

THE Seven Steps of HATE





The Psychopathology of Hate: A Seven-Stage Model

WHEN A HATE CRIME HITS THE HEADLINES, it often seems to come out of nowhere. Family, friends, and colleagues may express shock that someone they thought they knew was capable of violence, racism, and antisemitism.

The truth is that, by the time hatred explodes into violence, we are already well into the story. By focusing on the violence, we are starting in the middle and missing the essential context of where it originated, how it evolved, and why it happened.

Furthermore, hatred wears different masks. Antisemitism, for example, comes from the far right, far left, or Islamism (see related StandWithUs booklets). The visible hate groups that attract the headlines are only the tip of the iceberg. Below the waterline, however, the mechanisms and progression of hate are remarkably similar.

John R. Schafer, Ph.D., a behavioral analyst for the FBI and author of multiple books and articles, suggests a seven-stage model tracing the development of hate groups and their progression to violence.

At the core of hatred, Schafer suggests, is insecurity. "Hate masks personal insecurities. Not all insecure people are haters, but all haters are insecure people. Hate elevates the hater above the hated."¹

¹ "The Seven-Stage Hate Model: The Psychopathology of Hate," *Psychology Today*, March 18, 2011

This kind of “elevating” hatred can appeal strongly to those who feel powerless, diminished, and ignored by those in power or from whom they seek approval. Small wonder, then, that a hallmark of antisemitism of all stripes is the claim that Jews wield enormous (even occult) power: controlling banks, the media, politics, and more.

- **Right-wing extremists espousing white supremacy believe that Jews control banks** and other financial institutions as well as media, Hollywood, political systems around the world, and so on. They believe Jews are plotting to destroy “white civilization.” If these people feel they’ve been held back in life, it must be because of the evil, all-powerful Jews.
- **Left-wing extremists tend to be less crudely obvious. They often dress their antisemitism in the language of human rights, class struggle, or identity politics.** They accuse Israel (by no coincidence, the world’s only Jewish state) of committing genocide on the scale of the Holocaust, comparing Israel with Nazi Germany. Many leftists also accuse “global Zionism” of the worst kind of “imperialism” and “racism” since apartheid South Africa and Nazi Germany. This attribution of such vast levels of power to “the Jews” or “the Zionists” is unmistakably an expression of antisemitism.
- **Islamists see the many conflicts in the Muslim world as proof that they are being held back by the machinations of all-powerful Jews** (especially Israel), who “control” Western governments to oppress Muslims. Islamist ideologies view this as an intolerable situation whereby non-Muslims appear to be in a superior position, and the only way to correct this situation is through the waging of a struggle involving violent forms of jihad.

Individuals who share such imaginings are looking for validation of their worldviews, while gaining, in a group of like-minded individuals, the social acceptance, self-worth, and standing denied to them in other areas of their lives.

In this booklet, we will trace Schafer’s seven steps in relation to antisemitism and examine what each step might look like.

Antisemitic mural in London depicting conspiratorial Jewish domination of financial and political institutions.



Neo-Nazis march in
Charlottesville, VA,
in 2017, chanting,
“Jews will not replace us.”



STAGE 1:

The Haters Gather

“Haters rarely hate alone. They feel compelled, almost driven, to entreat others to hate as they do. Peer validation bolsters a sense of self-worth and, at the same time, prevents introspection, which reveals personal insecurities. Individuals who are otherwise ineffective become empowered when they join groups, which also provide anonymity and diminished accountability.”

We hear a great deal about “lone wolf” attacks or violence by the “self-radicalized.” Yet, lone wolves do not emerge in a vacuum. In the age of the internet, connection through shared hatred is just a click away.

Like any other online activity, hate can move from the virtual world to the real one. Browsing antisemitic literature online or posting in antisemitic forums connects the like-minded, who then meet in real life.





STAGE 2:

The Hate Group Defines Itself

"Hate groups form identities through symbols, rituals, and mythologies, which enhance the members' status and, at the same time, degrade the object of their hate. For example, [extremist] groups may adopt the swastika, the iron cross, the Confederate flag, and other supremacist symbols. Group-specific symbols or clothing often differentiate hate groups. Group rituals, such as hand signals and secret greetings, further fortify members. Hate groups, especially [extremist] groups, usually incorporate some form of self-sacrifice, which allows haters to willingly jeopardize their well-being for the greater good of the cause. Giving one's life to a cause provides the ultimate sense of value and worth to life."

Group identities are facilitated through symbols of hate.

As connections are made both online and in actual meetings, antisemitism and other forms of hate become key to group acceptance, and a groupthink evolves as individuals strive for validation and approval.

A rite of passage in white supremacist groups (and many criminal gangs) is getting a distinctive signifying membership—belonging. Certain words or phrases, or particular clothing, are shared within the group, although they may be meaningless to outsiders. This allows hate groups to fly under the radar of those who don't share their convictions.



Hezbollah members embracing the Nazi salute.

STAGE 3:

The Hate Group Disparages the Target



"Hate is the glue that binds haters to one another and to a common cause. By verbally debasing the object of their hate, haters enhance their self-image, as well as their group status.

In [extremist] groups, racist song lyrics and hate literature provide an environment wherein hate flourishes. The life span of aggressive impulses increases with ideation.

In other words, the more often a person thinks about aggression, the greater the chance for aggressive behavior to occur. Thus, after constant verbal denigration, haters progress to the next more acrimonious stage."

While the internet offers the potential for otherwise unavailable connections and opportunities, it is also a bottomless cesspit of hate. Group members have multiple outlets to share antisemitic books, pictures, music, and more. On-demand publishing makes it easy to distribute and produce physical copies of any screed.

Antisemitic literature is readily available, even from online giant Amazon, despite repeated protests.

In the Muslim world, bookstores and even prestigious book fairs offer such antisemitic works as *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf*, and Henry Ford's *The International Jew*.

Of course, antisemites don't necessarily need to quote the words of others. They are more than capable of creating and sharing their own poisonous views, further hardening the line between "us" and "them."



Mein Kampf displayed prominently in Morocco bookstore.



STAGE 4:

The Hate Group Taunts the Target

"Hate, by its nature, changes incrementally. Time cools the fire of hate, thus forcing the hater to look inward. To avoid introspection, haters use ever-increasing degrees of rhetoric and violence to maintain high levels of agitation. Taunts and offensive gestures serve this purpose. In this stage, [extremists] typically shout racial slurs from moving cars or from afar. Nazi salutes and other hand signals often accompany racial epithets. Racist graffiti also begins to appear in areas where [extremists] loiter. Most [extremist] groups claim turf proximate to the neighborhoods in which they live."

In addition to maintaining levels of agitation, excitement, and group cohesion among group members, taunting also serves the purpose of intimidating targets, leaving them (intentionally) to wonder, “Will it get worse?” “Where will it end?”

“Progressive” student groups on college campuses shout down Jewish speakers, even when the topic has nothing to do with Israel, often disrupting things to the point where an event cannot continue.² Actual assaults, such as ripping microphones from a speaker’s hands, and property destruction, such as knocking over podiums and tearing Israeli flags, have been documented. Even without physical violence, threatening chants, such as “Intifada, Intifada, go back to the ovens,” are intended to intimidate and instill fear.³ Pro-Israel students are targeted with particular venom, even from professors and staff.

In the West, the Hitler salute lives on in white supremacist, neo-Nazi and similar organizations.

In the Middle East, the Nazi-Islamist alliance promoted during WWII by, among others, Haj Amin al-Husseini,⁴ the Grand Mufti of Jerusalem, echoes today in the continuing popularity of the Hitler salute at rallies by Islamic Jihad, Hamas, Hezbollah, and the “leftist” Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine, among others.



The Swastika: Swastikas are used by antisemites on the far right to target Jews. Neo-Nazis revere the swastika as a symbol of white supremacy. Every week brings new reports of painted, drawn, or carved swastikas appearing on synagogues, homes, gravestones, and school buildings.

In January 2020, the music streaming giant Spotify, with over 200 million global users, was found to be hosting user-generated playlists glorifying Hitler, white supremacy, Holocaust denial, and antisemitism.⁵ Many prominently featured swastikas.



Marchers carry symbols during protest in Charlottesville, VA.

² “Who Gets Shouted Down on Campus?” *Inside Higher Ed*, February 26, 2018

³ “Caught on Tape: Horrific Assault on Jewish Students by Palestinian Activists at York University,” *StopAntisemitism.org*, November 21, 2019

⁴ See Volume 3: *The Antisemitism at the Heart of Radical Islamism*, StandWithUs Center for Combating Antisemitism



Using the swastika to invert the Holocaust: The antizionist left often uses swastikas to falsely equate Israel and/or Zionism with Nazi Germany. This form of antisemitism is called Holocaust inversion, which is a form of Holocaust denial. This specific slur was created precisely because Israel is a Jewish state. It is an explicit attack on Jewish memory and suffering. As such, it is not a mere “criticism of Israel.” Holocaust inversion trivializes what Jews endured and clouds understanding of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. It is antisemitic because it belittles the unfathomable consequences of the Holocaust on Jews, both in Israel and the Diaspora.

STAGE 5:

The Hate Group Attacks the Target Without Weapons

“This stage is critical, because it differentiates vocally abusive haters from physically abusive ones. In this stage, hate groups become more aggressive, prowling their turf, seeking vulnerable targets. Violence coalesces hate groups and further isolates them from mainstream society. [Extremists],



almost without exception, attack in groups and target weaker victims. The adrenaline ‘high’ intoxicates the attackers. The initial adrenaline surge lasts for several minutes; however, the effects of adrenaline keep the body in a state of heightened alert for up to several days. Each successive anger-provoking thought or action builds on residual adrenaline and triggers a more violent response than the one that originally initiated the sequence. Anger builds on anger.”

Violent attacks have increased on the Orthodox community in Brooklyn, NY.

Hate groups may attack in numbers, ganging up on victims. Individuals may act alone, apparently as “lone wolves,” but, as we have seen, even an individual attacker may be backed up by support, whether it is online or in a group. Jewish adults and children have been set upon and beaten, and those who are visibly Jewish, such as Orthodox boys and men wearing yarmulkes, are particularly vulnerable. As attacks increase in number and intensity, copycat attacks increase as everyone wants to “get in on the action.”

STAGE 6:

The Hate Group Attacks the Target With Weapons

“Haters prefer weapons such as broken bottles, baseball bats, blunt objects, screwdrivers, and belt buckles. These types of weapons require the attacker to be close to the victim, which further demonstrates the depth of personal anger. Attackers can discharge firearms at a distance, thus precluding personal contact. Close-in onslaughts require the assailants to see their victims eye-to-eye and to become bloodied during the assault. Hands-on violence allows [extremists] to express their hate in a way a gun cannot. Personal contact empowers and fulfills a deep-seated need to have dominance over others.”

The synagogue shootings in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania (2018), and Poway, California (2019), illustrate this stage of antisemitic escalation, but they do not reflect the preference for eye-to-eye violence noted by Shafer. Other attacks, such as multiple assaults on Hasidic Jews in Brooklyn, do correspond to this pattern. Both synagogue attacks were carried out by white men with extensive connections to neo-Nazis, white supremacists and right-wing conspiracy theorists. Violent attacks on European synagogues have mostly been committed by Islamists, supported by similar webs of like-minded antisemites, with the exception of the far-right Halle attack on Yom Kippur (2019). Islamists were also responsible for deadly antisemitic attacks in France at the Ozar Hatorah school in Toulouse and the Hyper Cacher kosher supermarket in Paris.



In the worst attack on Jews in American history, a shooter killed eleven people and wounded six.

STAGE 7:

The Hate Group Destroys the Target

"The ultimate goal of haters is to destroy the object of their hate. Mastery over life and death imbues the hater with godlike power and omnipotence, which, in turn, facilitates further acts of violence. With this power comes a great sense of self-worth and value, the very qualities haters lack. However, in reality, hate physically and psychologically destroys both the hater and the hated."

The Nazi Holocaust set a precedent in the minds of antisemites. The idea of destroying "the Jews" is no longer a taboo, and white supremacists and Islamists speak openly in these terms. The far left speaks in terms of destroying the Jewish state of Israel, often supporting the Islamists in their violent attacks against Israeli civilians.

In whatever form, this remains an obsession in the minds of many antisemites.

Universal Application: To see how the model might work in action, let's track a hypothetical scenario through each stage:

Seven Stages of Hate	
1	When a high school student becomes a hate target, the hater seeks out others in the school or social group who dislike, or can be persuaded to dislike, the hated student.
2	The group of haters establishes an identity using symbols and behaviors. They use a hand signal, body language, or a code word to exclude the hated student from sitting with them at lunch, or any number of other actions to demean and isolate. The haters may even adopt a name for their group.
3	At this point, the haters only disparage the hated student within their group.
4	As time passes, the haters openly insult the hated student, either directly or indirectly, by allowing disparaging remarks to be overheard from afar.
5	One morning, the hated student discovers his locker has been tampered with and offensive images, perhaps a swastika or another hate symbol, have been pasted on his locker or over a picture depicting him or his family.
6	Both sophomoric and more malicious acts of hate have the same effect. Eventually, the haters sabotage the hated student's schoolwork and/or extracurricular efforts in an attempt to ruin his or her reputation through rumors and innuendoes and create a further feeling of isolation through humiliation and embarrassment.
7	In so doing, the haters make the school environment intolerable for the targeted student.

Scenarios like this occur every day across America and, indeed, around the world. The targets of hate may change, but the hate process remains constant.



StandWithUs' Center for Combating Antisemitism takes a proactive approach through education.

Now What?

Understanding the common sources and shared mechanisms behind the outwardly differing forms of antisemitism of the right, the left, and Islamism helps us understand how hatred moves from horrific ideas to horrific actions, regardless of the specific means used to carry out the hateful intent.

It also makes clear that a reactive response after a violent incident is inadequate. Waiting until Stage 4 is clearly too late, although that may be the first time hatred surfaces in a way that is recognizable for those not involved in the hate group, or who are not its intended victims.

A more effective approach would be to attempt to “head ‘em off at the pass” in the earliest stages to prevent the situation from getting worse and reaching violent stages. Monitoring online and real-life activities of hate groups and timely interventions may avert deadly escalation.

Much debate has taken place about the responsibility of online platforms in disseminating hate speech, and the distinctions between hate speech that is protected and hate speech that is not (e.g., incitement that is a clear and present danger) are not always easy to draw. Investigations of perpetrators in the aftermath of an attack confirm that Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and others are important distribution channels and offer the means to organize an attack, encourage others to do so, and put the necessary logistics in place.

Monitoring online activity is a daunting proposition. There is some surveillance of Islamist groups, but legislators and law enforcement could certainly work with internet platforms to monitor hate groups of every stripe in the interest of national security. Such efforts would address a singular threat to the stability of our open and democratic society.

For more in-depth reading on this complex subject, the StandWithUs Center for Combating Antisemitism has published dozens of booklets, including a four-part introduction to antisemitism in all its permutations:



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