This project seeks to synthesize the concepts developed in previous sociological literature on the supremacist movement through an analysis of the political narratives featured on both public and private supremacist online forums, as well as more mainstream right-wing forums associated with the TEA Party movement. The supremacist movement in the United States has been especially adept at developing political narratives that are crucial to its recruitment and function as a social movement. These narratives serve to minimize stigma (Berbrier, 1999), frame movement ideology and goals (Berlet, 2003), and recruit new members (Lee and Leets, 2002). Recent scholarship has also been devoted to the way in which supremacist movements organize using internet technology and online forums (Adams & Roscigno 2005; Burris, Smith & Strahm, 2000; De Koster and Houtman, 2008; Futrell & Simi, 2004; Gerstenfeld, Grant & Chiang, 2003; Simi & Futrell, 2008). There has, to date, been no published scholarly work on the use of the internet by near-right political activists. This study seeks to understand the relationship between discourse of the extreme-right and the more mainstream near-right through the analysis of internet discussion forums.

Data has been drawn from the publicly accessible supremacist forum, stromfront.org, the world’s largest supremacist forum, as well as publicly released content from eight private supremacist forums that represent key political factions within the movement. Additionally, data will be drawn from two near-right forums of the TEA Party movement. The content of the forums will be analyzed using qualitative analysis software to compare the narratives developed by members of the supremacist movement to that of the TEA Party movement. These posts will be coded for the use of language that reflects overt versus covert prejudice and/or direct versus indirect references to violence in reference to the candidacy and election of Barack Obama. It is expected that the content of public forums will be much more likely to frame the candidacy and election of Obama using a populist frame that minimizes stigma and facilitates maximum recruitment through effective “persuasive storytelling” (Lee and Leets, 2002), discussing Obama in a manner that is simultaneously racist and palatable to the average white American. Conversely, the content of private forums will contain narratives that engage in framing for movement members; and therefore have a greater likelihood of using overtly racist and violent language. It is expected that the language of the TEA Party forums will use populist narratives of resistance to the Obama presidency similar to that of stormfront.org users while avoiding the overt language of the private forum users.

The current phase of this research project will begin in Spring 2011 with Kelly Tanner assisting in reformatting the data from private forums so that it may be more easily analyzed using qualitative software. This phase will also involve developing a literature review that focuses on framing and impression management. The data will be coded and analyzed in Summer 2011 for key themes discussed above and then developed into a working paper to be presented at the Pacific Sociological Association Annual Meeting in Spring 2012.

In addition to assisting with my research, Adrienne McCarthy and Kelly Tanner will be conducting their own original research on the construction of political narratives and framing by political actors. Kelly Tanner will be analyzing the framing of Barak Obama pre- and post-election to understand the role that ideology plays in constructing the popular image of the president. Adrienne McCarthy will be analyzing the “Science, Technology and Race” forum on stormfront.org in order to understand how scientific framing is used to validate racist ideology.