Legitimation Patterns of Members of White Supremacist Organizations

Stanislav Vysotsky

July 13, 2004

Introduction

For most Americans today the white supremacist[1] movement exists solely in the history books. It is a throwback to a time when hooded Klansmen rode on horseback through the night burning crosses of the lawns of black families and lynching black men in the post-reconstruction south or when Nazis in brown and black uniforms marched the streets of Europe saluting fascist dictators in Germany, Italy, and Spain. The images of white supremacy today are of the marginalized southern redneck or the sullen, post-adolescent skinhead angry men who hate everything because the world has given them nothing. These modern images have come to dominate the popular culture specifically due to historical changes in American society. While white supremacy was once considered a social norm in the era of Jim Crow laws and state sanctioned segregation, the success of the Civil Rights movement has made racism generally socially unacceptable. Through the television talk show, the television documentary, or the feature film, we have been taught that the white supremacist movement is a marginal part of a non-racist society.

Despite such historical changes, the white supremacist movement carries on building a membership and spreading its message of racial hatred across the United States and the world. The annual intelligence report of the Southern Poverty Law Center (SPLC, 2002) found 676

---

[1]The terms, white supremacist, white separatist, neo-Nazi, and other terms synonymous with the white racist movement, may be used interchangeably in this paper. Historically, the neo-Nazi movement has been only a wing of the larger white supremacist movement often condemned by other white supremacist groups such as the Ku Klux Klan because of its ideological ties to Adolph Hitler s Germany which many old guard Klan members fought against in World War II. In recent years, calls for unity among white supremacist groups and change in the leadership of many Klan groups has led to a general acceptance of Nazi ideology among American white supremacists. Groups that were once antagonistic to nazi imagery and ideology now openly praise Hitler and give Nazi salutes while chanting sieg heil. Therefore, it is safe to refer to all white supremacist groups as neo-Nazi.

organizations which it considers active hate groups in the U.S. This is an increase of approximately 12% from the previous year s total of 602. Of these groups, the SPLC estimates that 624 are white supremacist organizations[2] with 109 Ku Klux Klan groups, 209 Neo-Nazi groups, 43 racist skinhead groups, 31 Christian Identity groups,124 Neo-Confederate groups, and 108 groups which could not otherwise be categorized[3] (SPLC, 2002). The continued increase of membership in white supremacist groups[4] speaks to the ebb and flow of white supremacist group formation where groups often consolidate and splinter based on ideological and personality differences (Blazak, 2001; Ezekiel, 1995). However, actual membership within groups generally remains constant. The growth in organized white supremacist groups could be reflective of increased membership as a result of concerted recruitment efforts by white supremacists.

How is it that white supremacist groups are able to achieve such notoriety and numbers despite the fact that their ideology is considered anathema to many Americans values? What is it about white supremacist organizations that appeals to growing numbers of white Americans? Previous studies have pointed to the role that racist organizations play in the lives of their members. Raphael Ezekiel (1995) points out that the movement plays varying roles for its

---

[2]The SPLC also includes Black separatist/supremacist organizations in its count of hate groups, but they are not counted as white supremacist for obvious reasons.

[3]The total number of groups in the category labeled other by the SPLC is 109. The list includes various white supremacist and racist skinhead music labels, publishing companies, and women s groups. Also featured are conservative organizations that may not be explicitly white supremacist, but use similar rhetoric and often incorporate racist sentiments into their propaganda and organizing efforts. One organization, the Jewish Defense League (JDL) was also listed in the other category but was not counted in the list of white supremacist groups because of its minority orientation regarding the position of Jews in American society. The JDL does, however, espouse a racist ideology in regard to relations between Jews and Arabs, especially Palestinians, in regard to the state of Israel.

[4]The total number of hate groups in the U.S. in 1999 was 457.

members depending on their place in the hierarchy of the organizations they choose to join. He found that leaders are most often concerned with maintaining personal control over their organization and their membership. The cult of personality structure of neo-Nazi organizations allows the leaders to become the center of the group and the lives of its members.

> The leaders create the organization. Like a magnet gives shape to a random scattering of iron filings, the leader exudes a force that gives coherence to a random scattering of alienated people. The leader s great function is to play this orienting role. His home is a place the cadre men can come, sit with him over the kitchen table, and hear agreement with their exotic concepts. He orates to these lieutenants, agrees with them, and gives them ways to think of their own lives. He lets them feel his self-confidence. (Ezekiel, 1995: 61)

This central role fulfills certain psychological needs for attention and authority which the leaders often lack in their daily lives (Ezekiel, 1995). For the rank and file member, the white supremacist group becomes a way of making sense of the world. It provides a simple explanation for the marginalized position of its members in American society. Recent white supremacist recruitment campaigns are focusing on feelings of anomie or social strain rather than traditional appeals for whites to defend their power (Blazak, 2001). Ezekiel s (1995) interviews with young neo-nazis in Detroit reinforce this analysis because respondents often felt alienated in working class neighborhoods which had experienced white flight that had left poor white families a minority amongst working class Blacks.

Other social psychological research into white supremacist organizations has found that the movement plays a significant role in defining power, identity, sexuality, and situations for its members (Arena & Arrigo, 2000). The movement provides power to its members by redefining them as strong members of a powerful, often revolutionary fraternity based on race which will succeed in maintaining its position in the social hierarchy. One can see identity developing from this notion of power as one s race becomes the first and foremost concern of movement

members. Race becomes the defining characteristic of all individuals for those who subscribe to white supremacist ideology. This is further buttressed by notions of sexuality. In a world where feminism and gay rights movements have significantly challenged traditional notions of male sexuality, the white supremacist movement presents an ideally heterosexist view of gender roles for its members. This reassures the participants that the movement they are a part of will act in their best interest. Finally, when schools, the media, and other white people race defined the world as one where racial hierarchies are deemed unacceptable, the white supremacist movement gives individuals the ability to define situations from their perspective. They are able to see the conspiracies of the Zionist Occupation Government (ZOG)[5] behind every action, they can denigrate African-Americans at their leisure, and they can see themselves as the victims of racism in a multi-racial america.

Generally, the social psychological literature has been based around the importance of white supremacy to individual psychological needs. What is often missing from this analysis is the role that ideology plays in individual s motivations for becoming members in such organizations. How does the ideology serve as a means of legitimation which maintains a person s membership in a white supremacist group? How do members use ideology to rationalize their own racist beliefs? This paper will explore the literature on white supremacist organizations in order to develop an understanding of the role of ideology in white supremacist movements. I will begin by briefly discussing the role legitimation plays in constructing people s understanding of the world. This will be followed by a discussion of three primary themes which serve to legitimate individual s membership in white racist organizations: the belief in the

---

[5]The acronym, ZOG, is alternately defined as Zionist Occupied Government. In both cases, it is meant to portray the U.S. government as being under the control of a Jewish Conspiracy which will be discussed later in this paper.

inherent supremacy of whites over other races, the belief in male supremacy over women (particularly white women), and the belief that white supremacist views are shared by a majority of the white population but are not openly expressed. These views should have a significant impact on the self-concept of members of white supremacist groups as they navigate in a world that is often hostile to their political and social belief system.

Legitimation

There is a process by which people come to understand that their belief systems are acceptable to themselves and the society in which they live. This process is generally referred to as legitimation and incorporates a variety of micro- and macro- processes (Kerbo, 1996). Societies generally rely on these processes to justify inequality within their populations and maintain social order. However, the processes of legitimation may be equally applied to extremist political movements such as white supremacy in explaining the role ideology plays in reinforcing people s willingness to participate in the movement. Kerbo (1996) distinguished micro-level processes of legitimation as being based upon acceptance of norms, self-evaluation, and ideology while macro-level processes education, the media, and opinion-influencing organizations. Although, his work and the work of other theorists of legitimation (i.e. Della Fave) is focused on economic inequality, these categories may apply just as well to beliefs about racial inequality held by members of white supremacist organizations.

Members of white supremacist groups find themselves living in a world radically different from most Americans. The counter-cultural aspect of the white supremacist movement creates a place where every aspect of life is defined by race. It is a sphere where racial epithets are used commonly, racist jokes are the norm, and conspiracy theories dominate (Blee, 1998;

Daniels, 1997; Dobratz & Shanks-Meile, 2000; Ezekiel, 1995; Levin, 2002; Novick, 1995). These behaviors present the individual with a normative environment where she/he can express racist beliefs without fear of condemnation from others. In fact, as alluded to in a quote from Ezekiel (1995), leaders encourage the open expression of racist sentiment thus ensuring that it is normative. The concept of self-evaluation is constructed in such a manner that the person comes to view himself or herself as one who deserves a higher or lower position in the stratification system (Kerbo, 1996: 372). In a highly racialized environment, the white supremacist movement is geared almost exclusively toward establishing and confirming the superiority of whites, especially those who have joined the movement (Berbrier, 1998a; Berbrier, 1998b; Berbrier, 1999; Daniels, 1997; Dobratz, 2000; Dobratz & Shanks-Meile, 2000; Ezekiel, 1995). It is therefore, highly predictable that members of the movement would find themselves in direct agreement with the notions of racial superiority, particularly when these beliefs led them to the movement in the first place (Blee, 1998; Blazak, 2001; Ezekiel, 1995; Hamm, 1993). Finally, the ideology of racial superiority serves to reinforce individual beliefs in white supremacy. As people become engrossed in the movement, the ideology serves to reinforce their individually racist beliefs (Blee, 1997; Blazak, 2001, Ezekiel, 1995; Hamm, 1993). The lack of alternative ideological influence often results in marginalized whites finding a home within the white supremacist movement which allows them the safe expression of their racism (Blazak, 2001, Ezekiel, 1995; Hamm, 1993). One can easily see how these micro-level processes effect individuals who join white supremacist movements by reinforcing and legitimating their own racist beliefs.

Just as there are micro-level processes of legitimation at work within the white supremacist movement, there are also macro-level processes. Members of the white supremacist

movement are constantly taught the ideological justification for their racist beliefs by movement leaders. In fact, despite common perceptions that white supremacists exist to commit acts of violence. the movement is generally organized around meetings of various sizes which serve to reinforce its racist ideology. Leaders provide the role of learned elder who bring knowledge to the members by teaching them the ways of racism; that Jews are controllers of society and other minorities are pawns in their war against the white race (Daniels, 1997; Dobratz & Shanks-Meile, 2000; Ezekiel, 1995). This belief system is further reinforced through production of a variety of materials designed to further legitimate beliefs in racial superiority. These magazines, newspapers, fliers, books, CDS, audio cassettes, and video tapes all serve to present the movement as a professional and legitimate political movement operating in the United States. Members can rest assured that there are others in the world who feel the same as they do and are open about their feelings in these media. New recruits can also rely on the media to reinforce their racist ideas despite living in a culture which generally denigrates open expressions of racism (Arena & Arrigo, 2000; Berbrier, 1998a; Blazak, 2001; Daniels, 1997; Dobratz & Shanks-Meile, 2000; Ezekiel, 1995; Ferber, 1998; Hamm, 1993). Finally, the impact of the leaders as educators and the producers of white supremacist media fulfills the role of opinion-influencing. These individuals often have the economic resources obtained through profits realized from sales of their product, membership dues, or illegal activities as a means to sway opinion (ADL, 2002; CNC, 2001). Individuals with access to the financial means to produce media often find themselves setting the agenda for the movement at large. A prime example of this has been the Resistance Records music label. Once owned by World Church of the Creator (WCOTC) member George Burdi, the label brought the obscure philosophy to the forefront of white supremacy by presenting neo-Nazi, skinhead music through slick magazines

and high quality CDs. The label fell on hard times after Burdi was arrested in Canada and its assets were seized by Revenue Agencies in Canada and the U.S. However, it has seen a resurgence since it was acquired by the National Alliance which has resulted in that groups ascent to prominence within the movement (CNC, 2001). As one can easily see, control of white supremacist media and the profits that come with it often places individuals and groups at the forefront of the movement.

The processes of legitimation are organized in such a manner that an individual s ideology becomes reinforced through her/his interactions with society. In the case of white supremacists, the micro-level processes acceptance of norms, self-evaluation, and ideology as well as macro-level processes education, the media, and opinion-influencing organizations serve to reinforce individuals racist beliefs. I will now turn specifically to the ideology of white supremacist groups to demonstrate how the interplay between micro-level processes and macro-level processes serves to legitimate individual s membership in white racist organizations.

The Ideology of Racial Superiority

One of the crucial elements of legitimation for members of white supremacists is the ideology of racial superiority itself. This ideal serves many functions for members of racist organizations. As previously mentioned, it allows members to develop a coherent racial identity, it creates a sense of community, and allows individuals to express ideas which may not be acceptable in mainstream American society. White supremacist ideology is constructed in such a manner as to reinforce these social psychological functions for its members. I would like to explore the power of the ideology of racial superiority in legitimating the people s membership in white supremacist organizations.

The ideology of white supremacists can best be summed up by the infamous 14 words of neo-Nazi David Lane, We must secure the existence of our race and a future for White children (Dobratz & Shanks-Meile, 2000: 17). This phrase presents the essence of white supremacists view on the issue of race. Race, for the white racist, is not a social construct as understood by mainstream sociologists, but a salient feature of human beings a distinct genetic attribute which can be tied to other social attributes and ultimately defines the value of an individual (Daniels, 1997; Dobratz & Shanks-Meile, 2000; Ezekiel, 1995). However, as one begins to analyze the content of white supremacist ideology, one encounters a drastic alteration in the meaning of critical terms such as racism and racialism.

For the white racialist, these terms do not contain the same stigma as the general population. They are, in fact, viewed as positive markers of their subjective understanding of the importance of race and ethnicity in determining one s position in American society (Arena & Arrigo, 2000; Berbrier, 1998a; Berbrier, 1998b; Berbrier, 1999; Dobratz & Shanks-Meile, 2000). Many members of the movement would summarize their view of the label racist or racialist similar to the following comment from a member of group calling itself Clan Rook , It in no way means hate for any other race, it simply means love for my own race. Also that I am conscious of my race and proud of it, as should anyone about their race (Nocmar in Dobratz & Shanks-Meile, 2000: 94). The work of Berbrier (1998a; 1998b; 1999) also points to this redefinition of racial pride among whites as part of a general effort to construct whiteness as an ethnic label not unlike that of other racial groups in the United States. One part of this strategy is *ethnic claims-making*, the effort to portray white supremacist ideology as representing that of an ethnic group, arguing, among other things, that the label racist is applied to them simply for having a healthy pride in their heritage and culture. Moreover, the racists argue that if, according

to the values of cultural pluralism and diversity, ethnic or racial pride is legitimate for (other) ethnic or racial minority groups...then it is also legitimate for whites (Berbrier; 1998b: 499, italics in original). With this logic, the average member of a white supremacist group can feel comfortable in their racist ideas because they are no different from other ethnic groups in American society that express pride in their heritage. Conversely, there is a belief that minorities who exhibit pride in their ethnicity are likely to be as bigoted as members of their own organizations.

For others, the issue of exhibits itself in forms that are more familiar to most people. Many white supremacists take a certain pride in what they believe is their intrinsic superiority to other races (Arena & Arrigo, 2000; Dobratz & Shanks-Meile, 2000; Ezekiel, 1995). A critical element of this expressive form of racism is rooted in the belief in the biological superiority of whites over other races.

> The militant white racists look at a world in which white Americans and nonwhite Americans are treated differently in almost every interaction; they infer that race is a powerful biological construct that identifies essences....They look at a world in which almost all positions of power are held by men who are white; they infer that whites (and men) have a nature that is superior. The *boss*, the person one must worry about is white. Everyday experience tells the militant white racist that race is basic and that white is good. (Ezekiel, 1995: xviii, italics in original).

These views are further justified through a series of scientific arguments which serve to buttress racist world views. They point to the work of Arthur Jensen, and more recently, Murray and Herrnstein in discussing the correlations between IQ levels and race, specifically that blacks score lower on IQ tests than whites (Dobratz & Shanks-Meile, 2000). Others point to the research of somewhat marginal academics as Dobratz and Shanks-Meile (2000) point out many white supremacists discussed a number of scientists who support the new scientific racist work, such as J. Philippe Rushton who maintained that whites and Asians were typically more

family oriented and intelligent than blacks and anthropologist Roger Pearson who advanced the idea that the white race is threatened by inferior genetic stock (95). Others rely on generally held prejudices to promote ideas of racial superiority. A cartoon published by the White Aryan Resistance (WAR) portrays What s on a Nigger s Mind where cutout of a caricature of a black man s head reveals a brain labeled with different attributes. The majority of the brain is shown to be dedicated to stereotypical notions such as crave (sic) for watermelon , crave (sic) for drugs, alcohol, pussy, gold chains and drumbeats , and criminal behavior while a small portion shown at the bottom of the brain represents responsibility, vocal skills, intelligence, hygiene, creative skills (must be viewed through microscope), logic, and proportion (A. Wyatt Mann in Shanks-Meile, 2000: 96, parenthetical comment in original). These views of blacks reinforce the belief that membership in a white supremacist organization is not simply a matter of affiliation to express cultural pride, but an expression of feelings of superiority. As previously noted, experience dictates that whites are superior to other races and that this superiority is properly expressed through membership in a white racist organization.

The final element of white supremacist ideology that is critical to understanding legitimation in regard to white racists membership in organizations that are in many respects antithetical to mainstream American beliefs is the role of religion in justifying the aforementioned racist beliefs. A majority of white supremacist hold some form of religious belief which may be broadly placed into one of three categories: Christian Identity, Creativity, or Odinism (Dobratz, 2000). Citing Barkun (1997), Dobratz (2000) defines the primary beliefs of Christian Identity as follows: (1) white Aryans are the offspring of the tribes of Israel according to the Bible; (2) Jews are the children of the devil, a relationship that is traced back to the sexual relationship between Satan and Eve in the Garden of Eden; and (3) the world is rapidly

approaching a final apocalyptic struggle between good and evil with Aryans battling a Jewish conspiracy to try to save the world (289). A critical element that distinguishes true white people from others by the ability to blush because whites are the descendants of Adam or Aw-dam who name is said to mean, to show blood in the face (Dobratz, 2000; Ridgeway, 1995). Creativity is the name given to the spiritual beliefs held by members of the World Church of the Creator (WCOTC). The belief is centered on the concept that one s race is one s religion, it rejects Christianity because of its association with Judaism, and instead embraces what it believes are the laws of nature which include ideas of maintaining racial purity and superiority for whites (Dobratz, 2000). Finally, Odinism is a pagan belief in Norse mythology as a basis for spirituality. This is based on the belief that the true religion of white people is that of northern Europeans, specifically Scandinavians, and that these are the true gods of all Aryans (Dobratz, 2000). The function of religious belief for many white supremacists is to provide a spiritual foundation for their racial beliefs. Because their racial beliefs come from god or nature, mainstream society cannot provide a challenge to them. Any argument over the validity of racism automatically becomes an argument over religion. Likewise, the members dedication to the group is akin to that of a person s dedication to her/his religious congregation. Members are willing to follow leaders and accept their views as truth insofar as they are willing to accept their religious beliefs as truth. In this respect, racist religious beliefs are possibly the key element in maintaining members in white supremacist movements. Leaving an organization is not unlike leaving a powerful religious congregation because it provides structure, community, and ideological support.

In response to a society that is often hostile to overt expressions of white supremacy, many members of white racist organizations must rely on the ideology of racial superiority in

order to legitimate their membership in the movement. This ideology of racism can take several unique forms which may be expressed at different times by individuals in a particular organization within the movement. Ideas of racism may be expressed as positive feelings toward one s racial group and recontextualized as identification of whiteness as an ethnic group within a multicultural America. It is also possible for white supremacists to hold overtly racist views because they firmly believe in the intrinsic superiority of whites over other races. This manifests itself in either scientific studies of biological difference or in crude expressions of prejudice and stereotype. Finally, for many white supremacists, racist ideology is rooted in religious belief which provides the ultimate form of legitimation because it becomes a personally held spiritual belief which is hard to counter.

Male Superiority

Arena and Arrigo (2000) present gender, sexuality, and masculinity (230) as one of the primary themes found in white supremacist discourse. In her research on the white supremacist movement Daniels (1997) found that [t]he highest duty and honor of a White man, according to white supremacist discourse, is to preserve the white family and with it the hierarchy of race, gender, and sexuality (39). This is clearly reflected in the 14 words motto discussed within the racial ideology section of this paper. Preservation of gender roles and the traditional family is a critical tenet of white supremacist ideology which serves to further legitimate individuals membership in the movement by relying on their conception of traditional gender roles and their desire and willingness to abide by them in order to be active members of the movement. In this section, I will discuss the importance of constructions of masculinity and femininity for

individual white supremacists as a means of legitimizing their participation in white racist organizations.

The role of men in the white supremacist movement is predictably patriarchal. Movement propaganda consistently stresses that white men are hard workers, warriors, and protectors of white women s sexual purity (Arena & Arrigo, 2000; Daniels, 1997; Dobratz & Shanks-Meile, 2000; Ferber, 1998; Kimmel & Ferber, 2000). Analogous to the soldier/males depicted in the imagery of the *friekorps* of interwar Germany, the image of white men as racial warriors is a prevalent one in contemporary white supremacist publications (Daniels, 1997: 36). White men are encouraged to be warriors for their race because the movement ideology is structured around the idea of racial conflict (Berbrier, 1998a; Berbrier, 1998b; Daniels, 1997; Dobratz & Shanks-Meile, 1995; Ezekiel, 1995). This increases male members willingness to participate in a movement which counters what they perceive as threats to their social status (Arena & Arrigo, 2000; Daniels, 1997; Ezekiel, 1995; Levin, 2002). In order to justify the white man s role as a white warrior, he must be given an enemy. In the case of white supremacist propaganda, the enemy becomes a social system which is pitted against the white male. White men depict themselves as victims of racial discrimination, of class oppression, and as the special victims of race, gender, and class oppression at the hands of the racial state (Daniels, 1997: 37). The intelligent white man not only stays in a white supremacist movement because he it is his role to be a warrior for his race and a protector of his family and heritage, as the 14 words imply; but because the movement protects him in a world that is hostile towards him and his material and emotional interests.

For women, the white supremacist movement presents a very different view of gender roles. In most cases, women s roles have traditionally been defined by their relationships to men

in their lives. This is consistent with the propaganda of the white supremacist movement which espouses traditional, patriarchal relationships between men and women based on their natural sex differences. Women in the movement are also encouraged to have children as a duty of the movement. As Sherry, a neo-Nazi skinhead, points out, There are eleven women in our group and eight are pregnant. This is the most important way we can carry on with the white power tradition (Hamm, 1993, 183). This quote serves to reinforce the notions of male sexual dominance of women by reformulating the role of women in the movement as mothers of white children. In addition, the maternal role of the white women is also applied to men in the movement. White women are encouraged to nurture men in the movement, to provide for their daily well being, to nurse them back to health when they are hurt in racial attacks, and to support them when they are imprisoned (Daniels, 1997). Thus, the role of women within the white supremacist movement is reduced to being an object of male sexual desire (to be protected from oversexed Blacks and sexual deviant Jews by strong, white racial warrior men), the mother of future white children, and the nurturer of Aryan warriors. For women who have a desire to maintain an extremely traditional, patriarchal relationship with men, the white supremacist movement serves as a location to both find the type of man who will fulfill this role, as previously discussed, and maintain their own understanding of proper roles for women. Therefore, it is only logical that women who hold such traditional values regarding their gender role would find a place within the movement.

Women s roles in the movement have changed greatly in the 1980s and 1990s. The ideal of white women as mothers of the white race still holds true, but is supplemented with a new form of activist, almost feminist, female white supremacist. These women are taking active roles in the movement and even beginning to take on leadership positions. In her research on women

within the white supremacist movement, Kathleen Blee (1996; 1998) interviewed several women active in organizing within the movement. These women reflect a new trend of feminist white supremacists who are brought into the movement through aggressive recruitment campaigns targeted toward white women. Some researchers have claimed that women play a support role in white supremacist organizations to this day, but there is a clear trend toward active participation by women in the daily activities of the movement. Rafael Ezekiel (1995) describes one active member of a neo-nazi, Terri, who took an active role in the movement, the group gave her a setting in which to be provocative, saying confrontational things in a nasty way; she could be a conspicuous rebel (193). Terri s involvement in the group is due in large part to her sense of adventure and her desire to feel empowered in a world where her friends are burdened by teenage pregnancy and unfulfilling relationships (Ezekiel, 1995). Equally important is the role women play in leading groups. Both Hamm (1993) and Blee (1996; 1998) discuss the importance of women in leading skinhead, Klan, and neo-Nazi groups. For women who have grown up internalizing the values of feminism find a space within the movement to express their own desires for power and control of their lives through expressions of power and control over the lives of racial and ethnic minorities. As a marginalized movement, white supremacy must create space for women who can become strong leaders in order to increase its size and power. By appealing to certain feminist sensibilities the white supremacist movement can present a safe space for women to be both strong leaders and continue to hold on to traditional beliefs about gender roles.

The construction of gender identity is an important pillar of the white supremacist movement. It is a critical tool in maintaining the membership of organizations involved in the movement. White men are drawn to an ideal vision of their social role as proud white warriors

(Arena & Arrigo, 2000; Daniels, 1997; Dobratz & Shanks-Meile, 2000; Ferber, 1998; Kimmel & Ferber, 2000). Men who may find themselves disempowered by the larger society can find empowerment in their racial identity which is manifest in their traditional gender roles. The movement also works to explain this disempowerment as a form of victimization, providing both an explanation for certain men s social positions and justification for their need to become warriors for their race (Arena & Arrigo, 2000; Daniels, 1997; Dobratz & Shanks-Meile, 2000; Ferber, 1998; Kimmel & Ferber, 2000). Women have a more unique position within the modern white supremacist movement. On the one hand, they are viewed in an extremely patriarchal light as bearers of white children, nurturers of white men and children, objects of sexual desire, and subjects of protection by white men (Arena & Arrigo, 2000; Daniels, 1997; Dobratz & Shanks-Meile, 2000). On the other hand, some women have found a personal empowerment within the movement that could be labeled as feminist, had it not been within the context of extreme racial hatred. These women see the movement as a place where they can rise to leadership positions because of their strong personality, their commitment to violence (increasingly as active participants), their understanding of movement ideology, and their leadership abilities (Blee, 1996; Blee, 1998; Ezekiel, 1995; Hamm, 1993). By creating a space where men s and women s needs to fulfill their vision for their gender role is encouraged, the white supremacist movement overcomes what Davis and Robinson (1991) term the underdog thesis by orienting its members toward a position of conflict with racial and ethnic minorities.

Mainstream Acceptance of White Supremacy

The final element of legitimation for members of white supremacist groups is an implicit understanding that the mainstream society is in agreement with their views on some level. Only

a small minority of people truly wish to stand out from the norm and in some respects white supremacists are no different. In order to create this idea of racial supremacy as normative, the movement has chosen two distinct paths based on how individuals and groups wish to orient themselves to mainstream America. The first form takes into account many Americans hostility toward white supremacist ideology. By relying on the recontextualization of terms such as racialist or racist mentioned earlier in this paper, some white supremacists have tried to portray themselves as representatives of their (white) ethnic group in a multicultural society (Berbrier, 1998a; Berbrier, 1998b; Berbrier, 1999; Dobratz & Shanks-Meile, 1995). In this respect, leaders and members of white supremacist groups are no different than other advocates of ethnic groups in the United States. A second form of white supremacy as an expression of feelings held by the majority of white Americans which are not expressed openly. It is, therefore, the role of the active white racist to fight for the beliefs of white Americans despite their public expressions of condemnation (Dobratz & Shanks-Meile, 1995; Dobratz & Shanks-Meile, 2000; Ezekiel, 1995). In both cases, members of white supremacist groups find themselves in the curious position of legitimizing their membership in racist organizations as an expression of mainstream ideas.

After witnessing the changes in American s views on race and racism, some white supremacists have chosen a new strategy for recruitment and forwarding their ideas. Based on the hostility toward open expressions of racist sentiment which they are constantly confronted with, some leaders of the movement have chosen to try to mainstream their rhetoric in order to bring in new recruits (Berbrier, 1998a; Berbrier, 1998b; Berbrier, 1999; Dobratz & Shanks-Meile, 1995). Berbrier (1998a; 1999) characterizes this trend in the movement as an expression of *stigma transformation* or stigma management techniques aimed at changing an individual or group s situation (412). In the case of white supremacists, the situation they face is one of

social marginalization and hostility in an America which no longer accepts open articulation of racist sentiments. An important aspect of this process is intellectualization. Mainstream society often portrays the white racist as an ignorant and vile redneck who has not come to terms with modern views on race and ethnicity (Arena & Arrigo, 2000; Berbrier,1999; Dobratz & Shanks-Meile, 1995; Dobratz & Shanks-Meile, 2000; Ezekiel, 1995). In contrast to this social stereotype, members of the movement attempt to portray the ideology of the movement as having stemmed from an intellectual development among its members (Berbrier, 1999; Dobratz & Shanks-Meile, 2000). Through intellectualization, a member of the movement can view her/himself as having developed a specialized knowledge that distinguishes her/him from others who have not attained their level of intellectual development. Members find themselves drawn to a movement that gives them knowledge that they did not receive in mainstream education systems.

From this intellectualization arise two important forms of *stigma transformation*, the portrayal of the white supremacist movement as a movement for white civil rights in a multicultural America and the view of members of the movement as ordinary Americans defending their rights and beliefs against attack from radicals and minorities (Arena & Arrigo, 2000; Berbrier, 1998a; Berbrier, 1998b; Berbrier, 1999; Daniels, 1997; Dobratz & Shanks-Meile, 2000). The viewpoint that white supremacists are defenders of white civil rights stems from the ideological transformation of racialism and racism from negative terms applied to hate mongers into positive feelings toward one s ethnicity and/or race discussed earlier in this paper. Leaders often use the rhetoric of pluralism to argue that their beliefs are part of a mosaic of cultures and that their ideas are simply a defense against what they perceive as discrimination (Berbrier, 1998a; Berbrier, 1998b; Berbrier, 1999; Dobratz & Shanks-Meile, 1995). This argument is

framed in a number of ways, for example; Thomas Robb, leader of the Knights of the Ku Klux Klan used the term heritage as part of an effort to present white supremacy as the defense of an ethnic group which is putatively similar to other such groups (Berbrier, 1998b: 504). By referring to what many have termed, heritage, not hate, many white supremacists have attempted to place themselves in the position of civil rights activist rather than hatemonger. As such, the white supremacist movement becomes a movement for the defense of whites in a world that is often considered hostile to their interests. Dobratz & Shanks-Meile (2000) have analyzed the portrayal of the white supremacist as a Christian Soldier embodying basic principles of both the Christian religion, the majority religion in the U.S. and an American historical legacy of individualism and racial separation. Berbrier (1998a; 1998b) has pointed to the development of White Student Unions as an attempt by certain white students to have their status recognized as equal to that of other minority student groups on college campuses. These efforts have been significant in demonstrating to members of white supremacist groups that they are not the villains mainstream society has labeled them. They are, in fact, no different from other Americans who are interested in their history and cultural heritage and seek to defend it against attacks by other groups hostile toward them (in this case, Blacks, Jews, and other minorities).

In stark contrast to those who wish to mainstream the white supremacist movement stand those leaders and members who view their role in the movement as revolutionary (Dobratz & Shanks-Meile, 1995). These individuals view their participation in the movement as part of a vanguard of white Americans who are fighting to preserve their race under hostile conditions. The aforementioned Christian Soldier may be the embodiment of religious belief and American individualism, but he is a soldier nonetheless and he is ready for combat against the enemies of the white race with his rifle in hand (Arena & Arrigo, 2000; Dobratz & Shanks-

Meile, 2000). While, on the surface, this image may seem contradictory to a movement that seeks to represent the white majority, in reality its revolutionary spirit is drawn from a distinct belief that the racist views it expounds are shared by most white Americans who are simply afraid to express them in public. Because most white Americans, *at some level*, share these [racist] perceptions, the potential exists at all times for the militant movement to expand its influence. The militant movement keeps these ideas fresh and strong, persistently reinjecting them into the social discourse, ensuring that people stay vulnerable to interested parties who wish to use racism to capture public allegiance (Ezekiel, 1995: xviii, italics in original). In the minds of its members, the white supremacist movement becomes a vanguard for white Americans who cannot openly express their own deeply held racial beliefs. As such, members belong to the movement out of a sense of duty to their race because it is their race that is of primary concern (Dobratz & Shanks, Meile, 2000; Ezekiel, 1995; Ridgeway, 1995).

While mainstream American culture may portray racism as antithetical to American values, members of the white racist movement have found a simple way to reconcile this difference between public and personal perception. They have chosen to engage in *stigma transformation* through a variety of means (Berbrier, 1999). By intellectualizing their views on race, some movement leaders have attempted to present the concerns of their members as legitimate social issues. Stemming from this intellectualization of the movement, a movement for mainstream acceptance of white racialism as an advocacy of white ethnic heritage and the rights of whites as a minority group in American society has begun to flourish. However, some movement leaders and members find themselves content in believing that they are a revolutionary force fighting for all white people regardless of other white s public statements to

the contrary. Each of these forms of *stigma transformation* serves to further reinforce the role that an individual plays in the white supremacist movement.

Conclusion

Despite a history of challenges to white racism and the codified practices of white supremacy, there continues to be a thriving movement of white racists in the United States. Organizations that make up this movement are focused on building a membership that will push their agenda to the forefront of public discourse and allow them to build a racist society within the U.S. In order to achieve this, they must have a committed following of individuals willing to accept an ideology that stands in sharp contrast to the American ideal of social equality. This is achieved through a series of legitimations practiced by the movement. First, the racist ideology itself serves to draw in people who may hold conventional racist views. This is done by either presenting racism as a term selectively applied to white people who show the kind of love and respect for their ethnic group as other minority racial and ethnic groups do, or by relying on crude, overt displays of racial bigotry that appeal to those who may already hold such stereotypes. The movement also relies heavily on religious ideology which fuses racial hatred with spiritual beliefs to create a belief system within its members that is virtually impossible to challenge participation in the movement becomes akin to doing the work of god. A second element of legitimation is a reliance of strong, traditional, patriarchal gender roles. The movement presents men as powerful warriors for their race and masters of their family while giving women traditional support roles vis-à-vis the men in the movement. Some women are, however, recruited into the movement through promises of personal empowerment which manifest themselves in positions of leadership and active participation equal to, if not completely

surpassing, that of their male comrades. Finally, the movement relies heavily on portraying itself as mainstream. This is achieved by intellectualizing the discourse within the movement to give it an air of scientific validity, by presenting itself as yet another movement expressing ethnic pride in a multicultural America, or by defining itself as a vanguard movement of racially aware whites who act for the majority if white Americans who fear to openly express their racist beliefs.

Works Cited

Anti-Defamation League of B nai B rith (ADL). 2002. National Alliance: Extremism in America. *http://www.adl.org/learn/ext%5Fus/n%5Falliance.asp.*

Arena, Michael P. & Bruce A. Arrigo. 2000. White Supremacist Behavior: Toward an Integrated Social Psychological Model. Pp. 213-244 in *Deviant Behavior*. Vol 21 No. 3.

Berbrier, Mitch. 1998a. Half the Battle : Cultural Resonance, Framing Process, and Ethnic Affectations in Contemporary White Separatist Rhetoric. Pp. 431-47 in *Social Problems*. Vol 45 No. 4.

Berbrier, Mitch. 1998b. White Supremacists and the (Pan-)Ethnic Imperative: on European Americans and White Student Unions . Pp 498-516 in *Sociological Inquiry*. Vol. 68 No. 4.

Berbrier, Mitch. 1999. Impression Management for the Thinking Racist: A Case Study of Intellectualization as Stigma Transformation in Contemporary White Supremacist Discourse. Pp. 411- 33 in *Sociological Quarterly*. Vol. 40 No. 3

Blazak, Randy. 2001. White Boys to Terrorist Men: Target Recruitment of Nazi Skinheads. Pp. 982-1000 in *American Behavioral Scientist*. Vol. 44 No. 6.

Blee, Kathleen M. 1996. Becoming A Racist: Women in Contemporary Ku Klux Klan and Neo-Nazi Groups. Pp. 680-702 in *Gender and Society*. Vol. 10 No. 6.

-----. 1998. Reading Racism: Women in the Modern Hate Movement. Pp. 180-198 in Kathleen M. Blee (ed.) *No Middle Ground: Women and Radical Protest*. New York, NY: New York University Press.

The Center for New Community (CNC). 2001. *Soundtracks to the White Revolution: White Supremacist Assaults on Youth Music Subculture*. Chicago: The Center for New Community.

Daniels, Jessie. 1997. *White Lies: Race Class, Gender, and Sexuality in White Supremacist Discourse*. New York, NY: Routledge.

Dobratz, Betty A. 2000. The Role of Religion in the Collective Identity of the White Racialist Movement. Pp. 57-75 in *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*. Vol. 40 No. 2

Dobratz, Betty A. & Stephanie Shanks-Meile. 1995. Conflict in the White Supremacist/Racialist Movement in the United States. Pp. 57-75 in *International Journal of Group Tensions*. Vol. 25 No. 1.

Dobratz, Betty A. & Stephanie Shanks-Meile. 2000. *White Power, White Pride! The White Separatist Movement in the United States*. Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press.

Ezekiel, Raphael S. 1995. *The Racist Mind: Portraits of American Neo-Nazis and Klansmen*. New York, NY: Viking.

Ferber, Abby L. 1998. Constructing Whiteness: The Intersections of Race and Gender in US White Supremacist Discourse. Pp 48-63 in *Ethnic and Racial Studies*. Vol. 21 No. 1.

Hamm, Mark S. 1993. *American Skinheads: The Criminology and Control of Hate Crime*. West Port, CT: Praeger Publishers.

Kerbo, Harold R. 1996. The Process of Legitimation. Pp. 367-96 in *Social Stratification and Inequality: Class Conflict in historical and Comparitive Perspective*. Columbus, OH: McGraw-Hill Publishers.

Kimmel, Michael & Abby L. Ferber. 2000. White Men Are This Nation: Right-Wing Militias and the Restoration of Rural American Masculinity. Pp. 582-604 in *Rural Sociology*. Vol. 65 No. 4.

Levin, Jack. 2002. *The Violence of Hate: Confronting Racism, Anti-Semitism, and Other Forms of Bigotry*. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon

Novick, Michael. 1995. *White Power, White Lies: The Fight Against White Supremacy and Reactionary Violence*. Monroe, ME: Common Courage Press.

Ridgeway, James. 1995. *Blood in the Face : The Ku Klux Klan, Aryan Nations, Nazi Skinheads, and the Rise of a New White Culture*. New York: Thunder s Mouth Press.

Southern Poverty Law Center. 2002. Active Hate Groups in the United States. *http://www.splcenter.org/intelligenceproject*.