

Neo-Nazi Normalization: The Skinhead Movement and Integration into Normative Structures

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First-place winner of the 2005 Alpha Kappa Delta Undergraduate Student Paper Competition

Skinheads, a subgroup of the larger Neo-Nazi Movement, traditionally presented themselves in a blatant, intimidating fashion replete with tattoos, Nazi symbology, and startling group imagery. Recently, however, the Skins have adopted a new tactic for recruitment: normalization. Members now strive to appear and behave more in accordance with mainstream societal standards in order to achieve perceived similarity with potential members. Using General Strain Theory to attribute the historical-sociological emergence of the Skinhead Movement to affirmative action, this article explores the phenomenon of normalization with a focus on the Skins' evolving self-presentation, and describes a recent behavioral case example of the tactical change. Normalization is functionally explained in terms of frame alignment and frame resonance, while its effectiveness is demonstrated through Durkheim's construct of mechanical solidarity.

*The less any outsider knows, the safer and more successful
you will be. Keep your mouth shut and your ears open.
Never truly admit to anything.
Tom Metzger, *Laws of the Lone Wolf*, <www.resist.com>*

Social movements have historically been influential in helping to change the structure of American society while often reshaping its values. Movements such as the Labor Movement and the Civil Rights Movement typically serve as exemplars resulting in positive change and social progress; however, along with their emergence comes the genesis of countermovements. The neo-Nazis represent one such countermovement.

Like all movements, this one has proven to be a dynamic entity whose motivations and presentations have changed over time (Hamm 1993). This article will examine a modern American subgroup of the Neo-Nazi Movement, the Skinheads, as a paradigmatic case example of emergent phenomena within the broader movement. Specifically, the most recent formulation of the movement is a push toward normalization whereby members of the Skinheads, also known as Skins, appear to be trying to better integrate with conventional, mainstream society (Wasser 1997). In other words, possibly as a strategy for recruiting new members, Skinheads are trying to present themselves as less extreme, "normal" citizens who are involved in conventional activities and are interested in the good of the community.

Much of the current literature regarding neo-Nazis in general is descriptive and merely concerns the often deviant and destructive nature of their activities. Academic and journalistic articles abound regarding particular isolated instances of violence propagated by group members. For example, an online article from the Jewish Telegraphic Agency discusses five Skinheads who attempted to burn down a synagogue and their subsequent punishment (Tugend 2000). Other literature, such as that from the Anti-Defamation League (ADL), is largely intended to disseminate information about these groups with the goal of exposing and eventually halting the groups' racist ideologies and activities. This is frequently supplemented by specific suggestions for best controlling group members, resources, or diffusion of propaganda (Anti-Defamation League 1997; Anti-Defamation League N.d.a).

The purpose of the present study diverges from much of this past work, and instead explores the emergent process of normalization from a sociology of social movements perspective. Initially, a brief overview of both the historical and sociological bases for the materialization of this movement will be provided in order to ground the concept of normalization and give it proper context for analysis. A form of General Strain Theory will be used, and explains how the Skinheads arose as a smaller countermovement within the larger Neo-Nazi Movement, which in turn crystallized in response to societal-level changes, such as affirmative action (McVeigh 1999).

Next, normalization, the key focus of the article, will be discussed largely in the context of Frame Theory (Snow et al. 1986). According to this concept, movements must align their presented "values and beliefs and SMO activities, goals, and ideologies [to be] congruent and complementary" with those of individuals they are targeting for membership in order to connect and to "resonate" with them (Snow et al. 1986:464). Through normalization, the Skins are in fact participating in a form of frame realignment. In other words, members of this group are changing their presented ideology and to be more consistent with those of mainstream society. One concrete area where normalization is salient, movement self-presentation, will be examined to illustrate the concept along with a recent behavioral example.

Finally, an explanation of why the tactic of normalization might prove to be effective in increasing the movement's membership base will follow, and this explanation will rely largely on Durkheim's distinction between mechanical versus organic solidarity. This categorization involves delineating between societies or communities that are largely governed by understood mores and typified traditional values (mechanical societies) and societies that are construed as more modern and individualized because of the economic environment and division of labor (organic societies) (Durkheim 1964). It will be argued that this mechanical/organic distinction is applicable in the modern scenario on a community level,

as opposed to the broader societal level of Durkheim's original construct. In this context, mechanical communities will be demonstrated to be more conducive to countermovement frame and ideology propagation, because of the intensity of shared values and interpersonal connections when compared with organic communities.

From a theoretical perspective, investigating the modern permutations of the Skinhead Movement will aid in understanding how and why countermovements may change and develop over time and might also help account for some of the reasons they originally arise. Pragmatically speaking, information of this sort could potentially be used by organizations like the ADL who are interested in ensuring that ongoing activities of countermovements do not go unnoticed and in combating some of the negative and detrimental ventures of this and similar movements.

Historical Emergence

The Skinhead Movement did not begin as an American phenomenon, nor was it originally driven by racist ideology. Instead, in the 1970s, Skins evolved out of a wave of subcultural movements that began in post-World War II Britain (Anti-Defamation League N.d.b; Hamm 1993). As Hamm stated, “[m]ore than anything else, the early skinheads represented both a suppression of and rebellion against the bourgeois influences of British culture . . .” (1993:24). Accordingly, at this early stage, the arresting fashion of choice for group members, which would indeed be an emblem for the Skins for more than 20 years, was already visible.

The most distinguishing feature of their style of self-presentation was a shaved head or very closely-cropped hair, which not only was practical in the increasing numbers of physical altercations involving Skins, but also was originally meant to be reactionary against both hippie and wealthy, elitist cultures prevalent at the time (Hamm 1993). Other aspects of their dress typically included blue jeans, thin red suspenders, a bomber jacket, and steel-toed combat boots or Doc Martens (Anti-Defamation League N.d.b). At first, the use of swastikas or other Nazi symbology was not especially prevalent and, when employed, was intended to convey the general punk attitude of “fuckyouism” (Hamm 1993:29), as opposed to any particular racist or Nazi ideology.

Soon after in the early 1980s, however, as the British government became less supportive of immigration, and as the country simultaneously saw a dramatic increase in youth unemployment (Hamm 1993), the Skinheads slowly adopted ideals of out-group animosity and social isolationism. “White power” T-shirts became a commonplace addition to the uniform, as did swastikas, iron crosses, SS (abbreviation for German *Schutzstaffel*) insignia, and other Nazi Germany symbols in the form of jewelry, jacket patches, and striking tattoos (Hamm



Figure 1

Traditional Manner of Dress and Self-Presentation for Skinheads. Retrieved March 1, 2005. <<http://www.nukeisrael.com/citizens.htm>>.

1993). Figure 1 is an excellent example of this couture as well as of the dispositional “fuckyouism.”¹

Around this same time, the Skinhead Movement began to spread across the Atlantic. One of the major influences behind this expansion was Ian Stuart Donaldson, an icon among the British Skins. Donaldson, who had gained notoriety as the lead singer of the “white power” band, “Skrewdriver,” had formed a formal alliance in the late 1970s with the British National Front—a neo-fascist, “white power” group—and began disseminating a polarizing “white power”

newsletter called *Blood and Honour* (Hamm 1993). This newsletter made its way into the hands of U.S. Ku Klux Klan (KKK) and American Nazi Party leaders, including Tom Metzger, who was later to evolve into the demagogue of the American Skins (Hamm 1993; Wasser 1997).

In 1984, 25-year-old Clark Reid Martell started the first identifiable American neo-Nazi skinhead gang, known as Chicago's Romantic Violence. After Martell was jailed following escalating episodes of violence characterized as hate crimes, his gang disbanded and dispersed. Shortly thereafter, in 1985, a Skinhead group called the American Front emerged in Haight Ashbury in San Francisco, and it was in California that Tom Metzger again made his presence known after a brief period of personal abeyance. Metzger, who had since broken with the KKK, started a group called White Aryan Resistance (WAR) and actively recruited Skinheads in California (Hamm 1993). Recruitment began to spread across the country as Metzger sponsored events such as Aryan Woodstock and other Aryan festivals (Wasser 1997).²

The Skins can be thought of as the youth wing of a larger, more global Neo-Nazi Movement that arose in the United States in order to fulfill a need in this larger movement felt by younger individuals. Indeed it is no coincidence that most members of the group are between the ages of 13 and 25 (Anti-Defamation League N.d.b). Focusing on the Skinheads instead of another recognizable subgroup of the Neo-Nazi Movement such as the KKK is advantageous for several reasons.

First, this group's members have traditionally been visually salient and identifiable, which is not the case for some more-covert groups in the movement (Hamm 1993), and their transformation to the tactic of normalization is thus more clear. For a contrasting example, although KKK members strive to be visually salient when dressed in traditional hooded white robes and participating in activities such as cross burning, they nonetheless seem reluctant to be personally identified with the association outside of a group context, as evidenced by the fact that their personal identities are hidden while in costume.³ Second, primary sources for this group are more accessible than for some other groups; in addition to their intragroup mailings, the Skinheads and some of their key leaders maintain many public-domain Web sites and chat rooms where they openly proclaim their tenants and intended actions. Third, the ADL identifies the Skinheads as "the fastest growing faction of the white supremacist movement," which indicates this group and its actions may have increasingly important implications for modern society (Wasser 1997).⁴

Sociological Theory of Emergence

Many theories have been and could potentially be used either independently or in combination to explain the emergence of the Skinhead Movement.

One example is Neo-Marxist Theory, which has been used to explore the emergence of the subcultural groups in Britain (Hebdige 1979). This framework holds that individuals feeling dissonance with the dominant culture turn to subcultures as positive reference groups and forums for rebellion.

Hamm (1993:85) offers a few objections to this perspective: it has not been tested statistically and it may be applicable only to the early British portion of the movement. Further, however, this perspective tends to view subcultural acts as merely symbolic and not truly rebellious in intent or nature, which does not seem to be the case for *Skins*. Additionally, neo-Marxism alone cannot reconcile the group's simultaneous emergence with the British government's decreasingly positive stance regarding immigrant populations, which was discussed in the previous section.

Another theory previously employed on this topic is Differential Identification-Reinforcement Perspective, which is an extrapolation of Edwin Sutherland's Differential Association Theory and used by Hamm (1993). This perspective takes reference groups into account while allowing for the interaction of modern media and for the replacement of economic goals with goals of violence and chaos, which are often associated with groups like the Skinheads. An element of operant conditioning is also present, such that deviant behavior is positively reinforced as individuals are rewarded with feelings of belonging to the reference group (Hamm 1993).

Hamm's hypothesis based on Differential Identification-Reinforcement Theory is that Skinheads "emerge through specific educational and behavioral management efforts orchestrated by adult racists" (1993:85). This perspective fails to adequately account for why younger individuals may initially be amenable to adult racist ideology and is deficient in detailing the specific "educational and behavioral management efforts" involved. Additionally, by Hamm's own admission, this theory minimizes the role and importance of the subculture itself as well as of the socioeconomic class that members represent (1993:86).

To address some of these issues, this article proposes what is essentially a version of General Strain Theory (GST) as an explanation for the emergence of the Skinheads. Agnew's (1992) construction of this theory highlights four sources of strain: failure to achieve positively valued goals, disjunction of expectation and achievements, removal of positively valued stimuli, and presentation of negative stimuli. All four sources are directly applicable to the Skinhead Movement, but before illustrating these applications, and in order to provide a contextual framework for understanding these sources, it is necessary to present a case for what seems to be the overarching impetus of all four sources: affirmative action.⁵

Simply stated, affirmative action demanded an end to discrimination based on race or sex, and encouraged employers to make conscious efforts to hire disadvantaged populations in order to help remedy past grievances (Rosen 2000).

Affirmative action first appeared in 1965 under President Lyndon B. Johnson in the wake of the 1964 Civil Rights Act, but American society began to feel its legislative impact in the late 1960s and early 1970s (Swain 2002). By the early 1980s then, at about the same time as the emergence of the Skins in the United States, it was clear that affirmative action was more than a passing societal whim and began to influence broad sectors of society. This time frame additionally corresponded with a very active phase of Reaganomics and broader economic restructuring in the form of deindustrialization that disadvantaged many in the lower socioeconomic classes (Bluestone and Harrison 1982; Hamm 1993).

As a result of these combined conditions, a certain segment of the white population experienced a general feeling of disenfranchisement or alienation. Affirmative action and its policies provided a highly visible, salient target—minority groups—for these resultant negative feelings.⁶ Alienation was particularly prevalent among the lower and lower-middle classes in society because they did not have the economic and political advantages of the white elite, nor did they receive any of the perceived special consideration now formally given to their minority counterparts. Many alienated whites perceived affirmative action as active discrimination propagated against the white race (Swain 2002), and their disenfranchisement is evident in statements from individuals such as John Lee Clary, a former comrade of Tom Metzger, who angrily exclaimed “affirmative action has destroyed white America” (Wasser 1997).

Some of these disenfranchised and alienated whites chose to join with the Skinhead movement as a response to their growing frustrations, and indeed this state left many of them vulnerable to recruitment by movement leaders (Swain 2002). In fact, 64 percent of respondents to a poll on a youth message board popular among Skinheads listed their primary reason for joining the group as “I was tired of multiculturalism being stuffed down my throat.”⁷ Essentially then, the Skinhead Movement may be considered a countermovement, not against any mainstream movement per se, but as part of a larger Neo-Nazi Movement reacting against the changes in the social structure itself that resulted from earlier reform movements like the Civil Rights Movement. Reasons why only a portion of the embittered white underclass was attracted to the movement will be addressed in the later discussion of effectiveness of normalization.

Returning to the four sources of strain in GST, the ways in which affirmative action satisfies these conditions may now be examined. The first source is failure to achieve positively valued goals; clearly, in American society economic success is a key goal. At the time of the economic downturn in the early 1980s, this success became more difficult to achieve for less-advantaged groups. Frustration about this fact arguably sublimated around the visible and controversial policies of affirmative action, which then became the scapegoat for these economic frustrations. The second source of strain is a disjunction of expectation

and achievements. Very similar to the first source, disenfranchised whites realized the societal expectation of economic success, but were unable to achieve it. Affirmative action again took the blame for this disparity.

Removal of positively valued stimuli is the third source of strain. Positive stimuli in this instance may be classified as the historic advantages many members of the white race experienced as a result of wide-scale discrimination against minority groups. With the advent of affirmative action, these inequities were exposed, became open for public discourse, and the advantages attached to the former status quo were eliminated or reduced across many levels of society. Alienated whites again often directed their anger over these changes against affirmative action and those groups it most strongly represented. The fourth source of strain, presentation of negative stimuli, functions in a complementary fashion. Members of minority groups themselves served as negative stimuli for whites antagonized by the changing society, and minorities' increasing presence in the workplace and at other institutional levels of interaction compounded this effect.

A slight variation on GST, Power Devaluation Theory (PDT), was employed by McVeigh (1999) to explain the emergence of the second wave of the KKK.⁸ A component of PDT that would be applicable and helpful in interpreting the emergence of the Skins is the notion that concurrent political and economic devaluation within a group "increases the likelihood that a conservative movement will emerge" (McVeigh 1999:1473–4). The Skinhead Movement is certainly a conservative one, and affirmative action, as argued above, can easily account for simultaneous devaluation in the political and economic realms. Purely economic examples were used above to illustrate the sources of strain, but the legislation that accompanied these social changes in and of itself also gave whites a sense of powerlessness. This powerlessness arose from a sense that the white elites heading the changes in government were unresponsive to their needs, were caving to pressures for political correctness, and were in fact betraying their own race (Swain 2002).

Normalization

Normalization is the process whereby members of the Skinheads are changing the manner in which they present themselves to mainstream society. As discussed earlier in the section on historical emergence, Skins were traditionally very visible, with tattoos and other symbols clearly distinguishing their affiliation. Presented earlier, Figure 1 exemplifies this image; Figure 2 is also representative of the impudent manner in which members chose to represent themselves. As late as 1989 to 1991, when Hamm (1993) was collecting data for his study on members of the group, this trend still held true. Shortly thereafter, the tactic of normalization slowly developed, with an intensification evident in more recent years.



Figure 2

Example of Traditional Imagery for Group Representation. Retrieved March 1, 2005. <<http://web.archive.org/web/20010922173807/http://resist.com/>>.

The primary goal of normalization surpasses mere integration and seeks to allow potential recruits to better identify with members. Individuals who may previously have been intimidated or ostracized by the extremity of the Skins' visual presentation may now be more receptive to listening to their ideology and more apt to find accord with their feelings of disenfranchisement emanating from larger society. As Tom Metzger said, members of the movement are now encouraged to be "less visible, [to] have a good education, get a good job . . . get in there where they can do us a lot more good" (Wasser 1997).

Undergirding this striving for normalization is a concept known as Frame Theory, which social movement scholars have developed. Frames are "slices of observed, experienced, and/or recorded 'reality' [that] are assembled, collated and packaged . . . such that a new angle of vision, vantage point, and/or interpretation is provided" (Benford and Snow 2000:623). By altering the way a movement construes or presents itself, it changes its frame and modifies in-group and out-group discourse about movement goals and members. Importantly, the common problems experienced by members and potential members are not as critical as the manner in which those problems are framed, as framing provides definitions for and targets on which to blame the difficulties, as well as

emotional reinforcement for the attribution (McVeigh 1999; Snow et al. 1986). In this instance, the Skinhead Movement is realigning its frame to better “resonate” with members of the general white public, who, though they may feel alienated by recent changes in society, are unwilling to be as extreme as the Skins traditionally have been.

Frame resonance can be defined as the degree to which individuals can identify with the stated positions of a frame; and the extent to which a movement achieves resonance with a wide, diverse audience can largely determine its ultimate success or failure (Babb 1996). Resonance is a manifestation of what is known as consensus mobilization, whereby movements “activate individuals who already agree with [their] views and aims” (Snow and Benford 1988:199). Expressions of disenfranchisement from Skinheads logically resonate with more members of the white underclass when the Skins adhere to the tactics of normalization. This is because the potential recruits are not frightened or otherwise negatively affected by previously stark self-presentations, and are able to see themselves as more similar to the Skins.

Example of Normalization

The area in which normalization is most salient is the self-presentation of Skinhead Movement members. In contrast to their earlier conspicuous manner of dress and adornment, Skins have now begun to aim toward the look of “normal” or “average” citizens. They have started letting their hair grow out, have stopped dressing in the traditional uniform—Doc Martens or combat boots, jeans, “white power” T-shirts and red suspenders—and have instead opted for a more clean-cut, professional look (National Socialist Movement N.d.; Metzger N.d.). For example, many like Ashley Brown, the creator of a white supremacist newsletter called *National Vanguard*, which caters to Skins, now wear long-sleeved shirts to hide heavily tattooed arms (Wasser 1997). In fact, some Skinhead leaders are actually encouraging members to abstain from receiving tattoos altogether (“Do You Think Tattoos Are OK?” 2005).

Self-presentation, however, extends beyond mere physical presence. The imagery of the movement also diverges from past representations: snarling wolves and swastikas have been replaced by renderings of flawlessly attractive, idealized Aryans and runic symbols as the preeminent images, which indeed are reminiscent of Nazi Germany ideology (see Figures 3 and 4). Skins have additionally begun to alter the manner in which they collectively behave as a component of the normalization process. For example, some groups are encouraging members not only to avoid public confrontations about their ideology, but to initiate superficially positive interactions with members of the minority groups they so despise, and even to go so far as taking acting classes in order to be more convincing in their efforts (National Socialist Movement N.d.).

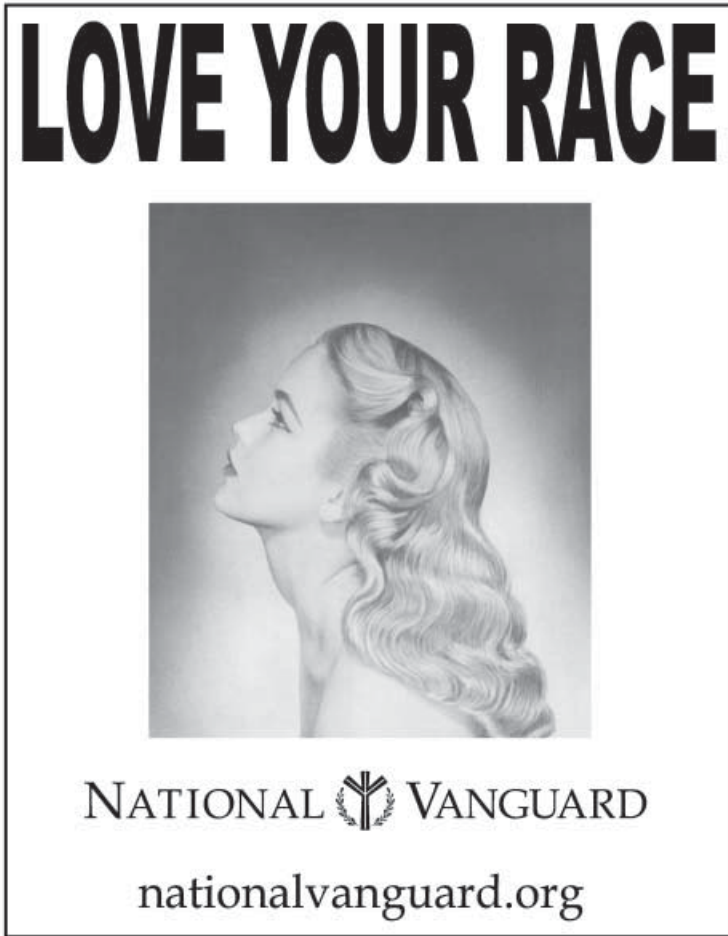


Figure 3

Example of newer group imagery, after normalization. Retrieved March 1, 2005. <<http://www.natall.com>>.

Skins, while physically and behaviorally more subtle than in the past, are far from inactive in the public sphere. A very recent setting for activities guided by normalization tactics is the 2005 Daytona 500, a popular NASCAR event. Racing events such as these are growing in popularity among the white population, and, according to the views of some affiliated with the Skinhead Movement,

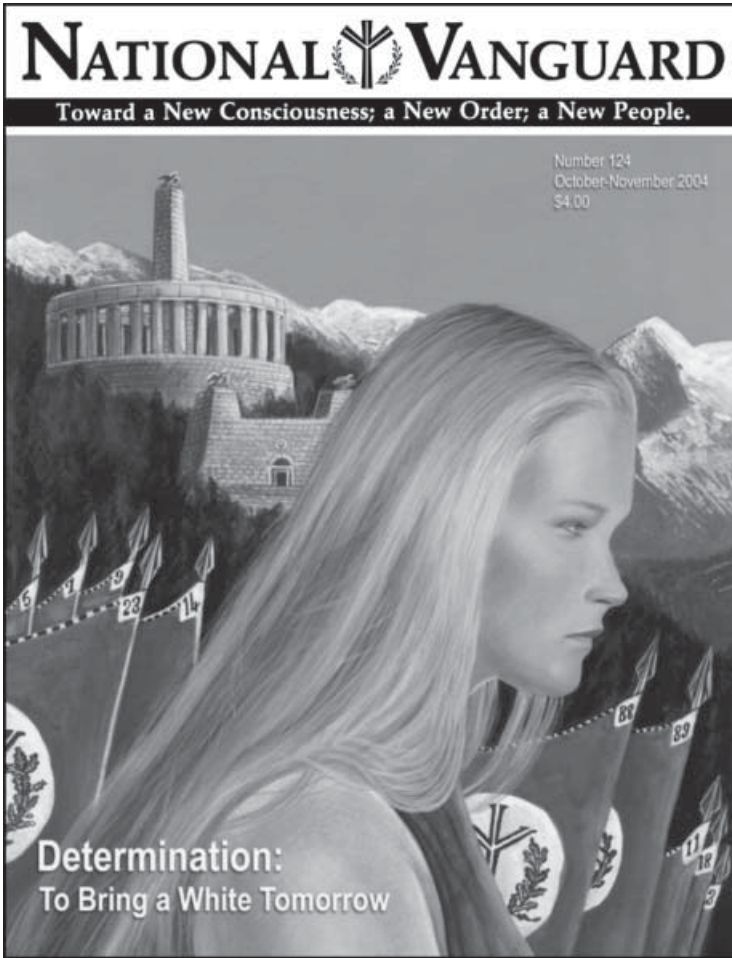


Figure 4

Another example of newer group imagery, after normalization. Retrieved March 1, 2005. <<http://www.natall.com>>.

attracting “blue collar workers and rednecks” as well as “increasing numbers of doctors, lawyers, and other professionals” (Parker 2003). These events provide a forum in which Skins may espouse their ideology in a nonthreatening manner, coupled with their normative presentations of self, to a likely-receptive, mass audience. At the 2005 Daytona 500, a plane pulling a banner saying, “Love

Your Race, visit natall.com” [an organization closely tied to many Skinhead groups] flew over the arena before the race began. The dual meaning of “race” in this context is doubtlessly intended to capture the attention of NASCAR fans and expose them to the ideas of the Skinhead Movement.

Additionally, Skins were among the crowds both inside and outside the stadium handing out at least three different flyers “designed just for the Daytona 500 outreach, [that] will help fans make the connection between the airborne banner, our ideas and the smiling, good-looking National Alliance member (like, you for instance!) who hands them a flyer” (Hendon 2005). Figure 5, which says “white people are falling behind” is an example of one of these eye-catching flyers clearly intended to activate and resonate with feelings of disenfranchisement in the white audience, facilitated by the nonthreatening appearance of the Skinheads distributing this literature, while making a connection through the perceived common interest of NASCAR. Also of note is the runic symbol in the background of this flyer, behind the car, which is part of the newer movement imagery, symbolizing, according to the ADL, the rebirth of the Aryan race (Anti-Defamation League 2003).

Another flyer (see Figure 6), under an image of “Love Your Race!” superimposed on a checkered flag reads, “It’s perfectly OK to forget all about Black History Month today. After all, today is Race Day. To see how you can help your fellow Whites win the race race, get in touch with the National Alliance at . . .” (Hendon 2005). This particular flyer not only utilizes the appeals of commonality present in the previous flyer, but also offers a very clear link between disenfranchisement and a symbol of the minority out-group linked to affirmative action—Black History Month.

Effectiveness of Normalization

The question of why the tactic of normalization may be effective for recruitment remains. As stated previously, a less extreme self-presentation is likely to be more conducive to attracting disenfranchised individuals than the traditional Skin image, even when the underlying resonant ideology remains constant, because of increases in perceived similarity. However, effectiveness, as well as why some disenfranchised whites are more likely than others to identify with the movement, is more complicated than this simple statement.

Importantly, Skinheads target their recruiting efforts among teenagers or young adults from the middle class (Wasser 1997), for whom the disenfranchisement is most intense. Individuals in the middle class are most susceptible to feelings of alienation because of a concept known as “nearness to entry.” Upper-class individuals set the economic standard and thus have no basis for experiencing disenfranchisement; lower-class individuals essentially have no hope of attaining the cultural goal of economic success and merely persevere



Life is a race.

In case you have been asleep for the last twenty years, White people are falling behind. To see how you can help the White race grab that checkered flag, get in touch with us at natall.com or nationalvanguard.org - or give us a call at (727) 526-1526.

February 2005						
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
<i>Race Day!</i> 20	21	22	23	24	25	26
	28	Official National Alliance DAYTONA 2005 Souvenir • natall.com • nationalvanguard.org				

Figure 5

One 2005 Daytona 500 flyer distributed by the Skins. Retrieved February 24, 2005. <<http://www.nationalvanguard.org/story/php?id=4612>>.



Its perfectly OK to forget all about

Black History Month

today. After all, today is Race Day. To see how you can help your fellow Whites win the race race, get in touch with the National Alliance at natall.com or nationalvanguard.org - or give us a call at (727) 526-1526.

February 2005						
Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
		1	2	3	4	5
6	7	8	9	10	11	12
13	14	15	16	17	18	19
20 <i>Race Day!</i>	21	22	23	24	25	26
	28	Official National Alliance DAYTONA 2005 Souvenir • natall.com • nationalvanguard.org				

Figure 6

Another 2005 Daytona 500 flyer distributed by the Skins. Retrieved February 24, 2005. <<http://www.nationalvanguard.org/story/php?id=4612>>.

in a ritualistic manner; middle-class individuals are psychologically nearer to attainment, believe that they should be capable of achieving success, and are extremely frustrated when unable to do so (Aronson, Wilson, and Akert 2004). Additionally, individuals in the middle class experience what Ehrenreich (1989:15) calls “fear of falling,” or fear of downward mobility, and this is certainly a fear on which the Skinhead Movement capitalizes. The young age of Skinheads is also a factor in that teenagers and young adults are typically considered more susceptible to strong ideological influences than their older counterparts (Aronson, Wilson, and Akert 2004).

To examine the issue of disenfranchisement further, it is necessary to explore Durkheim’s concepts of mechanical and organic solidarity. Mechanical solidarity is characterized as more primitive than organic solidarity, and relies heavily on norm enforcement through social pressure and conformity. Individuality is minimized, and all members of mechanical societies are expected to hold the same values and beliefs and to behave in a similar, consistent, and predictable manner. Conversely, organic solidarity is a function of the division of labor. While individuals are dependent on one another for goods and services, they are not as emotionally connected; there is room for increased individuality and dissent regarding belief systems without need for fear of normative retribution (Cosser 2003; Durkheim 1964).

Some view Durkheim’s construction of solidarities as inevitably evolutionary, whereby a society—arguably at the national level—must uniformly be either mechanical or organic, and must progress from mechanical to organic with the increasing presence of industrialization (Cahnman 1995). However, as an organism evolves, whether biological or social in nature, some units within that organism may prove to be somewhat regressive when compared with the whole. Communities within the United States may exist at differing evolutionary stages because of widespread disparities in wealth across society. Alternatively, Toennies’ similar distinction of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* holds that two forms of social solidarity may continually coexist within any society.

The first, *Gemeinschaft*, is bound by a “consensus of wills, . . . folkways, mores, and religion,” and is comparable to Durkheim’s construction of mechanical solidarity (Toennies 1957:64). Because *Gemeinschaft* solidarities are defined by cultural homogeneity, affective feelings for in-group members tend to guide interactions and behaviors (Toennies 1957). The second, *Gesellschaft*, is bound by “a union of rational wills, . . . convention and agreement . . . and finds its ideological justification in public opinion” (Toennies 1957:64), and is comparable to Durkheim’s organic solidarity. *Gesellschaft* solidarities are more impersonal, and individuality and competitiveness are emphasized (Toennies 1957).

Either an incomplete evolutionary perspective of mechanical solidarity or the *Gemeinschaft* framework can help account for why the Skinhead

Movement is attractive to only some segments of the disenfranchised white population. Importantly, research has in fact shown that Skins are most often found in small, inconspicuous communities that correspond to the mechanical framework (Wasser 1997). The dependence and shared belief system inherent in mechanical solidarities can only exist within relatively small social networks or communities. This dependency and interconnectedness in turn foster a system of interpersonal trust among community members that would allow for easy propagation of attribution of alienation to out-group members; for example, blaming affirmative action and minority group members for perceived disenfranchisement and economic disadvantage. Compounding this effect, smaller communities are more apt to be politically conservative than their larger city counterparts. Conservatism and the complementary political right tend to support idealized “traditional” values while in general looking unfavorably upon policies such as affirmative action as unjust and negative social policy (Swain 2002).

Some researchers also believe that many Skinheads come from abusive familial backgrounds (Wasser 1997). If this proves to be true, there is little doubt that such abuse, perhaps facilitated by the valuation of traditionalism, could act as an impetus for joining a subcultural movement. In other words, in small-community settings where family disputes are often considered private matters and are likely supported by such precepts as “spare the rod, spoil the child,” an abused teenager would have virtually no recourse other than forming a new reference group by, for example, joining a movement like the Skinhead Movement, through which they gain a sense of power, control, and a sense of belonging. Larger cities seem less conducive to this general attitude, if only because of higher population densities and more frequent out-group interactions, and thus would offer a more diverse support system with a greater number of potential reference groups for such abused individuals.

Lastly, members of small mechanical solidarities would be less likely than members of larger organic solidarities to regularly encounter ideas or values dramatically different from their own or from the group’s shared beliefs that would cause them to challenge their underlying assumptions. The mere presence of and opportunity for close interaction with out-group minority members would also act to challenge individuals’ beliefs systems: the more exposure individuals have to members of a particular group, the more likely they are to view that group and its members favorably (Aronson, Wilson, and Akert 2004). This occurs as perceived otherness decreases and perceived similarity on an individual basis increases across interactions. Unfortunately, the mere presence of out-group minority members is another force that is less likely to be present in small, mechanical communities compared to larger, organic ones, and thus cannot act as a challenge to shared beliefs.

Conclusions and Discussion

This article explores the modern American Skinhead Movement and its recent normalization tactic. The initial emergence of the movement was presented through a framework of General Strain Theory, and normalization, which is most evident in changing self-presentations of group members and images, was explained through the concepts of frame alignment and resonance. Finally, the effectiveness of normalization as a recruiting technique was hypothesized to be greatest in the context of small, conservative, mechanical communities, which are most conducive to promoting the ideology of the movement in the targeted, disenfranchised, white lower-middle class.

As with any complex topic, more research is needed to fully explore normalization and its long-term ramifications for the movement as well as for the broader society. Importantly, further quantitative confirmation is needed to test the relative acceptance of the Skins' message in mechanical and organic communities, and to determine if the unfolding presence of affirmative action in the early 1980s could account for resurgence of activity among other neo-Nazi groups. Another area for additional investigation is normalization itself. Will normalization lead to an increased or decreased incidence of actual crimes propagated by Skins? Will decreased visibility of members because of normalization ultimately strengthen or incapacitate the movement in terms of in-group solidarity? Will Skins and other neo-Nazi groups in other countries exhibit this same trend of normalization with similar eventual results? Is it reasonable to assume that normalization is emerging in other right-wing populist-type movements and not just neo-Nazi groups (e.g., Berlet and Lyons 2000)? Why did normalization as a tactic emerge precisely when it did, in the early to mid-1990s? Was it a result of external police pressures, or from some internal impetus, such as the financial bereavement induced by lawsuits brought against Skin demagogue Tom Metzger (Anti-Defamation League 2002)?

Further research should also examine the precise role that the Internet played in the spread of the movement through the 1990s, and the role it continues to have in the movement's propagation. Religion and music as forms of emotional appeal to prospective members would also be insightful topics for additional research, as these factors aid in making group ideology seem more mainstream. Whether or not any particular factors influence longevity of membership, or whether membership is specifically age-related is also deserving of study. Tattoo and symbol morphology is another area of interest regarding the Skins that has only just begun to be explored by organizations like the ADL, and likely holds much promise for interpretive understanding of the group.

Understanding the Skinheads will aid in understanding countermovements in general and may have practical implications for those interested in controlling

Skin activities. Understanding, however, will only come over time through additional research, including insights provided by actual Skinhead members, though accurate perspectives will be difficult to obtain. Hopefully, later research can build upon the notion of normalization presented here to gain a more thorough interpretive perspective than the descriptive efforts common in prior work.

ENDNOTES

¹This image was taken from <http://www.nukeisrael.com/citizens.htm>, a site identified with the "Tualatin Valley Skins," on March 15, 2005. Though this image has since been removed, at the time it seemed to be current, and thus in and of itself did not support the notion of normalization that will be discussed in this article. However, the argument of normalization need not hold true for every individual Skin, nor for every group of Skins for the general trend to be evidenced. Further, ideas such as "Lone Wolfing," are openly advocated elsewhere on the site and do in fact substantiate the concept of normalization.

²The advent of the Internet also greatly contributed to recruitment of potential members, and should be explored in future research, as it could be very informative regarding the nature of this particular movement.

³Interestingly, however, there is also evidence that normalization is indeed emerging within some segments of the KKK (see Berlet and Lyons 2000, chapter 13).

⁴The article text for this citation could not be located among the online archives of the Anti-Defamation League; the documentary source, however, was deemed sufficiently credible.

⁵Affirmative action may not be the sole source of or impetus for strain. It is, however, a functional, salient, and continuing component of the Civil Rights Movement that seems to directly address the causes of perceived disenfranchisement and alienation found in the Skins and potential members.

⁶This is in accordance with Allport's (1979) assertions about visibility and the perception of difference or creation of otherness, especially as it relates to skin color. Among other things, visibility of a certain trait causes a "condensation" of attitudes around a symbolic target, reduces the perceived individuality of out-group members, and increases solidarity among in-group members, all of which are based on categorization (pp. 134–7).

⁷This poll may be found at <http://www.resistance.com/forum/viewtopic.php?t=5884&sid=d976c735b7f1e8988f84c3e3e744b208> (retrieved February 24, 2005). While it is not scientific, may include multiple responses from the same respondents, and has a small *n* value (47), it is nonetheless insightful.

⁸McVeigh (1999) actually makes no connection between PDT and GST and one might assume he views the two theories as entirely separate. However, in practice, PDT indeed seems to function as a variation on, or at least as subsumed under, GST. In short, McVeigh states that KKK members experienced economic strain because of a changing political climate and expressed their concern to group members and potential group members in a way that resonated with growing economic fears. This constituency then banded together not only in response to this concern, but also as a way of changing the rules of supply and demand such that "cultural identity [was promoted] as an alternative basis of economic and political exchange" while out-group members and immigrants in general were boycotted as a threat on the supply side (p. 1475).

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