrance, divided over policies: Ten years after 9/11. Retrieved from https://www.pewresearch.org/politics /2011/09/01/united-in-remembrance-divided-over-policies/

Phillips, C. (2017, February 9). Reformed racists: Is there a life after hate for former white supremacists? Retrieved from http://www.pbs.org/independentlens/blog/reformed-racists-white-supremacists-life-after-hate/

Picciolini, C. (2017). *White American youth.* Hachette Book Group, Inc.

Polkinghorne, D. E. (1989). Phenomenological research methods. In R. S. Valle & S. Halling (Eds.), *Existential-phenomenological perspectives in psychology: Exploring the breadth of human experience* (pp. 41–60). Plenum Press.

Potok, M. (2014, February 25). The year in hate and extremism. Retrieved from https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/intelligence-report/2014/year-hate-and-extremism.

Prochaska, J. A., Diclemente, C. C., & Norcross, J. C. (1992) In search of how people change: Application to addictive behaviours' *American Psychologist, 41,* 1102–14.

Rabasa, A., Pettyjohn, S. L., Ghez, J. J., & Boucek, C. (2010). *Deradicalizing Islamist extremists*. Rand Corp Arlington, Va. National Security Research Division.

Reckless, W.C. (1961). A new theory of delinquency and crime. *Federal Probation, 25*, 42- 46.

Reiss, A. J. (1951). Delinquency as the failure of personal and social controls. *American Sociological Review, 16*(2), 196-207.

Ricoeur, P. (1971) The model of the text: Meaningful action considered as a text. *Social Research, 38,* 529-562.

Ricoeur P. (1976). *Interpretation theory: Discourse and the surplus of meaning* (5th ed). Christian University Press.

Roche, M. (1973). *Phenomenology, language and the social sciences*. Routledge and Kegan Paul

Rohr, M. (2018, November 1). He was a KKK member, then a neo-Nazi: How one white supremacist renounced hate. Retrieved from https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/2018/11/01/hate-group-white-extremist radicalization/1847255002/

Rozsa, M. (2017). Trump's Department of Homeland Security is defunding an anti-Nazi program. Retrieved from https://www.salon.com/2017/06/23/trumps-department-of-homeland-security-is-defunding-an-anti-nazi-program/.

Rusbult, C. E. (1980). Commitment and satisfaction in romantic associations: A test of the investment model. *Journal of Experimental Psychology, 16,* 172–186.

Rusbult, C. E. (1983). A longitudinal test of the investment model: The development (and deterioration) of satisfaction and commitment in heterosexual involvements. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, *45*(1), 101–117.

Rusbult, C. E., & Buunk, B. P. (1993). Commitment processes in close relationships: An interdependence analysis. *Journal of Social and Personal Relationships, 10*(2), 175–204.

Rusbult, C. E., Martz, J. M., & Agnew, C. R. (1998). The Investment Model Scale: Measuring commitment level, satisfaction level, quality of alternatives, and investment size. *Personal Relationships*, *5*, 357-391.

Ruszkowski, R., Sottile, C., & Ward, J. (2019, August 12) A former white supremacist's warning: No one's properly addressing online extremism. *NBC News.* Retrieved from https://www.nbcnews.com/tech/internet/former-white-supremacist-s-warning-no-one-s-properly-addressing-n1041476

Sanford, B. (2018). Attitude adjustment: Understanding implicit bias and opportunities to minimize its effect. *Texas Bar Journal, 81*(11), 848-849.

Saslow, E. (2018). *Rising out of hatred: The awakening of a former white nationalist*. Anchor Books.

Search for Common Ground. (2017, December 8). *Reversing hate: The story of Arno Michaelis and Pardeep Kaleka* [Video File]. Retrieved from https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9x_kCGIPUP0

Shenton, A.K. (2004). Strategies for ensuring trustworthiness in qualitative research projects. *Education for Information*, *22*, 63-75.

Simi, P., Blee, K., DeMichele, M., & Windisch, S. (2017). Addicted to hate: Identity residual among former white supremacists. *American Sociological Review, 82*(6), 1167–1187.

Simi, P., Windisch, S., Harris, D., & Ligon, G. (2019). Anger from within: The role of emotions in disengagement from violent extremism. *Journal of Qualitative Criminal Justice & Criminology*, *7*(2), 4-28.

Smith, J. A., Flowers, P., & Larkin, M. (2009). Interpretative phenomenological analysis: Theory, method and research. Sage.

Smith, J. A., Flowers, P., & Osborn, M. (1997). Interpretative phenomenological analysis and the psychology of health and illness. In L. Yardley (Ed.), Material discourses of health and illness (p. 68–91). Taylor & Frances/Routledge.

Smith, J. A., & Osborn, M. (2003). Interpretative phenomenological analysis. In J. A. Smith (Ed.), *Qualitative psychology: A practical guide to research methods* (pp. 51–80). Sage.

Southern Poverty Law Center (2020, March 18). *The year in hate and extremism: 2019.* Retrieved from https://www.splcenter.org/news/2020/03/18/year-hate-and-extremism-2019

Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1998). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory* (2nd ed.). Sage.

Sulkowski, M. L., Picciolini, C. (2018). The path into and out of violent extremism--part 2: Deradicalizing and leaving violent extremism. *Communique*, *47,* 1-18.

Thoits, P. A. (1992). Identity structures and psychological well-being: Gender and marital status comparisons. *Social Psychology Quarterly, 55*(3), 236–256.

Thompson, A. (2018, May 10). The Measure of Hate on 4Chan: The number of racist and other white supremacist terms has exploded on the message board since the start of the Trump campaign. *Rolling Stone.* Retrieved from: https://www.rollingstone.com/politics/politics-news/the-measure-of-hate-on-4chan-627922/

van Manen, M. (1990). Researching lived experience: Human science for an action sensitive pedagogy. Althouse Press.

Von Behr, I., Reding, A., Edwards, C., & Gribbon, L. (2015). *Radicalisation in the digital era: The use of the internet in 15 cases of terrorism and extremism.* Retrieved from https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR400/RR453/RAND_RR453.pdf

Voué, P., De Smedt, T., & De Pauw, G. (2020). 4chan & 8chan embeddings. Textgain Technical Reports, *1*.

Wilson J. (2017, April 4). Life after white supremacy: the former neo-fascist now working to fight hate. Retrieved from https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/apr/04/life-after-hate-groups-neo-fascism-racism.

Wilson, J. (2017, May 23). Hiding in plain sight: how the 'alt-right' is weaponizing irony to spread fascism. Retrieved from https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2017/may/23/alt-right-online-humor-as-a-weapon-facism.

Windisch, S., Simi, P., Ligon, G. S. & McNeel, H. (2017) Disengagement from ideological-based and violent organizations: A systematic review of the literature. *Journal for Deradicalization*, *9,* 1-38.

Woolf, L. M., & Hulsizer, M. R. (2004). Hate groups for dummies: How to build a successful hate group. *Humanity & Society, 28,* 40-62.

Yancy, G. & Feagin, J. R. (2015, July 27). American racism in the 'White Frame.' Retrieved from https://opinionator.blogs.nytimes.com/2015/07/27/american-racism-in-the-white-frame/.

Zaal, T. (2017, August 18). I used to be a Neo-Nazi. Charlottesville terrifies me. Retrieved from https://www.politico.com/magazine/story/2017/08/18/former-neo-nazi-charlottesville-terrifies-me-215502.

Zannettou, S., Caulfield, T., De Cristofaro, E., Kourtellis, N., Leontiadis, I., Sirivianos, M., Stringhini, G., & Blackburn, J. (2017). The web centipede: Understanding how web communities influence each other through the lens of mainstream and alternative news sources. *Proceedings of the 2017 Internet Measurement Conference.*

Appendices

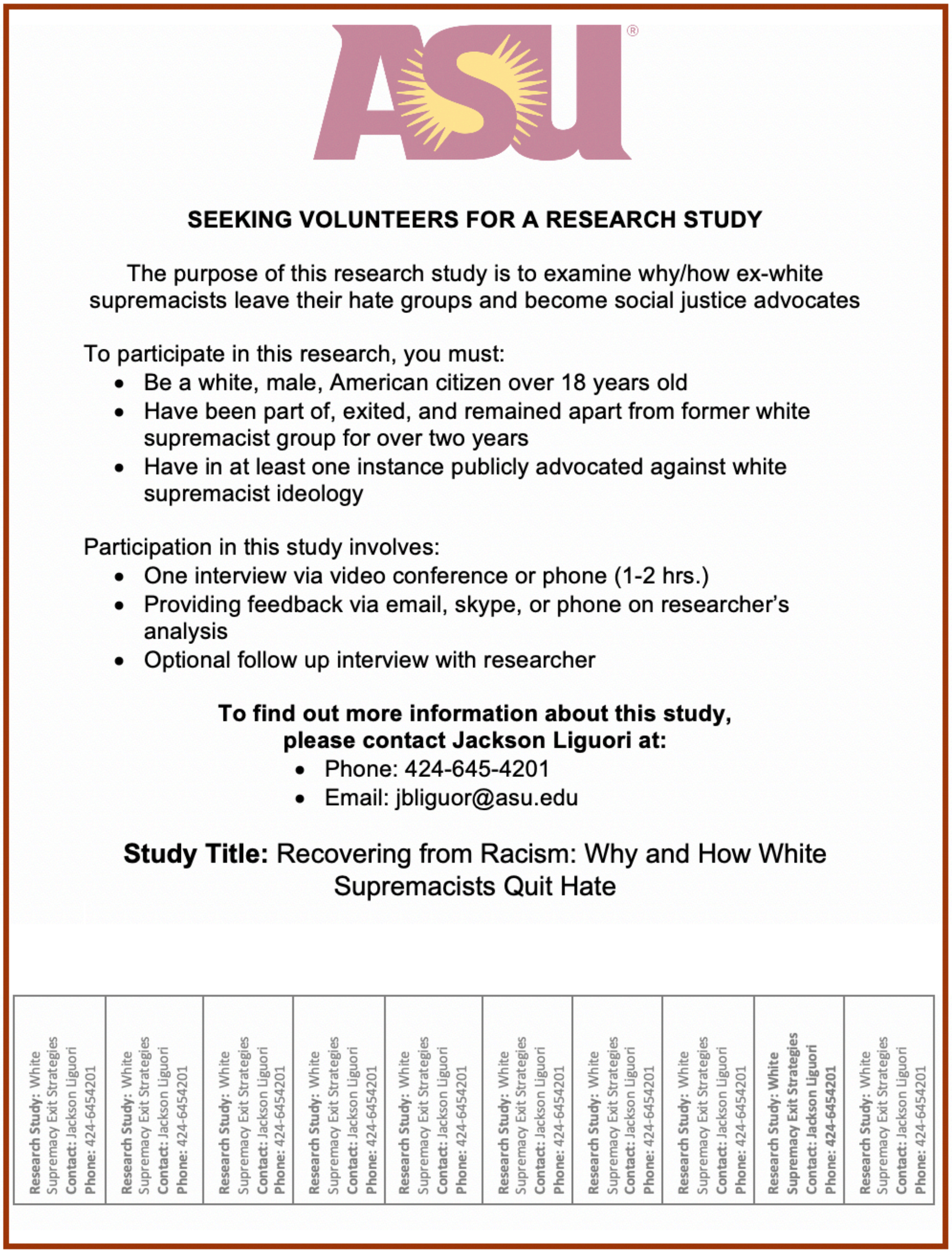
Appendix A: Participant Demographic Information

[Participant Demographic Information]

Participant*	Age	Gender	Ethnicity	Religion	Education	Job Status	Income	Marriage Status	Years in Hate Group	Years Since Exiting Hate Group
Bill	46	Male	German-American	Other	Associate's /some college	N/A	N/A	No	27	1
Chuck	52	Male	English-American	Christian	Some college, trade school	Full-time	100-199	No	13	21
Dougie	23	Male	Bosnian-American	Pantheist	Associates/ some college	Part-time	50-100	No	4	5
Duke	69	Male	German-American	Christian	High School	Part-time	25-50	Yes	7	9
Jonny	36	Male	German-American	Other	High School	Full-time	> 25	No	17	1
Matthew	27	Male	Other	Agnostic	High School	Full-time	50-100	No	5	2
Scott	41	Non-binary	German-American/ Swedish	Odinist	Bachelor's	Seeking Work	> 25	No	11	6
TZ	56	Male	Dutch-American	Buddhist	Associate's /some college	Full-time	100-199	Yes	13	25
Viktoria	37	Non-Binary	German-American	Odinist/a theist	Associate's /some college	Part-time	> 25	No	35	2

Notes. Participants are addressed by either self-selected pseudonyms or their legal names (by which they explicitly asked to be identified). Income is reported in thousands of dollars. To protect participants' identities, I do not specify their respective former hate groups. Instead, participants exited from the following groups: National Socialist Movement, Pioneer Little Europe, Skinheads, Stormfront, White Aryan Resistance, and Wotansvolk

Appendix B: Study Participation Flyer



ASU®

SEEKING VOLUNTEERS FOR A RESEARCH STUDY

The purpose of this research study is to examine why/how ex-white supremacists leave their hate groups and become social justice advocates

To participate in this research, you must:

- Be a white, male, American citizen over 18 years old
- Have been part of, exited, and remained apart from former white supremacist group for over two years
- Have in at least one instance publicly advocated against white supremacist ideology

Participation in this study involves:

- One interview via video conference or phone (1-2 hrs.)
- Providing feedback via email, skype, or phone on researcher's analysis
- Optional follow up interview with researcher

To find out more information about this study, please contact Jackson Liguori at:

- Phone: 424-645-4201
- Email: jbliguor@asu.edu

Study Title: Recovering from Racism: Why and How White Supremacists Quit Hate

Research Study: White Supremacy Exit Strategies **Contact:** Jackson Liguori **Phone:** 424-6454201

Research Study: White Supremacy Exit Strategies **Contact:** Jackson Liguori **Phone:** 424-6454201

Research Study: White Supremacy Exit Strategies **Contact:** Jackson Liguori **Phone:** 424-6454201

Research Study: White Supremacy Exit Strategies **Contact:** Jackson Liguori **Phone:** 424-6454201

Research Study: White Supremacy Exit Strategies **Contact:** Jackson Liguori **Phone:** 424-6454201

Research Study: White Supremacy Exit Strategies **Contact:** Jackson Liguori **Phone:** 424-6454201

Research Study: White Supremacy Exit Strategies **Contact:** Jackson Liguori **Phone:** 424-6454201

Research Study: White Supremacy Exit Strategies **Contact:** Jackson Liguori **Phone:** 424-6454201

Research Study: White Supremacy Exit Strategies Contact: Jackson Liguori Phone: 424-6454201

Research Study: White Supremacy Exit Strategies **Contact:** Jackson Liguori **Phone:** 424-6454201

Appendix C: Study Recruitment Letter

Dear X,

My name is Jackson Liguori and I'm a counseling psychology PhD student from Arizona State University. I am conducting a study for my master's thesis under the supervision of Professor Lisa Spanierman in an effort to understand why people formerly identified with white supremacist groups leave these groups, what their life is like post-exit, and how they re-integrate back into mainstream culture. I am conducting this research to gather data that can inform and develop interventions to support others trying to leave hate groups.

As I understand you to be an expert in this area, I was wondering if you might have time to have a conversation over the phone/Skype about your thoughts and personal experience concerning the subject of hate group exit processes. I believe your perspective would add a powerful dimension to deradicalization research, a topic that deserves more public attention.

I am recruiting white men over the age of 18 who were formerly affiliated with white supremacist organizations, but who have decided to leave their group and advocate against racism. The study will consist of a 1-2 hour interview that I will conduct via video conference platform or phone. I will create a voice recording of the interview, which will be stored as a computer file during data analysis. Only Dr. Spanierman and I will have access to this file, which will be used exclusively for the purposes of this study and then will be erased upon completion of this study.

If you are interested in participating, or have questions concerning any information in this letter, please let me know via email (jbliguor@asu.edu) or phone (424-645-4201). Thank you for your consideration and I look forward to hearing from you!

Best,
Jackson Liguori & Lisa Spanierman, PhD

Appendix D: Demographic Information Form

Demographic Information

Participant Pseudonym	**Name of Former White Supremacy Group**	**Year Participant Entered the Group**	**Year Participant Exited Group**

Please enter your age here: ______

Are you married?

a) Yes
b) No
c) Prefer not to say

What is your current household income?

a) Less than $25,000
b) $25,000 - $49,999
c) $50,000 - $99,999
d) $100,000 - $199,999
e) $200,000 or more
f) Prefer not to say

What is your current employment status?

a) Employed Full-Time
b) Employed Part-Time
c) Seeking opportunities
d) Retired
e) Prefer not to say

What is the highest degree of education you have completed?

a) Some High School
b) High School
c) Associates Degree or some college
d) Trade School
e) Bachelor's Degree
f) Master's Degree
g) Doctoral Degree
h) Prefer not to say

If applicable, please specify your religion:

a) Christian (please specify denomination: _______)
b) Jewish
c) Muslim
d) Buddhist
e) Hindu
f) Other: ______
g) Prefer not to say

Which category best describes you?

a) German-American
b) French-American
c) Italian-American
d) Irish-American
e) Polish-American
f) English-American
g) Other:_____________
h) Prefer not to say

Appendix E: Study Pseudonym Addendum

Hi [Name of Participant],

Thank you again for participating in my study. Your contributions have been instrumental in understanding how people leave hate groups.

I'm also writing to clarify how you would like to be identified in the research paper itself, and in any subsequent publications written in reference to this study. On your demographic form, I noticed that you either left the "Study Pseudonym" section blank or you put your legal name or initials. To ensure that I'm protecting your confidentiality as much as possible, would you mind choosing one of the following three options regarding how you wish to be identified in the study and in all subsequent published materials drawn from the study?

Please check the box next to the best option for how you would like to be identified:

☐ I choose to be identified by my legal first name (no last name) OR initials in this study

☐ I choose to be identified by the following pseudonym:____________________

☐ I choose to be identified by a study pseudonym selected for me by the researcher

If you have any questions concerning the research study, please contact either Dr. Spanierman by phone at (480) 727-2605 or email at Lisa.Spanierman@asu.edu, or Jackson Liguori by phone at (424) 645-4201 or email at jbliguor@asu.edu. If you have any questions about your rights as a subject/participant in this research, or if you feel you have been placed at risk, you can contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Institutional Review Board, through the ASU Office of Research Integrity and Assurance, at (480) 965-6788.

By signing below you are agreeing to be identified as a participant in this study and in all published materials drawn from this study according to the selection you made above.

Name:

Signature: Date:

Appendix F: Semi-Structured Interview Schedule

A. Pre-Exit/Exit

- **Primary question:** Could you share some of the reasons that led to you leaving [name of hate group]?
- **Possible follow-up prompts:**
  1) Could you explain the experience of actually leaving?
  2) Can you describe any important events or particular experiences during the process of you leaving?
  3) Did you leave as an individual or with others?
  4) Why do you think other people who want to leave the hate group don't end up leaving?

B. Post-Exit

- **Primary Question:** What was your experience of life after leaving your hate group?
- **Possible follow-up prompts:**
  1) How did you relate to people around you outside the hate group?
  2) Who were you surrounded by once you got out?
  3) How, if at all, did you relate to members who were still in the group?
  4) Did you experience any consequences of leaving the group? If so, how did you cope?
  5) How did/has your relationship with being a white man change(d) since leaving?

C. Advocacy

- **Primary Question:** What factors prompted your decision to publicly speak out against white supremacy?
- **Possible follow-up prompts:**
  1) Can you explain the process of coming to that decision?
  2) How did the people around you contribute to your decision to speak out?
  3) How would you describe your experience of the moments in which you first spoke out against white supremacy?
  4) What advice would you give a former white supremacist considering coming out publicly against racism?

Appendix G: Table of Themes and Definitions

<table>
<tr><th colspan="2">Participants’ Exit Experiences</th></tr>
<tr><td>Theme</td><td>Definition</td></tr>
<tr><td>Exit-precipitating Interactions with Members of Marginalized Communities</td><td>• Social connections and relationships with members of minority populations that ultimately influenced their decisions to leave their white supremacist groups</td></tr>
<tr><td>Doubting Personal Faith in or Commitment to White Supremacy</td><td>• Questioning of and loss of faith in white supremacist communities and worldviews</td></tr>
<tr><td>Feeling Disillusioned and Dissatisfied</td><td>• Growing frustration and diminished rewards from white supremacist membership</td></tr>
<tr><td>Experiencing Relief and Clarity Upon Exiting the Movement</td><td>• Feeling freedom and retrospective lucidity after exiting hate group</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Participants’ Post-Exit Experiences</td></tr>
<tr><td>Theme</td><td>Definition</td></tr>
<tr><td>Navigating Personal Danger and Threats to Safety</td><td>• Enduring emotional and physical violence from hate group members</td></tr>
<tr><td>Experiencing Social Network Shifts</td><td>• Confronting significant changes to social conditions upon exiting</td></tr>
<tr><td>Unlocking Intense Emotional Experiences</td><td>• Experiencing powerful, often novel sentiments and sensations after leaving their hate groups</td></tr>
<tr><td>Healing Through Introspection and Connection with Others</td><td>• Remediating racist beliefs and personal pain through self-exploration and reconciliation with non-white supremacists</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Participants’ Experiences of Becoming Anti-Hate Activists</td></tr>
<tr><td>Theme</td><td>Definition</td></tr>
<tr><td>Connecting with Former White Supremacists and/or An Activist Network</td><td>• Meeting/being introduced to an individual or community of deradicalized ex-white supremacists after their exit</td></tr>
<tr><td>Publicly Speaking Out Against Hate</td><td>• Important moments in the process of coming to publicly denounce their former ideologies</td></tr>
<tr><td>Developing an Activist Identity</td><td>• Cultivating of a new positive self-image as an anti-racist advocate</td></tr>
</table>