

THE PLACE OF WOMEN

Deep in rural Pennsylvania, eighteen young women gathered on an outdoor stage to be photographed for the cover of their group's newsletter giving a collective Nazi salute at the 1992 Annual Aryan Festival. Some held babies. One of them spoke for the group, announcing that white Aryan women were now ready to do battle with ZOG (the Zionist-occupied government) and its white traitor supporters and that the threat of neither imprisonment nor death could deter them from this mission.¹

That same year, the Aryan Women's League (AWL) published a eulogy to a woman they characterized as "epitomiz[ing] Aryan womanhood." They extolled her "legacy of absolute loyalty to her husband, her children, and her Race, which she served all her life." Particularly noted was her deepening racist involvement over her forty-five years of political activism, which began in her young adulthood. First a Girl Scout leader and Republican Party activist, she later worked on behalf of American Independent Party presidential candidate George Wallace; she then married a midwestern Klan leader. Her political career culminated when she became the Klan's state secretary and, during her husband's imprisonment and in defiance of federal authorities, operator of a racist publishing house.²

These two vignettes of racist activism are quite different, but both present women in familial as well as racial roles. Women are mothers of babies; women are politically supportive wives who parade the vilest

form of racism. To those victimized and disgusted by organized racism, such images are frightening and confusing. They suggest that women's family-oriented activities not only can expand to a politics of caretaking, justice, and resistance to capitalism, colonialism, and imperialism, such as that displayed by the Argentinean Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo or by mothers involved in environmental justice movements in the United States, but also can become deeply entangled with reactionary and bigoted interests. These images highlight women's familial concerns being used to support agendas of racial supremacy.³

Depictions of racist women often are tinged with gender ambiguity. Using the historian Joan Scott's insight that gender "provides a way to decode meaning and to understand the complex connections among various forms of human interaction,"⁴ we can see several such ambiguities in the montages of organized racism. The women gathered on the Aryan Festival stage are not posed with husband or boyfriends; they are depicted with other women, not as wives of racist men. Their pledge to do battle with ZOG is presented as their view, not that of male intimates. The AWL eulogy of a woman who lived her political life largely overshadowed by a more prominent racist husband seems to adhere more closely to conventional gender roles. Yet the AWL glorifies her as a model of "Aryan womanhood" by describing—probably erroneously—her increasing racist commitment as a personal decision, not as acquiescence to the political ideas of her husband.

As racist groups reach out to recruit women, it is increasingly important to examine their gender-specific appeals. How does the racist movement reconcile its desire for women as members with its historically deep masculinist emphasis? What roles do women play in racist groups and how are these changing? Might issues of gender become a weak spot in organized racism, a point of tension between its strategic need for unity and growth and its ideological commitment to a male-dominated racial struggle?

IMAGES OF GENDER

Gender is unquestionably an important organizing principle for racist groups.⁵ Aryan masculinity is venerated as the bedrock of the white race, racist politics as the litmus test of masculine prowess. Assumptions about masculinity are crucial, as the methods used by racist movements to appeal to white men make clear. Throughout modern U.S. history,

racist groups have trumpeted the idea that white men are in imminent danger of losing their proper economic, political, and social place to undeserving white women and to nonwhite men and women. To protect their long-standing racial and sexual privileges, racist groups declare, white men must support movements fostering racism, xenophobia, and sexual conservatism.⁶ Emblematic of such pronounced emphasis on masculinity are the names of the bands—Extreme Hatred and Aggravated Assault—featured at a white power music festival billed as a “Whiteman’s Weekend.”

Stereotypical traits of masculinity, especially physical strength and aggression, are presented as both the prerequisite and the consequence of white racist activism. *Manly* traits make the Aryan racial warrior. Conversely, battling the enemies of Aryan civilization heightens masculinity. Indeed, the trappings of modern organized racism—from its militarized uniforms and command structure to its aggressive rhetoric and practices—project a sense of hypermasculinity, an exaggeration of masculine ideals.⁷ Thus three young men on the cover of a skinhead music magazine are championed as prototypical male racial warriors: their shaved heads and arms tattooed with Nazi insignia mark them as racist, while their linked weapons denote both masculine prowess and a racist collective activism. A woman pictured inside the cover provides a starkly contrasting image of racist womanhood as passive and ethereal.⁸

White women have little obvious role to play in such racial politics. If maleness is asserted through political activism on behalf of one’s personal or racial family, then its presumed opposite, femininity, must be passive—that which is defended by masculine activity. Indeed, from the decline of the women’s Ku Klux Klan of the 1920s until the 1980s, organized racism was mostly a masculine enterprise. Solidarity among racist activist men was based on the exclusion of women, as well as of all members of groups designated as racial enemies.⁹ Women rarely were recruited to any but the subordinate positions of helpmates or intimates of male racists, and racist propaganda uniformly denigrated or dismissed women, seeing their only functions as supporting racist men and educating racist children. Strikingly, much of what Martin Durham in his study of the British fascist National Front terms the “overwhelming masculinity” of the extreme right has persisted in the face of increasing numbers of female members.¹⁰

Although racist propaganda until recently targeted a male audience almost exclusively, racist groups have not been silent on issues of women

and race. On the contrary, they consistently traffic in ideas about gender to promote themselves as the best way to ensure the superior position of Aryan men. Such ideas appear most graphically in demeaning and brutalizing propagandistic images of women from racial or religious minority groups. The women are portrayed as animalistic, sexually aggressive (or, conversely, asexual), and predatory (or, conversely, passive: as victims of domination and cruelty by nonwhite, non-Aryan male intimates or family members). Women of color, Jewish women, and other “non-Aryan” women are depicted as irresponsible “baby breeders” or sexual seductresses, and they are presented as threats to the racial standing and self-respect of Aryan men.

That several of these images are contradictory (for example, women as passive yet predatory) goes unnoticed in racist propaganda, though as I discuss later, these contradictions do concern racist activist women. There is little acknowledgment of the conflict between strongly condemning abortion and promoting births by white women, who are expected to breed the new racial generation, and advocating the opposite for women of color and non-Aryan women. Neo-Nazi groups, in particular, tend to support access to abortion for Jewish women, women of color, and women in third world countries. At the same time they view access to abortion for American Aryan women as a plot inspired by Jews seeking to “deplete the white race”; it succeeds insofar as “women give their bodies to be abused and mutilated by Talmudic butchers.”¹¹

While racist groups’ portrayals of nonwhite and non-Aryan women are uniformly negative and degrading, their ideas about white Aryan women are more mixed. Most racist groups simultaneously advocate gender and racial subjugation, but often the two impulses combine in complex ways. Both because they seek to broaden their appeal and because they have little interest in ideological consistency, leaders of racist movements tend to have what the historian George Mosse calls a “scavenger ideology”—a system of beliefs that annexes pieces of other ideologies.¹² Around the racist and anti-Semitic core of modern U.S. racist groups can be found views as disparate as a belief in alien invasions, faith in homeopathic healing, and concern for animal rights. In such an ideological stew, a variety of ideas about Aryan women can coexist with dedication to hard-core racism.¹³

In creating an image of white women, racist groups draw on the widespread tendency of the middle classes in Western societies to equate women with virtue, along with frivolity and shallowness.¹⁴ They portray

Aryan women in four general and somewhat contradictory ways: as ethereal Nordic goddesses and racial victims, as potential “race traitors,” as wifely supporters of male racial warriors and bearers of the next generation of Aryans, or as racist activists in their own right.

Goddess/Victim

The idea that white women are racial victims is captured aptly in the description by Vron Ware of the “enduring image of a seemingly passive, but wronged white femininity.”¹⁵ The notion has been central to every racist movement in U.S. history, used to justify assaults on men of minority races in retaliation for the threat they are presumed to pose to innocent white women.¹⁶ For example, a cartoon widely distributed in the contemporary racist movement shows a powerfully built African American man kicking sand at a white couple on a beach and threatening to rape the woman. “Mac,” a scrawny white man, decides to fight back by subscribing to a racist newspaper and tattooing himself with swastikas. These strategies prove successful, as he gains both an impressive physique and the attention of attractive white women. He becomes known as “Nazi of the Beach.”¹⁷

The cartoon’s theme is painfully familiar; its refrain closely echoes, among other tragedies, the Reconstruction-era Klan lynchings of African American men that often were “justified” by false charges of sexual interest in white women. Like these, the cartoon links a feminine racial victim to masculine racial violence. If white women represent innocence and potential racial victimization, then white men represent actual, engaged racial agency. As Mac adopts Nazism, both his body and the white (male) racial community are strengthened. White women, however, remain unchanged. They are still potential victims, though now their male protectors are more powerful. Thus a message of white female victimization is really a statement to and about men, declaring that racial violence is necessary to maintain white male superiority.

This message is conveyed often. Neo-Nazi and Klan groups issue mountains of cartoons, flyers, lyrics, and articles that portray African American men as rapists and victimizers of young white women, Nordic-looking goddesses as the archetypes of white womanhood. To suggest that whites are simultaneously victims and victors, both perilously endangered and about to vanquish, racist groups peddle images of white victimization as well as those of white strength. Underscoring their warning that white children are in danger of becoming an “endangered

species,” they distribute photos of white children captioned, “We will never forget, never forgive! We will forever be vigilant in our endeavor for our children’s future. A White future!”¹⁸

Portraying white women as racial victims gives them a role in racial politics that does not challenge traditional notions of women’s place.¹⁹ A good white woman must guard against racially inspired threats to her children and family. Pamphlets circulated by white supremacist women’s groups portray Aryan women as the crusaders “fighting for white survival,” responding to “a non-White crime wave which makes our cities unsafe for our families” and “the brain-washing, by the schools and the media, of White youth with racial self-hatred and genocidal race-mixing propaganda.”²⁰

Race Traitor

Another view of white women is much less benign: male racist members imbued with deeply sexist ideas easily cast these women as their antagonists. In the mildest form of this antagonism, women are seen as weakening men. Richard Butler, titular head of the white supremacist compound Aryan Nations, commented that “drugs, alcohol, and women have destroyed the manhood of two thirds of the white race, really. Two thirds of the white race is mentally castrated.”²¹ He is hardly alone in expressing this sentiment; racist propaganda often warns that sexual and romantic entanglements with women deplete the energies that white men require for racial warfare. Women are personal obstacles in the way of collective racial agendas.

More significantly, white women become racial traitors by being sexually intimate with nonwhites, thereby eroding Aryan racial purity. Twisting the motif of woman-as-victim into that of woman-as-willing-victim, a major racist publication provocatively asks, “Is Nordic Womanhood Worth Saving?” The answer, the unnamed author concludes, is clear: “to accept that she is free to destroy our race by mating with alien males is to accept—in advance—the face of our own extinction. Survival alone demands her rehabilitation.”²² In a similar vein is a lengthy poem titled “The Saddest Story Ever Told,” distributed by several racist groups. It reads in part:

*When a White girl marries a negro, her sun of life goes down,
And glaring spots of sun appear on her white wedding gown.
And White and black men stand aghast, while viewing this strange role;
And mutter, “they will wreck themselves and damn each other’s soul.”*

*All other crimes may be forgiven when prayer its power fulfills;
The scheming crook may find new hope, and even the man that kills;
But all my prayers can never clear my baby's mongrel skin,
Nor make him White as driven snow, nor cleanse my soul of sin.*²³

This depiction of white women as both sexually and racially promiscuous is consistent with the racist movement's general preoccupation with white women's sexuality.²⁴ While white women are revered as chaste racial goddesses, the possibility that they might respond to the sexual attention paid by minority men also makes them feared. Drawing on a mainstream cultural sense that women are innately "disorderly," some racist groups portray white women in interracial affairs as not fully accountable for their racial errors, as the unwitting dupes of predatory men.²⁵ The women thus lack either the racial commitment or the personal strength to resist the advances of sexually voracious men, despite the potential harm to the white race.²⁶ A recorded message on a telephone "hate line" for Aryan women declares that whites "have been programmed to feel guilty for everything—slavery, the so-called Holocaust and such" but warns that race mixing "is one guilt that the white race has not been charged with and they should be [since] the more race-mixing that continues, the better [chance] the Jews have of controlling the United States."²⁷ Relationships between white men and nonwhite women are less often discussed in organized racism; perhaps such discussion is taboo because of frequent speculation that some male racist leaders have secret nonwhite girlfriends.²⁸

Using both sexual prudery and sexual titillation—a mixture common in racist movements²⁹—racist women embed their admonitions to white women against interracial sex in sexually graphic images, decrying "young women who fondle these black greasy ballplayers" and claiming that "the Klan could do a lot of good, especially with young white girls who keep falling for black guys." Frequently, racist groups point to white girlfriends of prominent African American men as a harbinger of "the death of the white race." The final warning of one flyer is particularly ominous: "Whiteman, look at the beautiful woman you love. Whitewoman, think about the future for your children. WHITEMAN, THINK. The decision is for this generation. Your children will be outnumbered fifty to one, by colored people who have been inflamed to hatred of our people by the JEWSMEDIA. . . . YOUR FIRST LOYALTY MUST BE TO YOUR RACE, WHICH IS YOUR NATION!"³⁰

The demand that white women avoid interracial relationships can be couched in profoundly hostile language. A flyer distributed by one Nazi

group, addressed to “‘SLUT’ OR LADY,” explicitly attacks the racial loyalty and moral standards of white women who associate with nonwhites or listen to music produced by nonwhites. Even more vindictive is a “dial-a-Nazi” phone message that wishes death on white women who tarnish the racial crusade of Aryan men by engaging in interracial sex: “What has happened to you, Aryan woman? Have the hypnotic spells of some Kazar Jewess lured you to her bed, or perhaps the blubbering lips of some stinking, black, idiot ape have convinced you to partake in miscegenation? Whatever the case or cause may be, may you die a slow and painful death. You have abandoned the last of the Aryan heathen warriors in their darkest hour of need.”³¹

Wife and Mother

Because they are deeply concerned with destiny, reproduction, and identity, racist and right-wing extremist movements typically place great emphasis on women’s roles as wives and mothers. In a study of right-wing extremism in France, Claudie Lesselier finds that “at the heart of every racist and/or nationalist system the same function is assigned to women: they are called upon to transmit the blood, tradition, language, and be prepared to fight if necessary.”³² Similarly, Italian fascism depended on the “spiritual collaboration of wives and mothers” to make families responsive to its political agendas.³³ Modern U.S. organized racism, too, promotes the idea that Aryan women will produce a new white generation. As a neo-Nazi group put it bluntly, “the Aryan women hold the key to the future existence of the white race.”³⁴ Their role is linked to the fear, often expressed by racist activists, that high minority birthrates and white women’s interracial affairs have brought the white race to the brink of demographic destruction. Only the birth of white children in great numbers can secure a numerical advantage over nonwhites. Thus almost all racist groups churn out images of Aryan women as mothers of infants and young children.

Though the racial procreation entrusted to white women is portrayed as essential, it remains decidedly secondary to the activism of racist men. As mothers, white women do not have to take conscious racist action. Rather, they safeguard the racial future through their passivity and adherence to conventional gender norms. Simply by acting on their instincts, Aryan women are “doing their part for the white race.” As they become pregnant or nurse babies, they fulfill their racial destinies. Consider the striking adulation directed toward Vicki Weaver, a Christian

Identity supporter who was killed in 1992 when federal agents besieged her family's Ruby Ridge, Idaho, home in an effort to arrest her husband, Randy. Hit by a bullet as she stood in her doorway, infant in arms, Vicki exemplifies for many in the racist movement how innocent, noncombative white mothers are imperiled by government forces—a portrait that ironically ignores Vicki's actual outspokenness in defense of her beliefs.³⁵

Racist propaganda also portrays white motherhood as a deliberate strategy of racial warfare. In the newsletter *White Sisters*—published by the Aryan Women's League, a neo-Nazi women's group—mobilizing white mothers is seen as key to an Aryan supremacist future. Pointedly attacking traditional modes of racist activism, these white supremacist women assert that “one Aryan baby born in a small town is worth much more than a dozen Klan rallies.”³⁶ Mothers also are seen as safeguarding white childhood; thus a recruitment flyer for the racist Church of the Creator mimics ads for abducted children with its stark message about a “missing” future for white children. Moreover, an Aryan's mother's strength and protectiveness toward her children can extend to the entire white race. A graphic of an Aryan woman on a racist flyer depicts her heavily muscled arms encircling a sleeping baby, framed by symbols of Nordic Aryan history.³⁷ A poem by a Christian Identity mother of three tells of “the lifegiving delights of the Aryan woman's bosom”; she claims that it was pregnancy that led her to accept the importance of racist organizing for herself and her children.³⁸

In addition, racist groups glorify women who perform the wifely supportive roles that enable white Aryan men to maintain their racial vigilance. Racist wives are accorded a special, although decidedly subordinate, role in the racist movement. They are wives to the movement as well as to movement men, acting both as personal sexual accessory and as collective supporter and admirer of racist men. As a Nazi man writes, “I love the white woman not as a goddess but better yet as a feisty full loving individual and inseparable part of the line of mothers and teachers of our race.”³⁹ The impersonality of that role is demonstrated in a sexually explicit “Poem for a Norse Man,” distributed by a neo-Nazi group:

*The Norse Man
Stands beside me,
Within the
Circle of life.
Serpents upon his arms,*

*We face the sea.
He is entering the spiral maze
Upon his thundering steed,
Into the garden within,
To plant the final seed.*⁴⁰

Even widows of slain racist men are assigned a role in the racist movement. A frequently mentioned racist icon is Mary Snell, whose husband, Richard, a member of the white supremacist Covenant, Sword, and Arm of the Lord (CSA), was convicted of murder and executed in Arkansas on April 19, 1995, exactly one year before the federal building in Oklahoma City was bombed. She is esteemed for her “lady-like toughness” in lobbying for Richard’s release, for maintaining his racist newsletter in his absence, and for preserving the memory of Richard’s racist cause after his death.⁴¹ Other racist widows, too, are presented to the world as survivors of racial atrocity; their grief is displayed as evidence of the victimization of racist activists, and their determination to carry forward the agendas of their dead husbands is praised.⁴²

Female Activists

To recruit women into organized racism, a number of racist groups now include images of women as racist activists in their own right, along with stock images of women as victims, traitors, mothers, and wives. Earlier racist propaganda aimed more exclusively at recruiting men, sometimes promising to provide women from racial and religious minorities as movement prostitutes for “the few whites that can’t get any ‘stuff’ for some reason.”⁴³ Today, however, the picture painted offers a broader welcome that includes women.⁴⁴ One male neo-Nazi, writing an article (as its title declares) “from a man’s point of view,” describes the idealized comrade-wife as one who “has strode beside myself and other warriors into full impact combat [and] was strong, healthy, and spirited.”⁴⁵ Some racist groups even decry nonracist religions for their purported subjugation of women, criticizing the negative “attitudes toward women [that] are handed down by the major religions of Moslem, Judaism, and Judeo-Christianity [whose] belief structures tend to be Middle Eastern and anti-Aryan”; in contrast, “qualified women operate at all levels of [white] separatist activities.”⁴⁶

Groups that want to recruit women as individual members rather than as the wives or girlfriends of male members are particularly likely to portray women as racial combatants. Thus one flyer announces,

“White racially-conscious women, if you have any wits left about you, flee the Judaic and Judeo-Christian insanity and join the throngs of Aryan women warriors.”⁴⁷ A “hate line” message appeals to women as a potential collective force as it urges, “[F]ind the purpose and need of the Aryan woman today, and meet the mighty host of women that take the Zionist pig by the ears.”⁴⁸ Arguing that “white sisters” are necessary in organized racism, a women’s neo-Nazi group claims that women are needed as movement activists, not only as racist mothers or wives. They hasten to clarify, however, that they are “not a feminist group” but rather one that works “side by side with our men”⁴⁹ More strikingly, they express concern about women’s subordinate status in organized racism, although they insist that women’s activism need not create conflict with racist men:

*Do you feel the path to victory is through gossiping, backstabbing and petty jealousies? Of course not! So why does it continue to happen? Are these some of your reasons? 1) you get no respect from the men? 2) you feel you have no place in the movement? 3) you have nothing more constructive to do with your time? The AWL is here to offer you an alternative. The AWL women have a definite place in the struggle for White victory, but it does it by working together with the men not as separate extremes. Jewish media love to see White Aryan men and women battling each other and therefore destroying our cause.*⁵⁰

Portrayals of female racist heroines are used to attract women to the cause. These heroines are a diverse lot. Among those praised are women involved in earlier progressive as well as right-wing movements, such as the Russian wives of the attempted assassins of Czar Nicholas I in 1825, who supposedly saved their men with heroic feats; Margaret Sanger, who in 1921 founded the organization that became Planned Parenthood and is heralded as a “eugenics visionary” for allegedly focusing her birth control efforts on neighborhoods where poor black women were concentrated; and Mary Bacon, one of the first highly successful female jockeys, whose recruitment address to a Ku Klux Klan rally in Louisiana in 1975 earned her public notoriety as “the Klansman’s Jane Fonda.”⁵¹

Vignettes of female racist activism featuring Jean Craig and her daughter Zillah appear in a great many different racist venues and present a more ambiguous picture. Typically, Jean is portrayed as a heroine, her daughter as an example of women’s political duplicity. Jean, a Wyoming grandmother at the time she became involved in the racist movement, had a difficult early life; she suffered through abusive marriages,

years of economic struggle as a single mother, and a serious car accident. Then, with the help of funding from a vocational rehabilitation program, she began attending the University of Wyoming and thereby gained more stability in her life. At about the same time, Jean was introduced to Christian Identity by her aunt and began to attend CI groups. Her involvement in racist politics deepened as she met greater numbers of racist activists through her visits to a Christian Identity church in Colorado. Eventually, Jean became associated with a racist underground gang known as the Brüders Schweigen or “The Order,” organized in 1983 to eliminate Jews and the ZOG from the United States. Her role in The Order’s June 1984 murder of Alan Berg, a Jewish radio talk show host in Denver, led to her conviction on federal racketeering charges. Members of The Order were also implicated in a string of other crimes, including plotting the assassination of a federal witness, counterfeiting, bank robbery, and armed assault.

Like her mother, Zillah is presented as having experienced many problems in her early life, including an involuntary commitment to a mental health institution at sixteen and an unwanted pregnancy at seventeen, after which she and her mother became estranged. Independently of her mother, Zillah became involved with Christian Identity through a family member. Through CI she became acquainted with Robert Mathews, the founder of the Brüders Schweigen, with whom she had a child and who was later killed in a shootout with federal authorities. Despite her personal feelings for Mathews, Zillah ultimately served as an informant for the FBI against her mother and others and testified against them at their trial for sedition.⁵²

The images of white women found in racist propaganda—victim, race traitor, wife and mother, and activist—are intended to prod women to join racist groups through both promises (offering them a range of ways to contribute to the racial cause) and threats (maligning those women who stay on the racial sidelines). Yet those women who become active in the racist movement find themselves playing roles less important than they are promised.

WOMEN IN RACIST GROUPS

Women’s activities in organized racism differ considerably across groups. In general, Christian Identity and Klan groups tend to emphasize

women's familial and social roles, while women in some white power skinhead and other neo-Nazi groups are involved in more direct action, playing what I term "operative" roles. But these distinctions are often blurred. Groups overlap in their memberships and women move between groups. Even groups that share a similar racist philosophy vary in their treatment of women members, reflecting their different histories, their leaders' ideas, and their balance of male and female members. In general, the roles of racist women fall into three categories: familial, social, and operative.

Familial Roles

The most common activities for women in organized racism are racial elaborations of the domestic roles to which women are traditionally assigned.⁵³ Racist activist women are expected to assume tasks associated with creating and nurturing a racist family. Because some segments of organized racism, especially Ku Klux Klan groups, emphasize that organized racism is "like a family," the scope of those tasks is not clear. Sometimes, the racist family is invoked to refer to women's responsibilities to their husbands and children. At other times, it denotes women's obligation to sustain a collective "family" of organized racists. Many racist leaders try to create a familial atmosphere by stitching together political and recreational activities that promote loyalty and commitment among their followers. As Robert Miles of Aryan Nations told one reporter, "No one who joins these circles is ever without family. Each of us is the father and the mother, the brother and the sister of every white child who's within our ranks."⁵⁴

Nearly every Klanswoman I interviewed partly framed her discussion of organized racism in terms of family, claiming that organized racism promoted "family-like" qualities of caring and mutual responsibility among its members. Although, as I show later, many Klanswomen have specific criticisms of their groups, on an abstract level they insist that the Klan's ideal follows a family model. "Everyone's real supportive and, naturally you're going to have your little arguments here and there, but . . . basically, they're all real supportive, just like a big family," concluded a Klanswoman. An Aryan supremacist claimed that her racist colleagues were "part of my life, like family." A Nazi said that the thing she liked best in the group was "the camaraderie and the sense we get of having an extended family. The kinship we feel is probably the most important thing to all involved." Another claimed that "the unity be-

tween people who live so far apart is amazing. It is its own family.” A southern woman made a Klan rally sound like a family reunion: “We’d all be together. The guys would play football. And it was like a big family, togetherness. It was the perfect utopia.” Just as threats and conspiracies are understood by racist women largely in terms of their impact on immediate family and on daily life, so too the “virtue” of being in a racist group is often expressed in terms of its impact on self and family. A member of a violent Aryan group summarized how she felt about the group by saying, “It’s given me more purpose and commitment in my life and I think it’s helped me get closer to . . . my family, my friends. It’s strengthened bonds of commitment.”

The family sought by the racist community is more than just a metaphor. European fascism was built on existing cultural practices and norms, including those that governed family life.⁵⁵ Similarly, modern organized racism is based in part on familial expectations and ideologies, however distorted.⁵⁶ This invocation of family life also enables those within the racist movement to draw on codes of behavior and understandings by which personal relationships are fashioned and judged. As they learn to understand organized racism in terms of familial qualities, recruits to racist groups apply their expectations of familial relationships to those within racist groups. For some members, this analogy is positive, bolstering their commitment to organized racism. But for others, including many women, the equation of family life and racist group life exposes painful conflicts. Women whose experience in racist groups does not measure up to idealized portraits of family life—those who find racist groups oppressively male-dominated or male leaders patronizing or dismissive of women—feel cheated and resentful. Others find that the emphasis on family life contradicts the demand that they sever relationships with family members outside the racist movement.

Families are expected to serve as platforms for racist recruitment efforts. Modern neo-Nazi and some Klan groups enlist women and adolescent girls, hoping to absorb entire families. In a Nazi publication a reporter described a rally to which “many brought their families. Loving fathers and mothers watched their children play all across the compound with the pure Aryan children from other families. I saw with my own eyes what we all are working so hard to achieve in microcosm. A pure White nation made up of happy, successful White families working and playing together under the protection of the Swastika.”⁵⁷ A Klan leader commented that “you couldn’t join the Klan unless your whole family came in at the same time. It was truly a family of families.”⁵⁸

In most racist groups, women are expected to mother their immediate families as well as the larger racist “family.” Except in a few racist skinhead and neo-Nazi groups, women racists are told to fulfill their obligations to male intimates and to the racist movement by bearing Aryan babies. Cautioning racist men that “selecting a proper mate is the only way to give us the possibility in life to improve the heritary [*sic*] makeup of the coming generation,” racist groups make it clear that racial obligation includes racial procreation. Such pronouncements are particularly frequent in Christian Identity and neo-Nazi groups that emphasize long-term planning for a racist future. This maternal responsibility is made explicit in the recruiting efforts of some groups that seek to win the “birth-rate war” by enlisting race-conscious white Aryan women who will give birth to a large number of children.⁵⁹

In reality, the childbearing patterns and expectations of racist activist women are more mixed than the glorification of fertility in racist propaganda might suggest. On the one hand, several women I interviewed spoke with enthusiasm about their potential or actual contributions to increasing the white population, including one neo-Nazi who described being in a racist recruitment video “pregnant and strolling down the street with my baby and [being] so proud.” Similarly, a skingirl interviewed by sociologist Mark Hamm commented that “what people don’t know is that the [skinhead group] are strong into family values and strong antidrug. There are 11 women in our group and 8 are pregnant. This is the most important way we can carry on with the white power tradition.”⁶⁰ An eighteen-year-old woman interviewed by a reporter at an Aryan Fest prided herself on supporting the white movement even before she had her own babies by contributing toward movement drives for “cribs, baby clothes, [and] diapers” for “white families starting out.”⁶¹

On the other hand, many women in my study who were childless at the time of their interview expressed a desire to have no more than three or four children. Although a few predicted vaguely that they would have “a big white family” or that they wanted “as many [children] as possible,” most were like a neo-Nazi who alluded to pressure in the movement to have many babies, commenting that she would have “of course more than the typical one or two that the women of today want” but insisting that she was “not really aiming for ten either.” A skinhead said that she supported the idea of having a lot of children—“at least four”—but that she was not willing to begin having babies until she and her boyfriend were financially and geographically stable and “prepared to

raise our children in a decent environment.” Another, an aspiring racist, told a reporter that the emphasis on babies—the insistence of male skinhead leaders that “the purpose of intercourse is to have as many white Christian babies as possible”—made her and her girlfriends reluctant to pursue their involvement in the racist movement.⁶² Women with children and those older than thirty tended to be the most conservative in their childbearing goals. Most claimed that they did not want any additional children beyond the one or two they already had. One Klanswoman lowered her voice as she confided, “My husband wanted seven kids. I had two. I don’t want any more.” A skinhead, pregnant with her first child, concluded that she would have “only as many [children] as we can afford. I wouldn’t want to deprive children of what they need just to have more.” Some women even elaborated medical steps they had taken to ensure that they would not again become pregnant.

Racist women are also held responsible for socializing their children into racial and religious bigotry. They often provide verbal instruction in the norms of racist living, such as direct admonitions “to stay away from nigger children”; sometimes their cautions are more indirect. For example, a skinhead mother recounted a conversation she had had with her elementary school-aged daughter, a story oddly preceded by the mother’s assurance that “I don’t push her to believe any beliefs.” “My daughter understands,” the mother insisted. “She knows she’s a special person. . . . It’s the little things, [like] when she didn’t know what a black kid was, I explained that she’s different because of color, to let her know that she shouldn’t be involved with nonwhite.”

The children are ushered into a world of racial and religious hatred at a very early age. Homes are strewn with drawings, photos, flyers, videos, and pamphlets filled with vicious lies and threats against racial and religious enemies. In one house, a child’s high chair featured a hand-scrawled swastika on the back. In another, children’s crayons lay on flyers denouncing Jews as inhuman. Still others displayed pictures of lynchings on living room walls or newspaper clippings about the bombing of the Oklahoma City federal building on refrigerator doors. Male leaders of racist groups, too, are involved in efforts to socialize youths as racist activists. A particularly pernicious means of targeting the very young is the racist comic book, like the *New World Order Comix* published by the National Alliance and distributed by skinhead groups.

Children have easy entry into the spectacle of organized racism. Toddlers learn that Jews are the offspring of Satan. Their older siblings learn

to call nonwhites “mud people” as readily as other children learn the names of video games. From birth, some Klan children are installed in a “Klan Kid Korp,” preparing them for a life of racist activism.⁶³ Garbed in miniature Klan robes and flaunting imitation torches and guns, they are introduced to racist activism as fun and frolic. One woman told me, “At night, the lighting of the crosses, that is a big to-do. The men, of course, were in the front lines, the women were there, and there were lots of children, too, lots of children running around and they were just so happy.” Racist women extend this socializing further, creating networks of like-minded families in which their children can find assurance that their views are correct, even typical. Some children of racist families attend Aryan-only schools, where they can find white supremacist friends. Others are homeschooled, a method that almost all racist groups promote if not require to prevent children from becoming “double-minded” as they learn different racial values at home and in school (even in Christian schools).⁶⁴

Some children are assigned minor tasks in racist groups; thus, in one Klan chapter “the kids fold the pamphlets and put them in plastic bags and then take them at night and throw them onto lawns.” They also are prompted to secure children in other white supremacist groups as pen pals, an effort intended to deepen their racist identity and create a network of future activists. One such letter, credited to “Jessica,” age six and in the first grade, starts out with the neutral statement that she likes “to skate and play with my best friend,” but it ends with a message that seems to have been fed to her by an adult: “I love the white race and I want to keep my race alive.” Similarly, “Kimberly,” a thirteen-year-old, describes her “red hair” and her interests in “TV, roller blades, talking on the phone” and then adds, “I am proud to be white.” Writings purportedly by racial activist children, though perhaps actually penned by adults, are found both in newsletters aimed at the young (e.g., *Little Aryan Warrior's*) and in propaganda issued from adult women's racist groups. An eight-year-old girl asks other children, “Are you tired of . . . [s]itting on your butt, watching the Cosby Show? Letting other kids make fun of you? Then do something about it NOW!”⁶⁵ A twelve-year-old girl is presented as the author of a poem titled “Being White Is Not a Crime,” which reads in part:

*White and proud
That's what I am
Storming the streets*

*Getting rid of the trash.
What's wrong with knowing
your race is strong?*⁶⁶

The extent to which parents succeed in transmitting racial hatred and racial activism across generations is unclear.⁶⁷ Some women—especially women who grew up in Christian Identity households, married CI men, and are homeschooling their children in CI philosophies—claimed that they learned racism in their families. A female founder of a skinhead gang credited her Klan mother for her political “consciousness.” Another woman recalled that her father had warned he would kill her himself if she was ever involved with an African American boy. Another woman said that her schoolteacher mother “raised us to be aware that even though all people are in fact people, there are differences between the races.” A Christian Identity adherent said that she suspects that during her childhood her uncle was a member of the Klan:

I remember going to a situation that they call a rally. Now I know what it is. When I was little, going to where I remember all these men talking and I remember my dad saying, “Be well behaved” and so forth. And I remember other kids. I got to play with other kids. It took many years before I realized that my uncle took me to a Ku Klux Klan meeting. I didn’t even know what it was. It was a giant picnic, is what I thought. But when the men talked, I remember that you had to be hush-hush and you can go out and play with the other kids but don’t disturb the meeting.

But socialization from adult relatives is not the only or even the most likely route into adult racist activism. More than half of the women I interviewed had no immediate or extended family members who were racist activists or held strongly racist views. Some women insisted, in the words of one, that their parents “secretly agreed” with their racist views or might be “closet racists,” but many admitted that their parents’ racial views were much opposed to their own; their mothers, fathers, or both “believed that everyone’s equal” and even had played some small part in civil rights or other progressive movements. One said her father was victimized by the Klan when he was sexually involved with a non-white woman, another that “my parents would have a massive stroke if they found out that I was a racist.” Only logical contortions enabled one skinhead to reconcile her views with her upbringing: “The whole time I was young I was taught that racism was awful, that you just

weren't racist, you just didn't judge someone on the basis of skin color. And I still believe that way. . . . I don't care about skin color. It's just that I don't agree with multiculturalism and I know that race mixing hurts society."

Moreover, the claims of those women who told me that they came from a family of racists need to be treated skeptically. Some seemed to identify a continuous strain of racism in their families only in retrospect, after they themselves had become racist activists. Women would present themselves in their life stories as descended from a proud line of white racist warriors—but when I asked for more details, they could not name any specific racist forebear. One white supremacist did admit, with chagrin, that both her parents were racially tolerant; still, she insisted, "I haven't met any of them, but somewhere down the line in my family there are some grand dragons or grand wizards [of the Klan] or something." Similarly, other women mentioned cousins, uncles, or distant relatives who were reputed to be in racist groups.⁶⁸

A less obvious but also important role played by women racists within the family pertains to their control of family consumption. Just as some progressive movements have struggled to politicize consumers' choices,⁶⁹ so too racist groups try to channel the money they spend into sympathetic hands. Some urge their members to boycott products certified as kosher.⁷⁰ Several women I interviewed claimed to avoid these foods, though most could not identify the symbols that marked rabbinical endorsement (a recent inventory of such symbols posted on a white supremacist women's group Internet webpage may increase their awareness). Other groups encourage the bartering or trading of goods and services among racist activists and support vendors who sell racial paraphernalia.

At least a few women use their positions in racist groups, or those of their husbands, to benefit from racist purchasing. Some try to support themselves through their racist activities. A widow of a prominent racist activist sells "Aryan crafts"; Aryans, her advertisements claim, should buy from her rather than purchasing goods from major corporations ("who knows where the money is spent!") or frequenting "the mud [i.e., minority] infested, Jewish inspired shopping malls."⁷¹ Another woman runs an enterprise called "Cathie's Celtic Corner," and yet another hawks racist gear in ads in racist magazines.⁷² One woman sells "hand crafted N.S. [National Socialism] banners" along with Viking statues, etched glass, and other wares.⁷³

Social Roles

Women also must act as the social facilitators of racist groups, an expectation nearly as deep-seated as that making them responsible for bearing white children and raising them as racists. The importance of this role has grown in recent years as racists have sought to increase the longevity of their groups.⁷⁴ When social ties are strengthened, members who have individual identities as racist activists come to view themselves as part of a larger social movement, developing a “collective identity” of racist activism. In describing an “incubation period during which new collective identities are formed . . . in submerged social networks out of view of the public eye,”⁷⁵ the sociologist Carol Mueller captures how social networks among its members support organized racism. Social ties, as discussed in chapter 1, strongly influence people to join racist movements; in addition, as members of racist groups come to know each other in social as well as activist settings, they reinforce one another’s commitment to the goals of organized racism. They create the “oppositional subculture” by which organized racism is sustained over time.⁷⁶

Racist groups have proven remarkably successful in structuring the social lives of their adherents around movement activities. When I asked racist women how much of their socializing takes place with others in the racist movement, their estimates ranged from 50 to 100 percent, with most guessing 85 to 90 percent. As a Klanswoman told me, “Once you get into the Klan, it becomes your whole family, all your socializing, all your parties.” Racist women give a variety of explanations for their predilection to spend free time among fellow racists. These include mutual protection (“a lot of people like us are afraid we will be hunted”; “we look out for one another when one is in trouble”) and loyalty (“I’m totally secure in my trust in everyone in [her group]”). They also cite reinforcement of their beliefs (“I like being with people who share my beliefs”; “you do not need to defend your beliefs to anyone because they already share your views”), lack of access to other sets of friends (“when I decided I was going to be a skinhead, I lost a lot of friends, but I gained friendships I can count on”), and a perceived need for rapid and accurate sources of information (“everyone just updates on events that I should know about that are excluded from normal papers”). It is women who are responsible for making racist group life work, for creating rallies and meetings that leave people with a positive feeling. They often succeed; a skinhead remembered that her first Klan rally “was just like a big reception; it was a lot of fun.” A neo-Nazi similarly recalled being

surprised to find that a racist event was “kind of like a big powwow or something. There was no cross burnings or screaming.”

A flyer advertising a neo-Nazi event promises a day of fellowship and racist learning, along with a social time of music and meals at a local banquet hall—meals served, of course, by “the ladies.” Such gendered division of labor is common among racist groups; thus, for the social hour following a strategy meeting at the Aryan Nations’ racist compound in Idaho, a sixty-year-old woman played the organ and baked cookies.⁷⁷ Although women remain in charge of providing meals for racist events in many groups, some leaders deny that such gender-specific assignments demonstrate women’s marginality to racist operations. In the *Aryan Research Fellowship Newsletter*’s report on the Aryan Nations Youth Conference, a spokesman for the group claimed that women prepared meals on-site only to protect the gathered male racists, who otherwise would have had to buy meals in town (where they might fall into the hands of local police or antiracist activists).⁷⁸

The emphasis on survivalism and self-sufficiency in the racist movement may heighten this gendered division of labor in the future.⁷⁹ One racist women’s group sees its responsibility as “first aid, child safety, [and organizing an] emergency information guide, maternity clothes exchange, Aryan Alphabet Coloring book, Aryan Parent’s Newsletter, [racist] P.O.W. art collection and fund.”⁸⁰ Christian Identity women are organized as “White Nurses,” preparing to heal the broken bodies of Aryan (male) combatants in the coming race war.⁸¹ Another group defines women’s roles in the racist movement as midwifery, child care, and survival cooking.⁸² Barb, an Aryan supremacist, instructs new women recruits that “woman’s big responsibility is to be ready to fight to raise children (no drop off day camps), and be ready to offer other women a shoulder to cry on. Many young women today didn’t have a parent to teach them to cook from scratch (even the generation past had that problem and turned to TV dinners); to hand sew, and now women must learn it themselves and teach their children.” The wife of a prominent Aryan supremacist—whom one racist skinhead woman described to me, without intended irony, as “like Donna Reed . . . a very nice, wonderful, matronly woman”—Barb is a model racist social facilitator. Her role is doggedly maternal, coaching younger skingirls “how to make our men happy and the importance of being good parents, and make sure we’re eating nutritionally, and does anyone need vitamins?” At the racist compound where she lived, this model homemaker would “have us stay and make muffins and coffee and bring them out to our men [but] she’d go

through the roof if a man stepped in our flowers 'cause she had these gardens all around the place.”⁸³

Acting as social facilitators, women are central to efforts to create links between organized racist groups and outsiders. Indeed, women's greater participation and visibility in the racist movement are probably responsible for making it more accessible to mainstream populations. Because women seem incongruous in organized racism, they lend an air of placidity to racist gatherings and seem to lessen the threat that such groups pose. Women holding babies, schooling children, or serving chicken at buffet tables can to some degree “normalize” racial politics. A journalist recounts: “I see a Nazi sitting with a latte at an outdoor bistro table. This Nazi has no swastikas, no tattoos, no combat fatigues. Instead, she has a chic red bob, blue tinted sunglasses and a small son. If I hadn't seen her hail the Nazis at noon, I would only see a pretty mother in her early 20s enjoying the late evening sun.”⁸⁴ Racist women acknowledge their role in this effort, noting that their involvement helps racist groups convey a sense of the ordinariness of racist activism; in the words of one woman, they “portray a positive image [of] honor and integrity.”⁸⁵ After several members of his group appeared on a TV talk show, one male racist leader commented: “the women did quite well, dressing modestly, using proper makeup and proper arguments. The men should have stayed at home.”⁸⁶

Racist women also take more deliberate steps to gain entree to mainstream populations, seeking connections with sympathetic outsiders and attempting to recruit new members into the movement; they act as the racist equivalents of what, in her study of the African American civil rights movement, Belinda Robnett calls “bridge leaders.”⁸⁷ A Nazi group declares its members “advocates [of] a community form of activism” and urges them to get out and meet people, so that they might show by example “the society that we would like to see.” In so doing, “we will do much to break the image that the Zionist controlled news-media portrays about white nationalists.” Among the varieties of community involvement suggested are “running for public office, engaging in business, and generally acting as responsible citizens, all while being openly known as National Socialists.”⁸⁸

Many neo-Nazi and Klan groups practice some form of community “outreach.” One woman described the work of women in her group on behalf of animal protection, which they support as an affirmation of “mother nature” against the masculine “cowardly excuse for power called ‘sport killing,’ . . . the need in their pitiful lives to establish a sense

of dominance.” Some go further, claiming environmentalism and animal rights as issues for white racist activists since “it is not necessary to carry on a race if there is not a world to live in.”⁸⁹ Such efforts, along with programs in self-education, first aid, and survival cooking, are described by a member as “projects that bring respect in the community so *they*’ll listen.”⁹⁰

Racist women understand that groups of women who seem innocuous can attract people into racist politics. They are fully aware that most people enter the racist movement through personal contacts with existing members, and they work to create the opportunities that make such recruitment possible. Bible study groups bring ordinary women into contact with hard-core racists. Animal rights turn into Aryan rights. One recruit told of attending a women’s meeting billed as a Christian apocalyptic “preparation for end times”; she thought that “it would be boring—but it turned out to be excellent and exciting, with all the women who participated (and most did) taking part and exchanging ideas, really great.” Although she expressed disappointment that “many things listed were not covered in depth due to time running down,” the list of topics shows a strategic mixture of fundamentalist Christianity, self-sufficiency, and racism, with lessons on women in Scriptures, home birthing, healing with herbs, and homeschooling tucked between workshops on “how to use the system” and revelations about domestic spy satellites and secret inoculations with microscopic “transformers” meant to “track our people.”⁹¹ Perhaps the greatest threat posed by modern organized racism is seen not in the highly visible parades of middle-aged Klan members, who inevitably are far outnumbered by anti-Klan demonstrators, but in the mundane advertisements for toddler car seats and Aryan cookbooks that appear in white power newsletters and on Aryan electronic bulletin boards.

Operative Roles

The operative roles taken by women in organized racism range from routine clerical tasks to informal (and, very occasionally, formal) leadership and paramilitary activities.⁹² Most racist groups allow women to take part in public activities, though such participation is less common in Christian Identity and some Klan groups.

Women are found as formal leaders in only a handful of groups, but they often exercise informal leadership. Recognizing women’s importance as informal leaders challenges the common assumption that all

racist leaders are men.⁹³ That erroneous impression is created by the extreme difficulty of gathering information about the racist movement: most scholars and journalists rely on the public statements of self-appointed racist spokesmen like David Duke. Moreover, the ostentatious organizational titles that racist men customarily bestow on each other—Grand Dragon, Imperial Wizard, Commander—misleadingly imply a hierarchical structure of authority. Though their titles suggest that they command the obedience of hundreds of followers, these men may in fact enjoy little more than token allegiance from a handful of marginally committed group members. Conversely, those who actually lead racist groups may have no titles.

If we focus on the practices of leadership rather than on self-enhancing claims or titles, the picture we see is different and more complex. “Leadership,” in the sense of providing group cohesion, mediating conflict, developing political strategies, and nurturing collective identity, often is concentrated in the middle and less visible layers of racist organizations. These leaders, though not always women, are the right-wing equivalent of what the anthropologist Karen Brodtkin Sacks terms “centerwomen”: those who maintain and strengthen social groups.⁹⁴ Racist centerwomen command racist groups very differently than do male racist leaders. Men’s leadership in racist groups typically is described as manipulative, distant from followers, and simultaneously contemptuous of racist group members and dependent on their adoration and respect for self-aggrandizement.⁹⁵ In contrast, women’s informal racist leadership is more elusive, indirect, and personal. It may also be more effective and more dangerous. One woman noted that the male leaders “think of me as being all for people on their side. That’s how they look at it, too. ‘On our side.’ (Laughs) No, no complexities involved, right. They think of me as one of them, but yet not one of them. I know they have a hard time accepting me the way I am.” Another distinguished herself from male leaders by noting, “I don’t go for titles or offices or anything. I don’t care about them.” And a third downplayed her influence in the organization, saying that she was interested only in “routing the sociopaths out of the movement.”

One way of exploring such differences in racist leadership style is suggested by Dick Anthony and Thomas Robbins’s distinction between “norm-rejecting” and “norm-affirming” religious groups.⁹⁶ Norm-rejecting groups, like male racist leaders, favor heroic uniqueness and individual enlightenment over conventional behavior. Norm-affirming groups, in contrast, are formed around strong beliefs and strict rules.

Women racist leaders who operate in the fashion of norm-affirming groups may be able to nurture more sustained commitment to their groups, to have more success in recruiting new members, and to be less likely to alienate potential recruits. As one woman recounts of members of her group: "The girls look up to me. They're still going to dress their way, the way they do and I only suggest. I suggest you don't have your hair this way [she used her hand to demonstrate the very short hair of 'skinheads']. I suggest you grow your hair out. . . . If there's a little bit of hair you get along in the world much better." Another notes the problems faced by young recruits, which need to be addressed by older members such as herself: "[Her group]'s gonna have to work on these young people. And show exactly what's gonna happen, that you're all right."

Priscilla, a Klanswoman who declined to describe herself as a leader because she had no official title, but who nonetheless admitted that her work was vital to her group, similarly nurtured activism. She recounted her efforts to gently persuade recruits to attend public marches, an escalation of their engagement that entails greater personal danger and risk of exposure than do private rallies or meetings. While male leaders make harsh demands, insisting that recruits risk everything for the movement, Priscilla uses a subtler and more personal appeal. "I've been on rallies. I've been on marches," she informs me. "All they have to do is send a flyer and I will have everybody show up. That makes me feel good because they respect me that much. I don't tell them, 'Hey, you have to take your last dime and spend it on gas and starve to death to get there.' . . . I'm not like that. I'd say, 'Hey, it'd be great to have you.'"

Several women, in describing recruitment efforts, make it clear that they are practicing leadership indirectly and through social ties. One tells me, "I have a way of speaking in grocery stores, department stores. I approach people out of the blue, not as a [racist group] person. But if they look at something, I make a comment and that leads into something else. 'Cause they get into a conversation with me and then I try to explain some things. I don't bring up [her group] or nothing. No, I don't do that. But I try to educate them, I try to throw out little things that might make them think." Other women dismiss their male comrades' attempts to thrust racist literature and flyers into the hands of potential recruits as "ineffective."⁹⁷ One woman insists that her low-key approach is more productive, especially for recruiting women: "I'd say, 'Come over. We'll get together, we'll talk, we'll have some fun.' I mean, we have picnics where all the kids play together, all the women get together. We cook

our meals, you know. We sit around, we talk about how the kids are progressing, what they want in their lifetime, in their lifestyle.”

Women’s informal leadership does not stop with recruitment. Racist women also play an important part in creating the social community of racism and in easing new recruits into that social world. A white supremacist tells of her efforts to guide young women in the practices of racist activism: “I’ve got girls that tell me, ‘Lookit, I got a new tattoo,’ and I’m, like, ‘That’s nothing to be proud of, that’s stupid. It’ll poison your blood and when the race war comes you can’t give blood. . . . Don’t go out and get tattoos and shave your head ’cause nobody’s gonna listen to that.’ To me I think they’re a lot better if they get themselves an education, a steady job, a nice place to live, than think about having tattoos.” Such instruction in daily life as a racial activist suggests a form of leadership quite different from that provided by the battle-worn male warrior glorified in racist literature. Women like this white supremacist mediate between the proclaimed goals of racist groups (for example, to foment a race war) and the actions that bolster such goals. When she instructs “her” girls to avoid tattoos and shaved heads and to pursue education and jobs, she is creating an organizational space in which complex personal identities can be configured as personal and collective identities of racist activism. Perhaps even more frightening, she is attempting to make possible something heretofore unknown: a long-term and intergenerational racist movement. In nudging her young charges to become more effective and dedicated racist activists, this middle-aged woman illustrates how women’s practices of informal leadership can secure racist goals.

Women’s operative roles in organized racism are not limited to private acts of leadership. At least some women participate fully in direct action. A Norwegian racist women’s group, Valkyria, uses a paramilitary approach to organize against prostitution and pornography. Its members take part in strategy meetings with men and train with weapons.⁹⁸ Terrorist actions by women racists, though still uncommon in the United States, are on the rise.⁹⁹ Among the women I interviewed, about one-third reported that they had been arrested for violent acts in connection with racist activism, usually for assault; more than three-quarters claimed to have been in a physical fight with members of minority groups.¹⁰⁰ One woman, notorious for her public role at the helm of a major Nazi group, proudly described her physical prowess on behalf of white supremacy in a 1994 interview with *Mademoiselle*. As the “three-year reigning champion” of the hammer toss, she and her husband-to-

be, the male champion, won the honor of “getting to light the ceremonial swastika”—a startling outcome for the daughter of wealthy parents who had earlier studied photography at the Art Institute in Chicago.¹⁰¹

Women’s public activism can serve strategic goals for racist groups. When racists confront antiracist protestors, the participation of women can discourage retaliation. A journalist watching a Nazi “flag parade” in Idaho observed: “Three young women with babies in strollers salute the Nazis. Immediately, they are surrounded by screaming protesters. One young Nazi mother cradles a baby in one hand and uses the other to punch a young man repeatedly in the face until he is bloody. A young Nazi man who is with her stands back and lets her be the warrior. The strategy works: The man who has been beaten will not hit a woman.”¹⁰²

Women usually take operative roles that are less public. Some work to support racist prisoners. A number of racist publications carry letters purporting to be from the wives and families of men imprisoned for racist activities, decrying the conditions in which their menfolk are forced to live or lamenting their difficulties in visiting the prison. In a typical example, the wife of a man apparently imprisoned for racist terrorism writes:

Our life changed dramatically . . . when my husband was arrested, stood trial, and was convicted . . . we were expecting the birth of our son. . . . After our son’s birth, I relocated to where we now live, and became a welfare recipient. What a colossal nightmare! [My husband] got moved . . . farther and farther away from us and deeper and deeper into the more violent penitentiaries. Our visits stopped as the costs of visiting were way out of sight. . . . [Then] people found out and some support began coming in. From that time on, two groups have sent regular support and best wishes, one group was you [Bounties Bestowing . . . Blessings Bequeathed] folks!¹⁰³

Racist prisoner support groups maintain lists of prisoners seeking correspondents. They claim to screen them all to ensure that those on their pen pal list are white and Christian, but they note that not all are “political” (i.e., racist activist) prisoners hoping to communicate with racist comrades; some are potential recruits. Although such groups claim to do nothing more than give a prisoner “the security that someone cared enough to assist with his/her family needs,” their real purpose clearly is to distribute the racist writings of imprisoned racist leaders, to free racist prisoners, and to supply racist propaganda to prisoners. Under innocuous names like “Bounties Bestowing . . . Blessings Be-

queathed,” they link racist activists outside and inside prison walls and may help strengthen racist networks in prisons, such as the notorious Aryan Brotherhood.¹⁰⁴

Most of women’s—and men’s—actions in racist groups are more mundane, although not inconsequential. The women I interviewed described hours spent photocopying literature, making flyers, distributing propaganda, spraying racist graffiti on buildings and highways, writing to current and potential racist activists, promoting and managing white power bands, stamping public library books with racist messages and phone line numbers, and tucking racist literature under windshield wipers and house welcome mats, in grocery bags, and in racks of restaurant menus. Others work the Internet, seeing it as a way for racist women of all ages and levels of experience to recruit others “without ever leaving home or taking away from their families.”¹⁰⁵ These actions are largely ineffectual as means of recruiting new members to the racist movement, but they help spread a message of intimidation to the potential targets of racist groups.

In her study of women in the late-twentieth-century Italian underground, Luisa Passerini observes that “the discovery of a specific female identity—beyond the illusory mimicking of male models, in the organization and in the armed struggle—comes later than the fundamental decision to get involved.”¹⁰⁶ Those in modern organized racism have no specific female identity as yet. Women’s roles are in flux, neither submissive (as tradition demands of women) nor clearly activist (as racist propaganda suggests). But we should not see women in today’s organized racism as simply mimicking male models. Their experiences in organized racism, no less than those of men, are highly gender-specific. Women enter racist groups because of contacts and issues that reflect their places as women in the larger society. And once inside organized racism, women find themselves pushed to follow several and sometimes conflicting paths: to shape the racial family, to bolster its social networks, and to assert themselves as leaders and activists.

Specific Women’s Groups

Women’s activities in organized racism vary according to the gender composition, ideological orientation, geographic location, and idiosyncrasies of particular racist groups and leaders.¹⁰⁷ Such variation becomes

clearer when specific groups are examined. In some, women are quite marginal; in others, they are central players, though often engaged in different kinds of activities than those of racist men.

Aryan Women's League A particularly prominent women's racist group is the Aryan Women's League (AWL), an affiliate of a men's neo-Nazi group, White Aryan Resistance (WAR). AWL claims a unique mission in the white supremacist movement, distinct from that of men, and recruits among young female skinheads and neo-Nazi sympathizers.¹⁰⁸ Its newspaper proclaims the centrality of "courageous young women warriors" to the struggle for white victory, searching for historical examples of female role models among Nazi leaders or mythical Viking warriors.

Some AWL flyers recruit women without using particularly gender-tailored appeals. One asks potential recruits to join "[s]hould you want to break the habit of being part of the sheep and are willing to fight and fight hard now."¹⁰⁹ Another plays on fears of racial threat, invoking affirmative action, immigration, declining school quality, crime, political corruption, and foreign economic control to persuade women to "join with the thousands of your White kinsmen and kinswomen."¹¹⁰ Others aim specifically at women; for example, one appeal bundled with a copy of the AWL newsletter called on "today's racially conscious woman" to join the "White Nationalist movement."¹¹¹

The Aryan Women's League sees creating an Aryan culture and a self-sufficient economic and social support and educational system as key to the future of the Aryan race. It sponsors a baby fund to subsidize Aryan child rearing, noting that "procreating our Race is the only way in which we survive" and insisting that every Aryan couple should strive to have three or four children.¹¹² To that end, it publishes an Aryan parents' newsletter and collects maternity clothes and store coupons for an Aryan bartering exchange. Cautioning that "the Jews have long controlled the market; selling up clothes, crafts and everything else under the sun! We think it's high time that we support our own!" the AWL runs a baby clothes exchange for "the numerous Aryan families that need your support." It sells items billed as "useful to your Aryan family," ranging from an Aryan coloring book (advertised with the slogan "Don't let your child be forced to color what all the jews have prepared for him! Let your child learn about their history while coloring!") and an Aryan cookbook ("dozens and dozens of delicious recipes compiled from Aryans around the nation!"), to AWL T-shirts ("with a picture of a beau-

tiful Aryan child with slogan, ‘for the children’ ”), instructions on canning food, and an “Aryan P.O.W./Martyr Collage” that includes a free laminated photo of “one of our most valued heroes, Mr. Bob Mathews.”

Consistent with its anticorporate stance and its concern for the future of the Aryan race, the AWL is also militantly pro-environment, opposing the logging of old-growth forests and the use of disposable diapers. For members of the AWL, like many in the neo-Nazi movement, the Aryan future lies in the Pacific Northwest, where they see environmental spoilage as low and racial purity as high. They endorse the “Great Northwestern Territorial Imperative,” encouraging a paramilitary white supremacist network to colonize the Pacific Northwest as an all-white, all-Aryan homeland and then secede from the United States.¹¹³

Ku Klux Klan Women Several Klan groups have been very outspoken on the issue of women in the Klan. According to one Klan leader from the southern mountains, “Without the women, we wouldn’t have the Klan,”¹¹⁴ a sentiment that appears to be gaining ascendancy. Some Klan groups have publicized their commitment to the advancement of women in the organization. As early as 1987 a major Klan chapter insisted, despite all evidence to the contrary, that “women hold a very high and exalted position in the eyes of the Ku Klux Klan.” Though the Klan propaganda continues to tout the belief “that our women find their greatest fulfillment as mothers of our children,” it blames “international finance” (i.e., Jews) for retarding the advance of white women in this country.¹¹⁵

One woman who has achieved some prominence in a Klan is Rachel, the daughter of a Klan leader. She comes from a lengthy line of racists. Her paternal grandmother was an adherent to an early Christian Identity preacher, Kenneth Goff, who in turn was a disciple of the fascist Gerald L. K. Smith. Her father attended Goff’s Soldiers of the Cross Bible Institute, where he met his future wife and subsequently launched his career as a Klan leader and CI preacher. One journalist characterizes Rachel as her father’s “pride and joy . . . [his] proof that the patriot movement is not composed of losers and misfits.” In high school she was a cheerleader, beauty contest competitor, newspaper editor, and participant in the Future Homemakers of America—summed up by her father as “average American people.”¹¹⁶ She is featured at the Internet site of her Klan group on the “Aryan Women’s Page,” which lauds women’s roles as mothers and racial activists.

AMISH Aryan Mothers Inspiring Something Hopeful (AMISH) surfaced in the late 1990s in Pennsylvania, perhaps connected to Aryan Nations. The organization and its “Christian women’s newsletter” claim to be run and produced by women; they closely follow the Christian Identity view of women’s submission, insisting that “a woman’s responsibilities [are] what the Bible says.” “Men are to rule over women,” the group declares; “it is obvious in both nature and most importantly the Bible.” One woman claims that she and a girlfriend “were often very excited” while attending the Aryan Nation Congress and began to “high jive but realized that it was not very Aryan like”; they therefore substituted their own creation, a “Nazi curtsy.”

Like other adherents to Christian Identity, those in AMISH mix biblical commands with the vilest white and Aryan supremacism. Two of the founders personally testified that “while striving to follow the laws of Yahweh, we noticed that a great sense of joy and happiness has come into our lives [so] we both feel strongly about sharing our experience with as many Aryans as possible.” They also produced a racist and anti-Semitic variant on the children’s song “The Teddybears Picnic” for readers to “enjoy . . . as much as we do”:

*If you go out in the Idaho woods, you’d better be white as snow.
If you go out in the Idaho woods, be careful where you go.
There’s crosses burning bright and hot.
There’s Hitler heiling, guns are cocked.
Today’s the day the Aryan’s [sic] hold their Haaate Fest!*¹¹⁷

Valkyrie Voice A self-defined National Socialist women’s group, Valkyrie Voice (VV) asserts an active women’s presence in the racist movement, against “those [racist] men who long for ‘seen but not heard women’ [a] desire that evolves from an alien culture.” VV draws on ancient Nordic and Viking motifs, asserting that these are politically enabling for racist women, because “the tribes which we derive from (Celtic, Nordic, etc.) did not produce a feeble breed of Aryan women. So why should we modify our instinctive behavior into being meek?” Their message is unambiguously violent and Nazi, promoting such tracts as the infamous *Turner Diaries*, which allegedly inspired the bombing of the federal building in Oklahoma City; the “Writings and Teachings of David Lane, P.O.W.,” by an imprisoned member of the terrorist group The Order; and Hitler’s *Mein Kampf*.

The stance that members of VV take toward the issue of women as

reproducers of the Aryan race challenges some traditional racist philosophies. Though they emphasize this contribution of Aryan women, noting that “[f]or some [women] childbearing is the extent of their involvement (which is an obvious necessity and the greatest gift a woman can give to her race),” they also acknowledge that “for others this does not satisfy their desire to advance our people.” To those men and women who see the need to have women “restricted from thoughts or actions that are beneficial to our people’s future,” VV has an unambiguous response: “those who disagree have no place in our resistance, period.”

In other ways, VV’s supporters promote conventional notions of women’s place in the movement, particularly about women as mothers. Messages directed at women chide them to “get all their drinking and fighting out of their system before they become parents.” Aryan mothers, they insist, should learn first aid for “bullet, knife, and other serious wounds” and become emergency medical technicians. They should work toward food self-sufficiency by gardening and by canning their food, “not only for preparation for a race war, but [because] relying on the system makes you another host for the parasitic Jew.” Mothers should also breast-feed babies, homeschool older children, and learn martial arts and how to use firearms to “take care of yourself and/or your children in a necessary event.”

In VV, racist women express anger against what they perceive as abusive treatment by racist activist men. One woman, who claims that she was “led into the racial ‘scene’ under false pretenses,” attacks racist men who get drunk, fight over “petty differences [to] make others regard you as tough,” spend their time watching TV or nursing drunken hangovers, ignore or neglect their children, or justify promiscuity or adultery on the grounds that “it creates more babies for our race.” They have, she concludes, replaced the original fourteen words of the racist movement (“we must secure the existence of our race and a future for white children”) with the notion that “racial pride should only be taken seriously until it affects your personal life.”¹¹⁸

United White Sisters An organization very different from VV is United White Sisters (UWS), which urges women to work with men for the good of the racist movement. In flyers and propaganda riddled with spelling and grammatical errors, members of UWS address disaffected racist women. “We as individuals,” they insist, “must put personal differences aside (since can Aryan armies truly expect to be vic-

torious when there is squabbling in the ranks?).” Acknowledging tensions between women and men in racist groups, UWS nonetheless concludes that “it is imperative to our survival that we work together!” Fully subscribing to the racial and anti-Semitic agenda of the larger racist movement, UWS paints a scenario of imminent doom for Aryans, because “ZOG [is] throwing descent White folks into jail for knowing the truth.”¹¹⁹

Warrior Breed Like members of other skinhead groups, those in Warrior Breed insist that they are not really an organization, but “merely a group of friends united by the love and concern of our Race.” Despite this, women in the group promote racist rock and roll, attack ZOG, and encourage “natural family planning, ecological breastfeeding and home schooling.”¹²⁰ Their propaganda is very similar to that produced by other segments of the racist movement, but Warrior Breed also distributes material targeted more specifically to young girls and boys. These include a “skinzine” that claims to feature “news, reviews, art, tattoos, and commentary” but is in fact largely a vehicle for selling white power music tapes and clothing emblazoned with Nazi insignia.¹²¹

Warrior Breed also counsels skinheads on how to survive without being employed and how to secure money from the government. Their suggestions include claiming to be an alcoholic in order to receive government disability and getting services and resources from free clinics, food banks, and churches. “I always wear my grungy duds,” claims Warrior Breed activist Robyn, adding ironically, “it makes me feel more like a communist begging for food.”¹²²

Christian Identity Women Christian Identity women tend to express the most traditional view of women’s roles, drawing on biblical justifications for the subordination of women to their husbands. CI’s philosophy is summed up by Cheri Peters as encouraging “all women to fulfill their ancient roles as wives and mothers, that there may be proper male leadership in the nation.” In her column and her radio broadcasts, she urged wives to practice submission to their husbands and men to exercise command over their wives. CI insists that “a Christ-like woman wants a man who takes the lead and shows male dominance” and that women “cannot and will not be happy in a man’s world because our Creator did not make us to find our fulfillment there.”¹²³ Notwithstanding this deferential stance, Christian Identity women also are commanded to show determination in living CI principles. Asks another CI woman,

“are your convictions strong and sure enough that you have planned who will care for your children if you are called to prison for your faith? Are you prepared to die for the convictions that you have?”¹²⁴

Sigrdrifa A recent addition to the racist Internet world is Sigrdrifa, which proclaims itself “The PREMIER Voice of the Proud White Woman on the World Wide Web.” Declaring that it “is not the oldest, nor largest, women’s group in our struggle,” Sigrdrifa nonetheless claims to provide a comprehensive range of help for “white women taking a stand for their great race and rich heritage.” Among their offerings are a help network for white parents who wish to teach their children racial pride, a support system for new and expecting Aryan mothers, a home-schooling curriculum, a guide to home canning, an address list of prisoners of war combined with a “white prisoner book drive” to collect reading material that imprisoned Aryan racists “might find interesting,” and links to a wide variety of white supremacist Internet sites.¹²⁵

CONFLICTS OVER WOMEN’S ROLE

The introduction of women into the racist movement has not been without controversy. Many men are hostile toward women members and unsure what role women should play in a movement that historically has characterized itself in idioms of fraternalism—as a clan, a brotherhood, a community of like-minded men.¹²⁶ Moreover, the effort to create a “racist family” has been hampered by a disinclination to interfere in the private lives of members, particularly the power of men over their wives and children. And although a few women and groups describe themselves as “white supremacist feminist” or insist that it is possible to combine “white power with women power,”¹²⁷ organized racism has found it difficult to incorporate issues of women’s rights. As a result of these problems, many women members become dissatisfied, sometimes openly unhappy, about life in white supremacist groups even as they continue to support racist and anti-Semitic goals.

Conflicts within Racist Groups

In public, racist leaders often insist that women are treated as men’s equals in the racist movement. Indeed, it is increasingly common for

women to be a focus of racist speeches and propaganda. One neo-Nazi group proclaims, "We believe that without our women the movement will never achieve victory. [Our group] supports the equality of the sexes. We encourage the men of all political organizations to start showing more respect for the ladies. Our women should stand and fight with us."¹²⁸ However, this verbal support for women's rights does not imply any sympathy for feminism, which most male racist leaders routinely blame for deforming Aryan women. Racist propaganda decries the feminist movement as Jewish-controlled, as a conspiracy led by such women as Gloria Steinem and Betty Friedan to alienate white Aryan women from their male counterparts,¹²⁹ and as an assault on the masculine strength necessary for white victory. One racist newsletter put it bluntly: "feminism is the means to weaken Aryan masculinity, promoted by the international Jew. . . . [T]he Jews started this emasculation with the young intending that they never become real men who, someday, could challenge their worldwide supremacy."¹³⁰

Many racists leaders encourage their female recruits to hold good jobs. But some groups, especially those associated with Christian Identity, see the employment of women outside the home as part of a Jewish plot. They argue that Jews use their economic dominance to force Aryan women to work and then gain control over the Aryan children left unsupervised by at-work mothers. For them, Aryan women who work for wages, or even those in college, are racial enemies: they further Jewish goals.¹³¹

Most of the women I interviewed were highly critical of the feminist movement. They saw it as controlled by Jewish women and lesbians and as pro-abortion and antifamily. They characterized feminism as "disgusting," or "a bunch of ugly women trying to get the spotlight," and made such statements as "Gloria Steinem should be shot." However, some women did not share this blanket condemnation. One dedicated Nazi credited feminism with indirectly strengthening the racist movement, "because, before women's lib came about, our movement was ten years lacking [behind]. We [women] wasn't able to do anything and now we can hold office . . . , we can have authority where before we had none." Other women racist activists drew on the rhetoric of feminism to demand rights for Aryan women and to decry the misogyny of contemporary society. When a skinhead publisher spoke of the "male-dominated society" in which she "had the [work] experience [while] the men had the power and the salaries," she echoed the frustrations of

many progressive women. It is the perceived *cause* of the problem—in this case, Jewish control of the economy—that sharply distinguishes her racist ideas about male domination from nonracist ones.

A few male leaders even admit openly that men have found it difficult to regard women's issues as important to racist agendas. One, commenting on television coverage of gang rapes, claims to be frustrated by the cavalier response of fellow racist activists: "When I discussed this matter with several racialist friends (all male) over the next few days, I encountered a disheartening reaction. They all agreed that rape was a bad thing [but that] it was essentially a 'woman's problem' and that as such it fell outside the overall scope of racialist interests." Such attitudes, he continues, reflect a narrow view of women that could cause additional problems for the racist movement:

*Any discussion of women's rights and feminism within the Movement usually ends abortively with the unchallenged assertion that the whole topic is an artificial one concocted by Jewish communist lesbians to further divide and weaken the White race. Such an attitude is fundamentally un-National Socialist. . . . Too many male racialists live in a dream world of their own fantasies when it comes to women. Home is the only place they should be, it is felt, and cooking dinner and having babies are the only things that they should be doing.*¹³²

Another male leader, discussing the formation of a neo-Nazi women's group, traces its problems to the reluctance of racist men to accept women as their comrades:

The biggest problem the [group] has with recruiting is the men not accepting their women as counterparts in this race struggle, therefore pushing their women into the closet when racial matters and confrontations arise [because] . . . most men have chosen dainty little dormice as mates who will kiss their ass and give them no feedback at all. . . . [M]ost men in this situation are afraid that if their mate gets involved with other women, she will become even more harsh. . . . White racially conscious women are most beautiful when they are in battle. . . . Any man who feels threatened by his woman if she wages a few battles of her own might as well hang it up because he is no man at all, let along a White Warrior! Men who enslave and oppress their women are egotistical losers and "boyish" inside.

His earlier fears about women activists, he concludes, were misplaced: "I was predicting gossip and ceaseless nonsense. . . . It was not happen-

ing like that at all. The gossiping, glamour girls weeded themselves out . . . were excommunicated and could not reap the harvest of victory and/or glory.”¹³³

Ku Klux Klan groups, in particular, have hotly contested the place of women in the racist movement. On the one hand, some male Klan leaders have been among the most outspoken in their desire to recruit women into the racist movement. For the most part, however, those Klanswomen have been seen as a means of bringing into the movement more *men*—their husbands and boyfriends. This approach is the reverse of earlier efforts, whereby women were recruited through boyfriends and husbands already active in the Klan. But the underlying premise remains the same: the Klan is an organization of men. As one Klan leader told me:

A lot of [racist] men today, and this is true . . . a lot of men are a bunch of woosies. OK, I'll put it that way. Their women, girlfriends, and wives wear the pants in the family and in the relationship now. . . . So, in order to bring in men, the men will follow the women. It's sort of a reversal. If a wife is against the husband's being involved, you can just about forget the husband's hanging around for long once the wife starts complaining about the lack of attention she's getting. . . . The other way, if the wife is into it, she'll drag the husband along. I've seen that too many times to ignore it, so we don't hold women back from promotions or climbing the ladder. We can't afford to not let them have whatever positions they want to work for.

Despite his protestations that the Klan is an “equal opportunity” promoter of its female and male members, very few women have been given positions of power in any Klan groups. In fact, the Klans may have more gender inequality within their organizations than any other groups in the racist movement, with the exception of Christian Identity sects (with which many Klan leaders are affiliated).

Klanswomen are acutely aware of gender inequities in the organization. One woman said that she was not interested in recruiting her grown daughter, because if her daughter joined the Klan, there “wouldn't be anything for her to do. She could go to a few rallies or picnics, but wouldn't be allowed to go to the real meetings. There would be basically nothing.” Another made a similar point, telling me that “the Klan is male-oriented, totally sexist. The men still run it, as far as the offices go.” Yet another woman, who had been in the Ku Klux Klan a little more than three years, expressed her disillusionment with the gender

politics of the group, saying that “they acted as if women were equal [to men] but once you are inside the Klan, women are not equal at all.”

White supremacist skinhead groups present more varied and more extreme gender practices.¹³⁴ Many skin groups are intensely male-dominated and violently misogynist: skinhead boys and men refer to their female comrades as “oi toys” and feel it is their privilege to dominate and exploit their girlfriends, wives, and female comrades.¹³⁵ A Klan leader cast himself as an advocate of women’s rights by pointing out to me how he differed from skinheads:

I’ve noticed [the skins] have a different attitude. Their men regard the women as sort of a biking attitude; you know, they’re there to serve the man and they keep ’em off the front. Sort of on a pedestal, but yet they can look down on them at the same time. . . . In fact, one woman told me that the skinheads from Pennsylvania, this is what she said, at least one group look upon women as cattle. . . . So I think it’s a false sense of protecting the women. They won’t have them out on the front lines. They’re going to keep them behind the scenes, so they can have the refreshments ready when they get back from the demonstration.

Almost all racist skinhead propaganda projects images of extreme masculinity as central to racial activism. The pamphlet *The Code of the Skinhead*, for example, begins with a quotation from the philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche predicting that “a more manly, war-like age is coming, which will bring valor again into honor!”; and movement ’zines commonly define skinheads as young men “that love to have fun, beer, and girls (not necessarily in that order).”¹³⁶ A statement titled “I Am the Wife of a Warrior” makes it clear that women belong distinctly in the background when racial warfare is being waged by skinhead men: “My vows to my warrior-husband are as strong as fine tempered steel. . . . I am subject to long, lonely nights of worry and tears, while my warrior-husband fights our battles. I suffer his defeats, as I celebrate his victories. . . . Should he be wounded, I nurse him back to health, so that he can return to the forefront of the battle. I support my warrior-husband in all ways and through all circumstances [because] my warrior-husband fights for me.”¹³⁷

Oddly, however, skinhead women are often the racist movements’ most physically aggressive women, and at least some prominent skinhead women publicly confront the sexism of male skinhead culture.¹³⁸

As the message on one hate line asked, “Why do so many male skinheads and other males in the white resistance simply degrade women, get drunk, yell ‘white power’ and little else? Well, the answer is these are not Aryan warriors. . . . These are punks who use race as an excuse to be antisocial.”¹³⁹

Even skinhead women who are not physically combative may not conform to the image purveyed in skinhead propaganda. A twenty-two-year-old skinhead, living with and supported by her skinhead boyfriend, was nevertheless willing to challenge him when her relationships outside the skinhead world conflicted with the beliefs of her group. Her mother’s sister was openly lesbian, and she commented that she “didn’t really mind . . . [to me] it wasn’t really a big issue, [although] to some skins it was a huge issue.” Specifically, she recalled that her boyfriend was “appalled” when he found out that she had been frequenting a local gay and lesbian dance club. “I had gone in there a few times and when he found out he went nuts. But it wasn’t that big of an issue at all for me. . . . Hey, to each their own. It’s not something I’d be into.”

Conflicts within Personal Relationships

In a treatise on recruitment, a women’s neo-Nazi group argues that it is difficult to recruit women into “our movement” because of the *personal* behavior of male racist activists toward their female partners and wives. Warning that “the poor treatment that Whites of the opposite sexes give each other these days [and the resulting] deep emotional scars inside our kin” have political consequences, it urges movement men to recognize the political “dangers of promiscuity” and stop “discard[ing] partners like garbage.”¹⁴⁰

Such sentiments are not unusual among racist activist women. In his study of racist skinheads, the sociologist Mark Hamm found a good deal of conflict over issues of sexual promiscuity. For example, a Texas skinhead and high school honor student reported that “this guy [who was married] got caught sleeping with another girl [and] she got her ass kicked.”¹⁴¹ On national television, Moli, a self-described Nazi, boasted: “I don’t have a man in my life right now because I don’t want one right now. The one who I choose is going to have the same beliefs as myself or I won’t want him at all. I’m very proud of myself and I’m not giving up my beliefs for no one.”¹⁴²

In an appeal that is titled “A Woman’s Opinion: (Scary Thought,

Guys?!?!),” members of a neo-Nazi women’s group ponder how to recruit more “solid women” (those who “think for themselves”) into the racist moment. They assemble the following quiz for men:

Q. You are at a gig. You see a beautiful Aryan Woman. What do you do?

A) Go over and talk to her and try to score before your girlfriend returns from getting you yet another beer.

B) Stare and make crude comments to your buddies about how you would like to get her into bed.

C) Get your girl & then go meet this other woman and her boyfriend. It is always great to meet Racial Kin—especially another Sister!

After a complaint that ironically draws on racist propaganda about Aryan women as goddesses (“We are just sick and tired of seeing our Sisters and potential sisters degraded and insulted when we know we deserve so much more since we are the ‘ultimate symbol of love and beauty’”), women are presented with the following scenario:

You are arguing with your boyfriend because you believe that he doesn’t show you the respect that you, as an Aryan Woman, deserve. He claims that he has utmost respect & would die for any Aryan Woman yet, the night before he was with the waitress at the bar doing . . . well, you know! Does this sound familiar? I think it is time to re-evaluate your “meaningful” relationship with this so-called Man!¹⁴³

The struggle over gender roles in racist activists’ personal relationships is evidenced in many women’s gripes about being dominated by their male partners. They complained that male intimates wanted to control their every action, often in the name of racist solidarity:

He didn’t want me working. I wanted to work. I wanted to go to school. So I took part-time classes at [the local] community college and I worked part-time. He chose my friends. Almost all my friends from high school I was not allowed to see. In fact, there are three friends that I still remain close with that he will just go bonkers if he knew.

I remember one time [a friend] came over to the house and Jerry did not care for her, didn’t want me hanging out with her. It must have been my birthday or something, that would have been the only reason why she would have been allowed to be there. And she and Jerry got into a heated argument about something and she ended up swearing at him and telling him exactly what she thought about the whole

white power movement and this and that. And he just looked at me. And he said, "Get her out of here." Not in those words. And she got out of there. And I only called her from work from that point on.

In their conversion stories, the women tied their fears mostly to male members of minority groups. Some described the danger they felt from hostile men at public racist events; one recalled, "[Anti-racist activists] got ahold of me and almost killed me. . . . I literally had to fight for my life. . . . All I remember is all of a sudden, whoom, all these people were running from here and here, not far from me. [I thought], 'Oh shit, they're gonna kill me if they get ahold of me.' They're yelling, 'Kill the Nazi, kill the bitch.' . . . I was scared for my life." When pressed to describe their private lives, however, some talked about feeling threatened by their male racist comrades. Several told of being beaten by racist boyfriends or husbands. Indeed, racist women are often stereotyped as victims of domestic violence, though it is unclear whether they are more likely to suffer violence from their male intimates than are women in the general population. But the problem is serious enough that male racist leaders were forced to act publicly against one prominent leader after he was arrested for battering his girlfriend. Moreover, battered racist women have few avenues for help. As members of racist groups, they distrust and fear the police; and few believe that their networks of racist comrades are likely to prevent further occurrences or punish the perpetrators.

Almost all women racists spoke of difficulties in their personal lives caused by their activism, difficulties that are compounded by a lack of support from their male partners. Despite the racist imperative to produce many white babies, some said they had trouble juggling commitments to children and to racism. One woman noted, "I used to sit for hours and hours and fold literature. I'm into being mom now. I don't care. Let the literature pile up." A Klanswoman complained bitterly about her husband: "He's been at more rallies than I have. But you know I have to work and I can't really be there and work at the same time. And the bills have got to be paid." A male Klan leader confirmed these rigid gender expectations in his uncritical explanation of his inability to maintain a stable relationship with a woman: "Girls that will put up with this [Klan life] are hard to come by. You know, I thought I had one, this girl here I dated for about two and a half years. She was a good girl, but, you know, when she'd want to do something on the weekend, I'd say, 'Well, we got a rally.'"¹⁴⁴

In recent years, the racist movement's emphasis on becoming a surrogate family for its members has further complicated women's lives. In an interview with a reporter, a twenty-two-year-old woman who wanted to be a nurse to aid white people points to the personal costs of the pressure on women to have many white babies: "Reproducing a white child is a great thing. . . . But it's the thing to do, especially with a lot of skinhead girls, to have white children when they are very young. A lot of the girls quit high school."¹⁴⁵ Another woman decries what she regards as the limited scope allowed women in the Klan: "Klan men see women as breeders and most women in the Klan feel they should produce babies for the white race."

Gender differences are seen clearly in pen pal columns designed for Aryan singles. Thus the White Aryan Resistance offers the "Aryan Connection," a personals column for those seeking racially suitable dates and marriage partners that encourages "sports, camping, dancing or whatever Aryans would aspire to"; and on the Internet, racist women and men can use "White Singles" to advertise for politically like-minded partners and spouses.¹⁴⁶ Ads from racist women request men who are stable and family-oriented; almost none refer directly to racial beliefs or practices. They seek "a hardworking skinhead who wants a family," or "a responsible, respectable, and active male," or "a serious relationship/husband to settle down with and have a big family." These criteria are consistent with the personal dreams that racist women narrated in their life stories, which almost exclusively envisioned interpersonal harmony, a happy family life, and a stable marriage. In contrast, racist men advertise for women with explicitly political requirements, searching for "an 'anti-women's libber' who is free of any all non-White influences," or someone "who loves and fights for her racial survival."¹⁴⁷

Studies of successful social and religious groups find that members often have a deep emotional attachment to, even love for, their groups.¹⁴⁸ Such attachments are rarely seen among women in the racist movement. One Klanswoman could recall no names of those in a group to which she had previously belonged and had described as "like family." Another said that the Klan "seemed like the perfect utopia at the time, but now looking back, I remember other things." Still others found themselves depressed at the nature of their groups, which they viewed as self-defeating and fractionalized by "squabbles about petty ideological differences." "The picture I had in my mind was a lot different than it finally turned out," commented an eighteen-year-old who had moved

to Idaho to enter into a polygamous relationship with a white supremacist.¹⁴⁹ Indeed, it is hard not to notice the air of forced conviviality at racist gatherings—there is likeness and common purpose, but little sign of the intimacy, excitement, and spontaneity from which deeper social ties are fashioned. While its agenda of racial terrorism and vicious Aryan supremacism puts the racist movement chillingly far from the mainstream of American political life, the hollowness at its core mirrors obstacles to social connection that are widespread in modern America.

In chapter 1 I discussed the deep sense of resignation that colors many racist women's life stories, a sense of obligation rather than passion for racist activism. They talk of finding themselves in a racist movement that they support but that does not always support them, and they hesitate to involve their children, particularly their daughters, in the life of organized racism. Some women do describe feeling empowered by being a racist activist. But others paint a more negative picture. They rarely see themselves as racist heroes or warriors, talking instead of having made great sacrifices to be in a movement that has given them little in return. The image of women's activism projected in racist propaganda and in the speeches of racist leaders does not match the daily experiences of the average woman in a racist movement that remains very ambivalent about its female members.

Racist women react to this gap between their expectations and reality by tempering their involvement with racist life in various ways. Despite intense pressure, racist women resist severing connections with friends and family from the outside. Publicly they concur with racist ideas, but privately they refuse to enact those that intrude too deeply on their personal relationships. They proclaim their undying zeal for racism, but they search for boyfriends and husbands who are responsible and stable rather than politically inspiring. They work to recruit others, but their support of even the main tenets of organized racism is less than wholehearted.

The experiences of racist women in many ways resemble those of women in other social movements. In progressive groups, women often find themselves expected to perform maternal and wifely roles: they are usually responsible for nurturing a family feeling among activists, sustaining family life, socializing children, and ensuring that purchasing decisions reflect the movement's goals, and they bear the burden of creating and maintaining social ties among members. There, too, women are often found in middle-level and informal leadership positions. Racist groups are also like other groups in failing to provide their women mem-

bers with a sense of satisfaction to compensate for their internal shortcomings. It is not difficult to find progressive women echoing the dependency expressed by racist women who think their movement will never become more accommodating to them or to other women.

But in other ways, women in racist groups are in a very different situation. Organized racism, perhaps more than any other social movement, is intensely concerned with biological reproduction. Racist groups are obsessed with ensuring the purity of racial bloodlines, determining race from racial markings, and increasing white birthrates. To racists, reproduction can never be left to chance. It is the racial destiny and obligation of Aryan women to produce large numbers of children. The centrality of biological reproduction overshadows other roles for women in racist groups, and it is a particular source of discontent among women.

Moreover, unlike those in more mainstream social movements, racial activists differ greatly from the larger white society from which they seek recruits. Their commonly held ideas about race, religion, and government seem bizarre and frightening to outsiders. To recruit members, racist movements must make themselves appear more normal, less threatening. Presenting women in the movement as fulfilling traditional gender roles is key to achieving that end. When racist women take part in everyday activities such as food preparation or child care, they can seem reassuringly similar to women in the rest of society. The very ordinariness of their tasks can disguise the racist and anti-Semitic goals at which they aim. Thus racist groups favor positioning women members where they will come into contact with outsiders while engaging in the most normal-seeming and gender-traditional functions possible, even when women want—and are promised—a broader set of roles within the movement.

Finally, like other extremist and marginal groups, racist groups embrace conspiratorial ideas, which are wedded to strict internal hierarchies of authority meant to shield members from outside influences and dangers. Racist groups teach their members that they are the targets of attacks from the government and racial minorities. They teach them to depend on the group for protection. This mind-set favors tightly controlled groups with minimal input from rank-and-file members, perpetuating male leadership.

These features suggest that the road to gender inclusion in racist groups will be a rocky one. Plans to fuel a sustained revival of white supremacy in the United States by recruiting many women are not

likely to be successful.¹⁵⁰ The number of women members may increase, but there is no certainty that women will be central figures within racist groups, or even remain in them for long. A more likely outcome is that the interpersonal conflicts and political disillusionment experienced by racist women may contribute to the demise of organized racism.

A CULTURE OF VIOLENCE

Two huge logs lashed together in the shape of a cross lie on the ground in a remote clearing in the southern mountains. As a long day of speeches draws to an end, most people head to the food station to claim the remaining sodas and chips. A few walk in the opposite direction—men into pickup trucks, women into station wagons. They drive away, returning soon after with containers of kerosene and gasoline stacked next to bags of chicken and tubs of potato salad. Women carry the food back to the group. The men drag the accelerants across the field toward the cross where other men, younger and more raucous, arrive and join them. Women and children begin to drift over. As they start to splash fuel on the cross—first carefully, then haphazardly, the men become more agitated. The crowd segregates. Men move closer to the cross. Women and children retreat to the perimeter of the clearing.

Once the cans of gas and kerosene are empty, most people head for the headquarters building to change into their uniforms. Soon a line of women and men forms, all dressed in black trousers with white shirts neatly pressed despite the stifling August weather. Most have Klan or Confederate badges on their sleeves or pockets. Their heads are bare. Their feet sport black Doc Martens, work boots, or sneakers. Children walk beside them, dressed in smaller versions of the adults' clothes. The children are laughing, talking about how this cross compares to others, whether it will take "too long" to burn and take time away from their snacks and play before bedtime. In vain, parents plead with their chil-