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The Power (Threat) of White Women: A Content Analysis of Gender, Race, and Context in Police Calls on Racial Minorities in America

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In this article, the authors combine elements from hate crimes theory, intersectional feminism, and critical race studies to explore the spate of White persons calling the police on African Americans for non-criminal actions in the United States. We propose that in order to move beyond attributions of individual racism, we need to consider the role of gender, class, and status threat. We contend that the fact that a disproportionate number of calls to the police are from White women and occur in commercial/leisure locations, this represents a threat to the status of White women. We also link the current actions of privileged White women to historic actions by members of this same group during the American era of lynching, segregation in the 1950's, and other racial hostilities. Drawing on 21 news stories about racially-biased calls to police, we utilized content analysis to find common themes from these incidents. Specifically, we found that the symbolic ownership of space, gendered spheres of activity, and the use of gendered scripts to deflect the label of "racist" were present while carrying out acts that we contend are "hate crime-adjacent" behaviors intended to covertly advance White supremacy.

Keywords: racism, intersectionality, hate crimes, power threat, feminism

Introduction

BBQ Becky, Permit Patty, Cornerstore Caroline, Becky Blocker, and Coupon Carl. Each of these nicknames represents a case where a White person decided to call the police to report a "criminal violation" by a person of color. These supposed crimes include, respectively, having a barbeque in the park, selling water outside of an event without a permit, accidentally brushing a woman's behind with a backpack, attempting to enter one's own apartment, and trying to use a voided coupon at the store (see Hutchinson, 2018 for a list of cases with links to individual cases). This list does not include the woman who called the police on two African American men at Starbuck for sitting down without ordering, the White Yale student who was frightened by a Black Yale student sleeping on a communal couch, the Black Oregon politician whose constituents called the police on her while canvassing her district for votes, or the White Connecticut woman who spit on a Black man with a disability and repeatedly called the police to arrest him. Those did not get catchy, hashtagged names. From wearing socks at a pool to walking down the street, people of color are harassed by individuals who clearly do not believe they have the right to exist in the same spaces as Whites.

Beyond the sheer extent of everyday racism in America, one of the most interesting threads that connects many of these cases is who exactly is making these calls. Although there have been several well-publicized cases of White men calling the police, it is White women (now frequently called "Karens") who have taken the lead as guardians protecting White spaces, "weaponizing" (Takei, 2018) the police in the process.

This willingness of White women to harass people of color has raised some eyebrows because in a patriarchal system, women of all colors and economic backgrounds face sexual harassment, and are told that they do not belong in male spaces. This begs the question, why are so many White women willing to subject others to harassment for simply existing in the same spaces as them?

The simple answer to this question is "racism." But, by treating Becky, Patty, Caroline, and other non-hashtagged White women as independent racists, this minimizes what we see occurring. Racism is a social, group phenomenon that should not be reduced to a small group of individuals acting on prejudicial thoughts about other racial groups (Bonilla-Silva, 2006).

Individualization conceals the impact of structures and ignores mechanisms that perpetuate racial defense of territory. It also minimizes the historical legacy of White women as active participants in White supremacy. We contend that the explanation to these actions lies in hate crimes theory and how marginalized populations often internalize hegemony, leading to acts that reinforce existing hierarchies because they see other minority groups as a threat to their own status. The actions of these White women are in line with both gendered interactions with the world and racist reactions to integration.

What follows is an exploration of how White fragility and weaponized White feminism can be combined to create gender-specific acts of aggression that share the same goals as more overt, violent forms of hate crimes. We examined 21 prominent cases of racially biased police calls in order to identify the commonalities between these cases, as well as how they reflect underlying cultural structures that perpetuate White supremacy. We hope to better connect what have been seen as a string of isolated incidents to their historical antecedents and expand the understanding of how bias-motivated crimes can be supported without actively engaging in violence. The significance of this article lies in its ability to provide a deeper understanding of pressing contemporary social processes, and how hate can be spread in seemingly small, benign ways that have significant, potentially deadly consequences.

Contextualizing Gendered Hate

White women have made a significant impact in the fight for equality, much greater than that of White men. However, feminists of color have pointed out that at times, White feminists act in their own best interests at the expense of more marginalized communities (Carby, 2007; Ortega, 2006). Whether this is an intentional act of opportunity hoarding or a case of White women being "lovingly, knowingly ignorant" (Ortega, 2006: 57) towards groups they empathize with but ultimately cannot relate to, the end result has been the continued marginalization of people of color due to White privilege. As Carby, Ortega, and others have shown, White women often assume the issues they face are the same for all women, but this is not the case. Issues of race and class add new layers to how women experience oppression.

In 1989, Kimberlé Crenshaw introduced the idea of intersectionality as a way to explain how one can inhabit multiple social locations, some of which are privileged while others are marginalized. Crenshaw argues that the experiences of Black women were fundamentally different from those of White women because they navigate not just sexist social structures, but racist ones as well. The idea that our identities are interlocked has also been proposed by Patricia Hill Collins (2002), who explained how minimizing levels of difference helps maintain systemic inequality in America. For Collins, the intersection of social locations created unique combinations where depending on the circumstance, one could be oppressed, privileged, or both at the same time. This is important to consider because although White women do experience sexism and are often ignored by police in cases of sexual assault and domestic violence, when the central issue becomes race they are the ones wielding the power. Additionally, norms governing behavior are often a reflection of one's social location. For example, calling the police and complaining to authorities when one feels they are wronged is more normalized in White communities because Whites rarely face racialized violence from law enforcement. We do not imply that BBQ Becky or Permit Patty are White feminists. Based on what little the public knows about them, they do not identify as feminists. However, this tendency to use gender bias as a way to disguise racism and advance a White supremacist agenda is a form of "weaponized" White feminism (Liska, 2015). We contend that actions by these women go beyond the appropriation, manipulation, and exploitation of people of color that is commonly associated with weaponized White feminism. When the removal of people of color from the public sphere is one's primary goal, this brings these actions closer to the realm of hate crimes.

Power Threat and Hate

Rarely do we think of women when it comes to hate crimes, and for good reason. According to US Department of Justice data, only 17.1% of all hate crimes committed between 2011-2015 were carried out by women alone, compared to 19.1% of all other crimes (Masucci& Langton, 2017). In fact, hate crimes by women are so rare the FBI does not regularly publish statistics on bias crime offenders by gender.

Women are also less likely to hold racist (Spanierman, Beard, & Todd, 2012) or homophobic (Pistella et al., 2017) attitudes, have lower rates of virtually all forms of crime than men (Masucci& Langton, 2017), and can better empathize with victims of bias crimes than men (Spanierman, Beard, & Todd, 2012). This is most likely because of their own experiences as survivors of the many forms of sexism and sexual violence (Smith et al., 2017). These patterns hold true for the majority of women, but women are, and have always been, diverse in terms of ideologies. Historically, a minority of White women have participated in the marginalization of others and in hate crimes. Kathleen Blee has written extensively about the participation of White women in hate groups from the 1920's to now (1991, 1993, 1996, 2008). During the era of lynching, many White women invented stories about being sexually assaulted by African Americans, instigating acts of violence to be carried out by men. During the Jim Crow era, White women could be seen assaulting activists at sit ins or harassing students of color who were only trying to go to school. White women have proudly supported the Knights of the Ku-Klux Klan, Aryan Nations, and comprise some of the most well-known figures in the Alt-Right. But again, these examples are abirritant when it comes to where White women as a group stand on racial issues. So why do we see so many White women going viral for harassing people of color?

Though conceived in 1967, Blalock's Power Threat Hypothesis remains one of the most influential theories on why hate crimes occur. According to Blalock, hate crimes are primarily about the struggle for control of spaces, in terms of economics, politics, and culture. Blalock's theory separates these three forms of social goals into distinct threats. Economic threat refers to when majority group members fear a loss of economic power when minorities move into their neighborhoods. This is the fear that they will lose their jobs. Power threat refers to the loss of political power as minorities approach equal representation in an area, disrupting existing political networks. Symbolic threat involves the fear that those in the majority will be the new minority, thereby becoming cultural outsiders who will be subject to social control and harsh penalties by the new majority – the same social control and penalties they supported when in power. Although Blalock and subsequent power threat theorists had very specific demographic scenarios in mind when creating these hypotheses, ultimately it is the perception of the offender that determines what kind of threat they feel, and if they experience one or more threats. Though it is difficult to ascertain motive from a viral tweet or a thirty second video, we contend that it is this last form of threat, a symbolic loss of cultural control, that deserves further study when it comes to White women calling the police on people of color for inhabiting the same spaces.

But is calling the police a hate crime? Normally, when we think of hate crimes our minds go to cases like Matthew Sheppard or Robert Byrd. Persons who were violently killed for being gay or being Black. Hate crimes are difficult to define, but broadly they are crimes committed against persons where bias is the primary motivator. We tend to define hate crimes in terms of violence, but really that is a means to an end, not a goal. The goal is to send a message. Usually this message is related to who belongs in a particular space. This is why Blalock focused on neighborhoods and why so much of the American Civil Rights Movement took place on busses, in restaurants, in residential neighborhoods, and in schools. The goal of a burning cross is not to produce a fire, but to scare someone away from a White space. One could easily argue that filing false or frivolous police reports is a crime, because it is. But the larger point here is that attempting to have the police remove a person of color from a person's proximity because they want to send a symbolic message that others do not belong is at the root of all hate crimes. Additionally, scholars such as Michelle Alexander (2010) have argued that the criminal justice system has replaced the Jim Crow system, with law enforcement officers carrying out racial justice. All one needs to do is turn on the American news and they will most likely see a case of a person of color, usually African American, gunned down by police for questionable reasons. One could draw a direct parallel to White women in the lynching era selecting which African American was lynched and the modern case of calling the police. This is why we apply the term "hate crime adjacent behaviors" to these acts. They are reflections of the same racist ideologies as the more violent acts mentioned above, and aim to achieve the same segregationist ends. Whether that is the intent of a BBQ Becky or a Permit Patty is irrelevant because their goal is to send a message: Whites only.

Patriarchy, Spheres of Activity, and Symbolic Importance

Why would a marginalized group, such as White women, so fully endorse symbolic threat? Researchers (Collins, 2016; Charles, 2010; Pyke, 2010) have written about how disadvantaged populations sometimes internalize the ideology of their oppressors unconsciously in an attempt to fit in, to gain favor, or even just to survive. Women have made great strides in fighting for gender equality, but still earn less than men and are severely underrepresented in positions of power (political or otherwise). Ironically, patriarchy may be why a non-trivial number of White women actively engage in attempts to suppress other minority groups. As with poor White men, when full membership in the dominant class is unattainable people may rally around the shared characteristic of race as a way to achieve status by proxy. This goes beyond taking advantage of White privilege because it involves actively defending the majority status that they have. In other words, denial of full privilege in society makes persons hypervigilant to threats to the advantaged status(es) that they do have.

This reflects a kind of internalization of oppression because it asks minority members to act on behalf of the majority. It also involves a kind of false consciousness, as partially marginalized people focus not on their privilege status(es), but on their disadvantage, thereby seeing themselves as under attack. In her book, Robin DiAngelo (2018) discusses how White men and women have difficulty connecting to the idea of race, because they lack the cultural capital to fully understand how race works when you are a racial minority. Instead, they react angrily out of fear of being labeled as racist. What DiAngelo calls "white fragility" can fall particularly hard on White women, who experience discrimination and prejudice on a daily basis, but from a gendered standpoint. This can cause them to focus on a young Black male's "maleness," ignoring his race, thereby reframing the interanion along gendered lines. Experiencing both privilege and marginalization can result in a kind of cognitive dissonance, pushing some White women to feel entitled to act on perceived threats to what they have fought so hard to achieve.

The Historic Roots of Weaponized White Feminism

In fact, gender equality was often cited in oral histories of female members of the Ku Klux Klan in the 1920's (Blee, 1993, 2008). In her interviews, Blee also found that many women of the Klan were more than just ornamental figures or accessories, but they took leadership roles and actively engaged in Klan hate crimes. The rise of the second KKK followed widespread gains by women in politics after the success of the Suffrage Movement. Though it seems counter intuitive today, the transition from women's lib to racial politics actually makes sense when you consider how the Klan employed "profamily" ideology in their message, explicitly telling women that they needed to seize the power to protect their children from social "others" who meant them harm. This framing of racial injustice as necessary to protect the rights of women forms the foundation of weaponized White feminism, as any action, no matter how violent, can be seen as serving a progressive, pro-woman function. The fear for the family still impacts hate today, particularly when it concerns the ownership of space.

Historically, women have been constrained to the domestic sphere of activity while men have dominated the economic sphere (Shoemaker, 2014; Lundberg & Pollak, 1993). This made women, White women in particular, the queens of their castle. At least while the king was away. This split division of labor that dominated the 1950's is important for two reasons. First, it directly tied a woman's status to a man's. A wife's prestige was a reflection of her husband, and their house was the ultimate symbol of shared success. Returning again to the idea of symbolic threat, in a hyper-segregated social system, under the separate spheres ideology, the house was a woman's place and a symbol of her femininity. Therefore, any challenges against the status of the house were a threat to the woman herself. Second, this is the timeframe that America has romanticized and for many, it is a highwater mark that they want to return to. Though rarely vocalized, it was a time of strict gender divisions, but even more harsh racial segregation and racialized violence.

Present Study

The discourse surrounding the outbreak of calls to police on people of color in America has been framed as the unrelated acts of several racist individuals. This framing divorces these similar acts from their historical antecedents, as well as obscures the identical goals of the callers. We contend that this gendered, "accessory" style involvement in defending White spaces bares striking similarity to false charges in the lynching era or other forms of indirect racial violence seen throughout American history.

Though most White women are sympathetic to other marginalized communities, oppression can be internalized and exploited to protect one's status. The rash of calls to police by (predominantly) White women on persons of color provides a glimpse into one way that the ownership of space and the expression of privilege can be used to oppress others, and achieve similar goals as more overt, traditional acts of hate. An in-depth look at prominent cases of bias-motivated calls to the police illustrates how these seemingly individual acts reflect a larger group process.

Methodology And Data Collection

To explore the above outlined themes, the authors completed a content analysis of 21 cases. We collected our sample using a simple internet search, while relying primarily on an ABC News article cataloging bias-motivated police call cases (Hutchinson, 2018). Where possible, non-editorialized news stories were used to examine the facts of the incidents. These cases were all coded for location, caller demographics, target demographics, police response, if the caller was an employee reporting a customer, and outcome of the call. The authors coded the cases individually, and then compared notes as a form of triangulation. Summary data for the 21 cases analyzed is presented in Table 1. Of the 21 cases, a majority involved female callers (76%), with 14% of cases not reporting the gender of the caller, and only 2 cases of male callers. Slightly more males than females (48% compared to 38%) were targeted for removal by callers, while male and female couples made up 14% of all cases. The deeper meanings of the codes were then expanded, and are presented below.

Table 1. Demographics and Contextual Factors for All Examined Cases (N=21)

Variable	Number	Percent
CallerGender		
Female	16	76%
Male	2	10%
Unknown	3	14%
Target Gender		
Female	8	38%
Male	10	48%
Male and Female	3	14%
Location of Call		
Stores and Restaurants	7	33%
Public Streets	4	19%
Parks and Shared Communal Places (parks, dorms, lunchrooms, apartment swimming pools)	7	33%
Private Residences	3	14%
Employee Caller		
Yes	8	38%

COMMON THEMES IN RACIALLY BIASED POLICE CALLS

Location, Location, Location

In most of the cases analyzed, the location was what could be considered a "female White space." A third of the calls came from stores and restaurants, as well as parks and shared communal spaces (dorms, lunch rooms, soccer fields, and apartment swimming pools). Public streets (19% and private residences (14%) made up the rest of the call locations. The relegation of women to the domestic sphere has undoubtedly constrained their power and autonomy; it also defined certain activities as "women's work." Control of the house extends to other "female" pursuits like consumption, childcare, and family leisure. Women have fought hard to extend their spheres outside of the house, but they are still burdened with these responsibilities.

This is important because the sites of many of these viral stories fall within one of these domains, or in an area that women have recently gained a majority. Elijah Anderson (2015) contextualizes White resistance to integration in terms of what he calls "the White space." For Anderson, White spaces are locations that have historically been all White and "off limits" to racial and ethnic minorities. The rise of the Black middle class has afforded many African Americans financial entry into White spaces like neighborhoods, country clubs, shops, schools, and offices, but unable to let go of racial stereotypes about crime and poverty, Whites view Blacks who venture into White spaces as trespassers. The idea of defended territory has always been a feature of hate crimes, as "sundown towns" were the norm of Jim Crow America, and integration was a key goal of the Civil Rights Movement. This history is important to consider, because it continues to shape racial interactions today. In 2019, colorblindness is the idealized norm in American society, but non-Whites in White spaces are still treated as a threat. This is particularly true for non-Whites who go into female-dominated White spaces such as coffee shops, neighborhood parks, and pools. A fact made clear by looking at several prominent cases of hate crime-adjacent behavior, and how it interacts with control of physical space.

Defending the Domestic

BBQ Becky, who arguably started the recent viral trend, committed her act in Oakland, CA. Oakland has long been the "Black" side of the Bay Area, but with housing prices among the highest in America, many upper-middle class Whites have moved to that area to take advantage of the lower rents, creating a state of gentrification.

In short order, calls to police on African Americans walking, listening to music, going to the park, delivering mail, working, and living next door increased. To put this into quantitative terms, in 2015, Oakland police reported a surge of phone calls after Oakland started gentrifying, and now receive over 700 calls a month for suspicious persons and vehicles (Shaw, 2015). BBQ Becky clearly was not a pioneer in symbolic threat, but she was part of a larger trend. Interestingly, this represents a reversal of Blalock's original symbolic threat hypotheses since it involves new residents calling the police on older residents. This speaks to ownership of space, White privilege, and threats to the home. Women like BBQ Becky feel entitled to space, and that the existence of non-Whites serves as an active reminder to her that social "others" exist in her neighborhood, and should "rightfully" be removed for interfering in her ideal White neighborhood. The presence of people who lived in a neighborhood that existed before her offended her and acted as a symbolic threat to her superiority, since moving to a minority neighborhood is seen as a decline in status.

Maintaining White Spaces

Likewise, the case of a woman calling the police on two African American males in a Philadelphia Starbucks (Hutchinson, 2018) reflects a desire to defend White spaces. Starbucks has long acted as a symbol of the White middle class, and has appealed to American White women by presenting a more stereotypically feminized, or female-friendly, take on coffee. Flavored coffee drinks such as pumpkin spiced lattes are often associated with affluent White women in America. The symbolic cultural significance of Starbucks most likely motivated the White female manager to call the police, alleging that two young men were trespassing because they sat down before making a purchase. This was after she allegedly gave a White woman the code to the bathroom without requiring her to make a purchase. The intrusion into the White space of Starbucks reflects a larger issue of Whites calling for the removal of people who they see as "outsiders" simply because of their skin color. A sentiment echoed by a Massachusetts lunchroom worker who called the police on a Black female student for "looking out of place" (Wootsen, 2018). The Philadelphia Starbucks and Smith College cases were not unique. Thirty-eight percent of all cases examined involved employees calling police to remove persons of color. This is concerning because across states and types of businesses, employees see maintaining the Whiteness and exclusivity of their occupations as part of their jobs.

In 2015, police were called to a pool party in McKinney, TX because residents of the gated community did not believe the African American teens belonged in their neighborhood pool (Khazan, 2018). A similar incident occurred Memphis, TN when a White female property manager called the police on an African American man wearing socks in the pool (Hutchinson, 2018). In all of the above cases, symbolic threat caused White employees to call the police to remove people who they felt did not belong in their place of employment. The longstanding racial segregation of American neighborhoods leads Whites to see integration as a threat to their social standing, as well as a visible decline in their own status. Calling the police to defend their territory is then a response to symbolic threats to White hegemony.

This can be exacerbated by low-wage workers who feel pressured to appease their predominantly White clientele, and actively work to make sure the customers in their place of business "belong." It should be noted that all of the non-female (male or undetermined) caller cases occurred in places of business by employees, which suggests that unlike other contexts, persons of all genders work to maintain the Whiteness of commercial spaces.

Newly Won Spaces

Even college campuses have seen White women act on symbolic threats to White spaces. In 2018, a White student at Yale University in New Haven, CT harassed a Black female graduate student napping in a common area before calling campus police (Hutchinson, 2018). Multiple campus police officers confronted her and demanded to check her ID to ensure that she really was a student, despite the fact that this encounter occurred in *her* dorm room. A young Black woman attending Smith College, a women's-only liberal arts school in Massachusetts had an almost identical experience as a school employee called the police on her for lying on a couch in a common area (Wootson, 2018). Here again we see the disbelief on the part of Whites that other racial groups belong in the same spaces as them. Though not a traditionally welcoming space to females, recent American college trends show that women now make up the majority of US college students and graduates (Snyder, 2018). This makes the university a newly won territory for many White women. The irony of course is that just a few generations ago a White woman on campus could have been stopped to ask if she belonged.

In addition, many White women still face barriers to inclusion in male-dominated fields like engineering and other STEM fields, and continue to make $0.81 for every male dollar, even with the same degree (Blau& Kahn, 2016). This prejudice and discrimination can become internalized, as White women use the same techniques as their male oppressors to assert dominance in a college setting. In other words, because they feel their hold on college spaces are tenuous, this amplifies symbolic threat. Judging by the Smith College incident, this is even true when the space is clearly defined as for women. Of course, the women engaged in these activities probably do not see their behavior as racist. They see themselves as enforcing laws and protecting the community.

Weaponized Feminism and Deflecting Blame

Arguably the best example of weaponized White feminism and hate crime-adjacent behavior comes from Hamden, CT where now-former public school employee Corinne Terrone was filmed screaming racial slurs and spitting on a Black man in a motorized cart at a grocery store (Friedmann, 2019). What makes this case unique is that in addition to having video of her engaged in outright, overt racism, her three calls to the East Haven and Easton police were released by the New Haven Register (2019). In these calls, she berates the police non-emergency operators, demanding that the police arrest the man she harassed and assaulted because he victimized her by calling her a gendered expletive. She leans into the same racism captured on the video while demanding she did nothing wrong and commanding the police to leave their jurisdiction to comfort her and take her report. What stands out in these calls is her outright anger at what she feels was a criminal assault upon her as a woman, and her unwavering belief that she is in the right. However, after two failed attempts, she finally contacts a detective and, realizing that her anger is getting her nowhere, she completely changes her demeanor. She openly weeps, apologizes for her behavior, and attempts to elicit a plea for sympathy by telling the detective about recent personal losses.

The response of women who are caught engaging in hate crime-adjacent behaviors tends to follow highly gendered scripts. Multiple White women have had attempts to defend White spaces backfire on them, with police or bystanders questioning their behaviors. In many of these cases, the White guardian drops their rage and asserts a claim that they are the real victims. In 2007, Mamta Motwani Accapadi wrote about the power of White women's tears and how they are used to oppress women of color. Accapadi illustrates how when White women cry, the original issue that caused the tears tends to disappear, leading to favorable outcomes for White women. In particular, she links this behavior to how people with privilege respond to verbal challenges to that same advantage, called the Privilege Identity Exploration Model (Watt, 2007). This is what we see when women like BBQ Becky, Permit Patty, and others are challenged for their racism. For Becky and Patty, their response to law enforcement was to cry and claim that they were being attacked when in truth, according to video evidence, they were the initial aggressors.

There are two ways to interpret these tears. First, we can take these women at face value since having the police called on you and being verbally confronted can be an emotional experience. Though it should be noted that this is the same experience they were trying to force onto non-Whites who dared exist in their proximity. Second, we can interpret this as Accapadi does: this is a tactical response and a defense mechanism.

This is important to note as there was only one case where a caller was apprehended by police, and as far as we can tell, no legal charges were filed against callers in any of these cases. This mirrors reactions to false testimony in lynching, as the women in question do suffer informal social sanctions like ridicule or the loss of a job, but they never face police justice. This reaffirms the idea that the police exist to enforce White laws against non-White people. When White women play the damsel in distress to cover for their racist actions, they know that this will help them escape the situation they created. Law enforcement will want to calm down and protect the woman crying, not charge her with making false reports or engaging in harassment. Again, this reflects traditional gender roles under patriarchy because it activates gender stereotypes of women as in need of protection. White women are afforded this protection because unlike other groups, they have the privilege of Whiteness and even though patriarchy hurts women, it does offer some protections to them when race is a factor.

Conclusion

The defense of White spaces by White women is nothing new. Though marginalized by patriarchy, the complex relationship between race, class, and gender creates a vested interest in ownership of space on the part of White women. Incursions into White spaces, be they coffee shops, pools, or college campuses are met with resistance by White women because they constitute a symbolic threat to White identity, regardless of gender. In fact, we argue that the tenuous status of White women in America makes this group more vigilant for symbolic threats. Acting as an internalized ideology, hegemonic racism works alongside weaponized White feminism to encourage women to minimize gendered social distance by expressing White privilege, and even White supremacy. Given the gendered nature of daily routines, White men defend economic spheres while White women patrol White spaces of consumption, family, and leisure.

Location played a significant role in all of the analyzed incidents. Stores, parks, and common spaces made up the majority of police calls, while private residences were the least likely place to result in a police call. This is unsurprising, given that interaction between racial group members is most common in public, rather than private areas. However, what stands out is that in nearly all of these cases, the location was one where women constitute a majority or are symbolically linked to the site. This is also reflected in the gender distribution of calls for police, with women comprising the majority of callers. The symbolic connection between what could be called feminine privilege and calls to the police to remove social "others" is important to consider because it speaks to a sense of entitlement and a willingness to defend one's status. Though these women did not directly engage in any acts of violence to remove persons they felt did not belong, their desire to see people of color punished for "invading" their space mirrors the goals of more traditional hate crimes. In most cases, officers declined to arrest the target of the call, which is fortunate. However, in one case, police responding to a call from a mother picking up her kids from school ended when a Black man was fatally shot in his own garage. His crime? Listening to music too loudly (Estrada, 2018). As stated earlier, violence and destruction of property are not the primary functions of hate crimes, they are tools to defend White spaces and White social status. For this reason, we view racially motivated calls to the police hate crime-adjacent behaviors.

This article has several weaknesses that must be addressed. First, though new stories about racially motivated calls to the police are plentiful, there are only a handful of incidents to analyze. The small sample size limited our ability to generalize, but given the relatively small number of incidents, we feel that our work is representative of the actual cases publicized by the press. Second, all of these cases occurred in the United States. Racial bias is not found in any one country and our decision to exclude other countries can be seen as limiting. However, given the complex nature of culture, identity, and the law we feel that expanding our work to countries where we lack cultural competency would be unethical. Third, the decision to frame the study as exploring female callers could be seen as biasing our sample or being overly, unfairly critical towards women. This was not our intention, we simply felt that there were more questions surrounding a marginalized population (women) engaged in exclusionary practices than a privileged one.

There also is far less literature on hate crimes and acts of racism carried out by women than men, so our decision to focus on women was partially based on our desire to explore an understudied area. Additionally, the overrepresentation of female callers in news stories suggests that this behavior is most often carried out by women, and the framing of this issues needs to reflect that fact. Fourth, as is the case with all research, textual analysis is dependent on the researcher and can reflect known or unknown biases. In order to maintain a level of objectivity during coding, we attempted to be as reflexive as possible by challenging and questioning our reasons for selecting cases, codes, and interpretations. Despite these efforts, it is still possible that our social locations and identities affected our perceptions of the cases.

Despite these weaknesses, we feel that the present study has many strengths. There is a tendency in America to individualize racism; to think of it as a personality flaw affecting a small number of persons who do not represent the larger social fabric of the country (Bonilla-Silva, 2006). This makes challenging racist actions difficult because it obscures the more complex interactions at work when it comes to race, class, and gender. We contend framing that the actions of BBQ Becky and other women like her as collective actions, based on a long-standing tradition of privilege defending itself from perceived threats provides a deeper understanding of this phenomenon. The first step in improving any social problem is identifying its root causes.

Another strength of this research is how it can broaden our understanding of hate crimes to include acts that do not meet the classical definition, but operate in concert with more traditional bias-motivated crimes. In a climate of racial unrest, characterized by a high number of persons of color fatally shot by police, demanding law enforcement remove racial and ethnic minorities from White spaces could easily end in violence, as has always been the case when the dominant racial group wants to exclusively control spaces. This is why we argue these actions constitute hate crime-adjacent behaviors. They are based on the same ideologies and hold the same goals as traditional, violent hate crimes. All that differs is the distance between the actor and the violence. Hate crimes are often narrowly defined and frequently understood. We assert that we need to expand our how we perceive hate crimes by looking at other forms of violence and bias-motivated behavior. Calling the police to remove people of color from shared public spaces should be viewed as an aggressive, violent act that promotes White supremacy.

By connecting these individual actions, we hope to recast this as a social problem that reflects group processes. As a result, what we need is an organized, aggregate answer to bias-motivated calls to police. It should be noted that the Oregon State House recently passed a bill allowing for victims of racially-motivated police calls to sue the caller for up to $250 (The Associated Press, 2019). While we applaud this measure, one has to wonder if the cost of suing a bias-motivated caller would cost more than $250, and given the difficulty that already exists in proving bias motivation in hate crimes, if this will actually lead to restorative justice. We hope that by connecting what has been viewed as individual cases of racism to the larger processes mentioned earlier, we can reshape the narrative. Recognizing what drives BBQ Becky is a first step forward reducing status threat-based calls to the police.

This piece is not intended as an attempt to tear down White women or make the argument that all White women engage in racist practices. Nor is it some men's rights attempt to distract from the racism of men. As previously stated, most hate crimes are committed by White men and most White women actively fight against racism. Our aim with this discussion is to properly contextualize the actions of some White women against history and theory in hopes of illuminating the reasons they feel compelled to call the police on people of color just for sharing the same space with them. Beyond the simple answer of racism, key concepts from the study of hate crimes and gender studies can explain this phenomenon. Women are still marginalized by gender roles, but White women enjoy White privilege. In some cases, this leads them to see integration as a symbolic threat to their status in society. They react to this threat by calling police to enforce White spaces, and when caught acting in a racist manner, turn to gendered patterns of blame avoidance. Put in this framework, the oppression of non-Whites by White women no longer seems contradictory or confusing. It is simply an attempt to preserve one's status in a system defined by difference.

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