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Negotiating White Power Activist Stigma

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This article uses extensive ethnographic data on the U.S. white power movement (WPM) to describe the interactional aspects of managing activist stigma in everyday settings. We describe their stigma management as a form of everyday resistance. In the face of strong cultural codes against extreme racism, they conceal their Aryan identity to avoid the constant ire, indignation, and conflict they face from others. But, concealing their activist identity creates dissonance, which they work out by exploiting opportunities to selectively disclose features of their racist self. Disclosing aspects of their Aryan self while covering the more extreme aspects creates some expressive balance, which activists experience as resistance to social constraints on identity and self-expression that they perceive. We explain variances in the degree to which WPM members conceal and disclose their identity by focusing on structural differences in the common, everyday settings of family, work, school, and other public contexts. Keywords: white power movement, hate group, stigma management, everyday activism, right-wing extremism.

Despite claims that we have become a “movement society” (Meyer and Tarrow 1998; see also Jenkins and Klandermans 1995; Rucht and Niedhardt 2002) where protest is institutionalized, normalized, and accepted, deeply committed social movement activism is still the exception (see Soule and Earl 2005 for arguments challenging the “movement society” thesis). As Sidney Tarrow ([1994] 1998) observes, “the general public’s acceptance of the legitimacy of protest is confined to a narrow range of [conventional] protest activities” (p. 206). The same can be said about the types of protest claims that are accepted as normal and legitimate. Explicit and outspoken activism remains a relatively uncommon deviant act.

Research on activism has focused mainly on the role of social movement organizations (SMOs) where activists connect with like-minded others who support their beliefs and identity. But much of the activist experience occurs outside SMOs in everyday contexts among people who do not support, or are even hostile to, their beliefs. Openly expressing their political values in such situations can produce interactional tensions associated with stigma (Anderson and Snow 2001; Goffman 1963b; Renfrow 2004). How activists manage those tensions is critical to their ability to sustain their commitment to the cause (Downton and Wehr 1997). To better understand the activist experience then we must answer the following question: How do activists cope with stigma in everyday life?

This article discusses how members of one of the most radical, deviant, and stigmatized social movements—the U.S. white power movement (WPM)—manage the interactional tensions they face in everyday nonmovement contexts. We describe a process that pivots on strategies of calculated concealment and revelation of their Aryan activist identity. On the one hand, embracing an Aryan identity obliges one to openly challenge those who do not see

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the world, its problems, and the solutions in the same way. On the other hand, their radically racist attitudes contrast sharply with contemporary integrationist attitudes and multicultural ethics held by many they interact with on a daily basis. The “strong codes [that now exist] against the direct expression of racist views” (Billig 2001:270; see also Van Dijk 1992) mean that Aryans face the constant prospect of ire and indignation from others if they reveal their beliefs. To reduce the chance for unwanted conflicts, Aryan activists often cover their identity to “get along” with others. Yet, covering such a salient identity creates dissonance. They manage this dissonance by devising techniques to accomplish a degree of expressive balance between who they are and how they portray themselves. The techniques are survival strategies that help them avoid many of the everyday conflicts their identity may bring. But, Aryans experience these concealment strategies as resistance rather than acquiescence to anti-Aryan culture. Concealment is a form of activism because it is integral to how they sustain themselves as activists.

Everyday Resistance and Activist Stigma

Most social movement research focuses on “normal activism” characterized by highly visible mobilizations pushing for reforms through the political system. This activism includes strikes, picketing, signing petitions, lobbying, writing letters, joining and/or maintaining SMOs, civil disobedience, large scale projects (e.g., Freedom Summer), and other common forms of social protest (Haenfler 2004). There is comparatively less attention to forms of resistance that occur outside SMOs and political institutions (Buechler 2000; Giddens 1991; Melucci 1996). This is changing as some analysts attend to more diverse forms of resistance involving expressive action at the micro-level (Einwohner 2006; Haenfler 2004; Taylor and Raeburn 1995). Alberto Melucci (1989, 1996), Debra King (2004), and Paul Lichterman (1996) emphasize that contemporary activism is increasingly individualized, personalized, and embedded in everyday lives (Taylor 2000). Individual everyday forms of resistance are particularly ripe for study (Hollander and Einwohner 2004), especially research that highlights forms of personal resistance that pivot on concerns about identity and values (Buechler 2000; Haenfler 2004; Larana, Johnston, and Gusfield 1994; Melucci 1996).

Individual everyday forms of resistance can be enacted in a variety of contexts and in a multitude of ways (Hollander and Einwohner 2004). James Scott (1985:xvi, 1990), whose treatise on Malaysian peasant struggles is a key conceptual lens for understanding everyday resistance, observes that anytime people feel constraint and coercion we can expect a “prosaic but constant struggle” to withstand or counteract the force. Scott’s (1985, 1990) analyses focus on “ordinary weapons of relatively powerless groups: foot dragging, dissimulation, false compliance, pilfering, feigned ignorance . . . and so forth” (1985:29). These techniques “deny or mitigate claims made by appropriating classes” (Scott 1985:302) but “stop well short of collective outright defiance” (Scott 1985:29; see also Fantasia and Hirsch 1995). This perspective intersects with Foucauldian views on the microphysics of power that also emphasizes the inevitability of resistance and its expression in everyday life (Buechler 2000). People resist constraints on identity and expression that flow from established social categories used to label and subject individuals to others’ notions of who they are and should be (Foucault 1979; 1980). Such struggles often pivot on questions of identity and challenges to forms of power experienced in immediate, everyday life (Buechler 2000; Foucault in Dreyfus and Rabinow 1983:211–12).

Identifying different forms of resistance has refined how we understand the character of oppositional struggles. But, it has also led to an implicit dichotomy in how activism is typically dealt with and discussed. Normal activism (and activists) is treated as one category of resistance and everyday resistance as another. Researchers have not usually considered everyday forms of resistance to be what participants in established social movements do as part of their activism. For instance, Scott (1985:xvi) makes a clear distinction between organized,

revolutionary action and individualized everyday forms of resistance that “require little or no coordination or planning . . . and typically avoid any direct symbolic confrontation with authority” (p. 29). Likewise, Buechler (2000) talks of everyday resistance as a wholly “new form of politics . . . originat[ing] at the microlevel of personal identity” (p. 150). Everyday resistance is individualized, immediate, and “quasi-anarchistic” (Buechler 2000:150) in contrast to the more organized forms of “contentious politics” (McAdam, Tarrow, and Tilly 2001). The assumption is that actors who employ disguised acts of everyday resistance are not explicitly tied or committed to conventionally-organized social movements, while committed social movement activists are thought to channel their activism through “normal” protest. Thinking of activism in this way obscures much of what committed social movement participants may actually do as activists.

Managing the stigma tied to social movement activism is a type of veiled, identity-based resistance that occurs across many everyday contexts. Scholars rarely understand this as a form of activism, in part because we have given so little attention to activist’s everyday lives where the experience of stigma can be acute. This is quite an oversight given that the everyday comprises so much of an activist’s life. Committed activism is not a role that is switched on and off as one enters into and exits marches, demonstrations, or organizational meetings, but is central to self-identity as a moral status that permeates thoughts and interactions across countless movement and nonmovement situations (Downton and Wehr 1997; Gecas 2000; King 2004). Many everyday settings are filled with people who do not subscribe to activists’ commitments. Consequently, activists are often subjected to labeling as deviants. This leads some committed activists to organize their lives explicitly to avoid those who do not believe as they do (Downton and Wehr 1997). But, for many, such a drastic reordering of everyday living is not possible. In family, work, school, and everyday public contexts they must interact with “nonbelievers” and face the possibility that the expression of their Aryan identity will be stigmatized.

Dealing with stigma, even one that the individual may be proud of and committed to, is socially and psychologically demanding (Edgerton 1967; Goffman 1963a). It requires being on constant guard for verbal, symbolic, and, sometimes, physical attacks to self. We explain that activists may respond to stigma in everyday settings by playing down outward expressions of their activist identity to avoid “negative attention” (Derber 1979) and complete whatever practical tasks are at hand. This point follows Erving Goffman’s (1963b) observation that the stigmatized:

make a great effort to keep the stigma from looming large. The individual’s object is to reduce tension, that is, to make it easier for himself (sic) and the others to withdraw covert attention from their stigma, and to sustain spontaneous involvement in the official content of the interaction (p. 102).

Masking one’s political leanings can be a conscious and intentional response to mitigate the interactional conflicts that flow from stigma, but it need not imply that the masking is indicative of shame or guilt about their identity as Goffman and others seem to suggest is the core sentiment that drives stigma management efforts. Instead, it can be a strategy for *retaining* deviant attributes. Covering stigma limits scrutiny and scorn from others and reduces pressures for change (Kanuha 1999).

Activists’ attempts to conceal their identity are an act of everyday resistance. Concealment to avoid conflict is part of a struggle about identity, commitment, and the power to resist other’s labels of who they are and should be. All committed activists face this dilemma to some degree. How, when, and where does one express the political commitments that are central to one’s sense of self and purpose and, conversely, how, when, and where does one suppress them in order to just “get along” with others? Activists find ways to cope with this dilemma that range from “blending in” to openly “disavow[ing] their imputed inferiority” (Anspach 1979; Gussow and Tracey 1968:317). We use the extreme case of WPM activists to understand some of the strategies activists use to manage their stigma in these everyday contexts and why they choose them.

Aryan Stigma, Dissonance, and Expressive Balance

Popular images present white power movement activists as strident, hostile fanatics that stand out from the crowd (Aho 1990; Blee 2002; and Kaplan 1995 also make this point). But as with all stereotypes, the reality is more complicated. In many everyday settings it is difficult to determine who is an Aryan and who is not. Committed white power adherents are not typically “out” about their Aryan leanings. Instead, they are covert about who they are. Their “calculated conformity” (Scott 1985) to mainstream expectations masks their activist identity, which helps them avoid extreme Aryan stigma (Linden and Klandermans 2006).¹

Their identity is built around a radically-racist and anti-Semitic worldview.² White power members embrace a sense of exceptionalism. They feel they have special insight into the “true” nature of the world that allows them to “see through” and reject attempts by nonwhites to destroy Aryan culture and eliminate the “white race.” They see themselves defending the white race from genocide by Jews and their “nonwhite pawns.” Their utopian vision is of a racially-exclusive world dominated by Aryans, where “nonwhites” are eliminated, separated, or at least subordinated to Aryan authority. This world is imagined in the popular mantra among WPM members known as the “14 Words” statement—“We must secure the existence of our people and a future for white children.” Many support the vision of Aryan militarist nationalism that requires the creation and defense of an all-white, non-Jewish homeland. They also abhor homosexuality, interracial sex, marriage, and procreation, and tend to idealize conservative traditional patriarchal family forms and community relations dominated by Aryan kinship.

Aryan stigma flows from the many sources that oppose their beliefs and practices. Integrationist policies and multicultural ethics delegitimize their beliefs and isolate Aryans (Barkun 1994; Bennett 1995; Blee 2002; Dobratz and Shanks-Meile 2000; Kaplan 1995). While racism certainly persists in many forms and among many people, “even whites who hold stereotyped images of African Americans do not acknowledge . . . that they are racist [and] distance [themselves] from those whites who are considered to be racist, such as Klan members [they] view as uneducated or psychologically disturbed” (Feagin and Vera 1995:161). Media accounts and some scholarly work lampoons WPM activists (Roberts and Kloss [1974] 1979) as “wackos on the fringe” and “evil incarnate.” There are overt and covert forms of government suppression of Aryan activism (Cunningham 2004; O’Reilly 1989) along with nongovernmental watchdog groups such as the Southern Poverty Law Center, Simon Wiesenthal Center, and the Anti-Defamation League who also act as social control agents. Counter-movement activities represent some of the most commonly visible expressions of hostility and repression toward white power activism (Blee 2002; Dobratz and Shanks-Meile 2000; Kaplan 1995) and public opinion data indicates low approval ratings among Americans for overt racist political activities (Lewis and Serbu 1999). On an interpersonal level, Aryans face the scorn, ire, and indignation of many who oppose their extremist views. Their marginalization is especially

1. To be sure, WPM activities also include various forms of normal activism such as marches, rallies, and leafletting (see Dobratz and Shanks-Meile 2000). However, our focus is on members’ less visible, recurrent forms of resistance enacted in everyday situations, not the infrequent, episodic forms of normal activism by the WPM.

2. The white power movement in the United States is made up of groups such as the Ku Klux Klan (KKK), Christian Identity sects, neo-Nazis, and white power skinheads. The oldest and, historically, the most influential organization in the WPM is the Klan whose roots date to late-nineteenth-century Reconstruction. Christian Identity groups trace their roots back to nineteenth-century British Israelism, which claimed that Anglo-Saxons are the “true” Israelites and Anglo Christians are God’s chosen race (Barkun 1994). The U.S. neo-Nazi branch of the WPM is rooted in the American Nazi Party and organized around Adolf Hitler’s racial purity ideals. Umbrella groups such as the Aryan Nations (AN) have led the trend of Klan members, skinheads, and others to increasingly embrace Nazi symbols and ideology, along with Christian Identity theology (Burriss, Smith, and Strahm 2000:218). White power skinheads are the fourth, and newest, major wing of the WPM. The members are linked together by such cultural symbols and practices as shaven heads, white power music, racist politics, and a propensity for racial violence (Hamm 1993; Moore 1993).

acute in face-to-face encounters where interactional tensions emerge when extremely deviant and discrediting Aryan identities are revealed.³

Aryan activists are clearly aware of the stigma others attach to their beliefs and most perceive great personal risk in publicly communicating their ideas. These tensions create discomfort and influence when and how they reveal who they are. WPM members describe how openly expressing their beliefs disrupts their personal relationships with non-WPM members (e.g., neighbors shun and even picket their residence when they are exposed) and is a factor in job loss (Bjorgo 1998; Blee 2002; Kaplan 1995). Most of the Aryans we interviewed report fears of being shunned, or even surveilled and arrested, if their activism became known to non-Aryans (see also Blee 2002; Dobratz and Shanks-Meile 2000:23).

Consequently, a major concern of many in the movement is how and when to conceal or reveal their identity as Aryans. On both organizational and interpersonal levels, identity concealment is particularly vexing because a central part of being an Aryan is openly advocating for one's beliefs. In our prior work we have described that the WPM deals organizationally with stigma and social control by creating a hidden "infrastructure of free spaces" where Aryans meet and sustain movement culture away from public scrutiny and conflict (Futrell and Simi 2004). These spaces range from Aryan homes, to parties, campouts, Aryan music shows, Internet spaces, and intentional racist communities that allow Aryans to experience relationships with other racists and openly express their beliefs without fear of retribution (also see Futrell, Simi, and Gottschalk 2006; Simi and Futrell 2006). These free spaces allow them to sustain activist networks and develop new strategies for political and cultural change.

At the interpersonal level, strategies for hiding white power leanings are enacted by individual activists. Most of our interviewees indicate that their Aryan activist identity dominates their thoughts and actions, cutting across all other social statuses they hold. They revel in their sense of "true enlightenment" about the ways of the world and feelings of moral superiority over non-Aryans. And since they are expected to "spread the word" they measure their commitment to the role, in part, by how well they enact this "racial responsibility." As Victor, a Southern California skinhead, told us:

People like us, people who are aware, it's our job to awaken the sleeping members in our race. We must do what we can to overcome these problems by taking pride in our people and our families and our jobs. We have to look out for each other in our workplaces and in our neighborhoods. There's lots of things that we can do, just talking to people pointing out the wrongs that you see. We have to lead by example, that's the only way" (interview 6/24/04).

Yet, "leading by example" is risky. They often live between a "virtual social identity" implied in the impressions they give off and their "actual social identity" comprised of the Aryan attributes they embrace (Goffman 1963b). The Aryan activist's dilemma is how to square their commitment to openly promote white power beliefs with efforts to avoid extreme interactional tensions that flow from their stigma. To be clear, we are not implying that Aryans totally avoid conflict, but that many of them do not see total openness about their beliefs at all times and places as a viable option.⁴ The potential for conflict and its consequences, both real and perceived, is too great. But as activists, their commitment to Aryanism is tied to their advocacy for their beliefs.

3. Although previous research has skillfully documented the extent to which white power activists feel victimized (Berbrier 1998, 1999, 2000, 2002; see also Ferber 1998), there has been little attention directed toward how WPM activists manage their stigmatized identities in the course of everyday interaction.

4. While exceedingly interesting, we want to bracket analysis of when and why Aryans choose to engage in conflict and fully express themselves toward non-Aryans. While a systematic analysis of these instances is beyond the scope of this article, several factors appear to influence whether individuals fully assert their Aryanism. Some of these include: age and experience; alcohol consumption; reputation for violence; and the number of Aryans present during the situation. Based on our observations and interviews, however, the volume of these instances is minimal in comparison to the amount of concealment these activists perform on a daily basis. Our focus here is on the understudied everyday experiences of dealing with a highly-stigmatized activist identity.

Hiding their Aryanism creates dissonance between their self portrayals and their activist identity. Rachel Einwohner (2006) observes that under the most repressive conditions where activists must “pass” by completely disguising all public displays of their identity, the dissonance they experience can actually increase the salience of their activist identity. In her fascinating analysis of Jews passing as Gentiles in Nazi-controlled Warsaw, Poland she describes how, facing enormous risks, Warsaw Jews “had to simultaneously ‘be and not be’ themselves” (Einwohner 2006:52) by inwardly embracing their stigmatized identity while completely hiding it around others. But, because they understood their activities as resistance, their commitment and sense of efficacy was amplified. This response to their dissonance helped them sustain their stigmatized activist identity and resistance activities over time.⁵

The risks and constraints on revealing an activist identity vary considerably across movements and the circumstances they face. Consequently, how activists manage those risks and constraints will also vary. In contemporary U.S. society, Aryans are highly marginalized, but they do not typically face such extreme risks as the Warsaw Jews that Einwohner describes. Most of their experience is dominated by forms of “soft” repression (Ferree 2005:141) that occur in routine contexts of daily life—e.g., the ridicule, opprobrium, ostracism, and other interactional conflicts brought on by their activist stigma.

They negotiate these contexts by strategically deploying their identity in ways that enable them to avoid the full contempt of others (Einwohner 2006). They do not, however, rely solely on complete concealment, but instead probe the situational constraints to see how much they can also reveal of their Aryan selves. We describe their efforts as a strategic search for “expressive balance.” This “balance” is struck, on one side, by revealing aspects of their extreme racism, which helps them sustain a sense of resistance, efficacy, and authenticity as true Aryans; on the other side, they simultaneously conceal many aspects of their activist selves to avoid the constant grind of conflict that they anticipate from others. To be clear, this “balance” is seldom weighted evenly. Across the settings we discuss, Aryans always conceal much more than they reveal about their racist ideas. How much they reveal is contingent on situational characteristics, particularly the structure of constraint and opportunity for expression that they perceive. We assess the type of contexts in which Aryans strategically avoid or diminish interactional conflicts over their deviance, what their strategies are, why they select them, and how their efforts help them carry on their resistance. We focus on home, work, school, and various public settings as some of the most prominent everyday settings where Aryan activists experience the tensions that flow from their stigma. After reviewing our method and data, we discuss how Aryans negotiate the constraints and opportunities they encounter in these settings in order to find some expressive balance, and sustain their resistance.

Method and Data

We draw primarily from ethnographic data collected on various white power activists and groups between 1996 and 2005.⁶ Our multimethod approach (Denzin 1978) includes interviews, participant observation, and content analysis of WPM Web sites and other literature.

5. Our discussion in this paper emphasizes how individual WPM activists experience and deal with their stigma in ways to help them successfully maintain movement commitments. But, clearly, sustaining an activist identity is not solely an individual act but “something that people do together” (Schwalbe and Mason-Schrock 1996:114). Some Aryans exit the movement because of the stigma they endure. The most common cause that we observed was a lack of integration and social support for them from other movement members. Individual activists that are not linked into broader movement networks face many obstacles to solidifying their identity as an Aryan. For more on group identity maintenance in the WPM see Futrell and Simi 2004.

6. Data collection was not continuous across these years, but occurred in several phases as our sample of interviewees snowballed and new levels of access were achieved. The cultural context of white supremacy changed relatively little across these nine years. Following the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing, carried out by Timothy McVeigh who had strong ties to WPM groups, and other WPM extremism in the mid-to late 1990s, WPM marginalization increased and has remained high.

Interviews included one-to-three-hour face-to-face and telephone interviews with 89 Aryan activists. Seventeen respondents were group leaders and 72 were rank-and-file members. Ninety-four follow-up interviews with primary contacts led to 183 total interviews. Snowball and purposive sampling strategies (Berg 2004; Lofland and Lofland 1995) produced contacts with a wide range of white power networks active in 24 states.⁷ Specific organizations represented in the sample include: White Aryan Resistance, Aryan Nations and local branches of Aryan Nations, Hammerskins, National Alliance, and branches of the KKK.

Of the 89 interviewees, 65 were male and 24 were female. Their ages ranged from 15 to 25 years ($n = 12$), 26 to 35 years ($n = 35$), 36 to 45 years ($n = 16$), 46 to 55 years ($n = 16$), and 55 and over ($n = 10$). Our informants represent a broad cross section of socioeconomic status found in the movement (see also Aho 1990; Blee 2002). The majority ($N = 61$) of subjects described either their current or childhood socioeconomic status as “middle class.” We confirmed that a sizeable minority ($N = 21$) were working in mid-to-upper-level professional occupations (e.g., attorney, college instructor, x-ray technician, etc.). Most of the subjects’ educational level included a high school diploma or equivalency and a quarter ($N = 23$) of the interviewees attended some college or higher.

Participant observation was done with Christian Identity adherents in Arizona and Utah, Aryan Nations members in Idaho, and a variety of Aryans in Southern California. The events observed in Utah and Arizona included 23 house visits lasting from one to three days and a variety of social gatherings (e.g., parties, Bible study sessions, hikes, etc.). Additionally, there were four three-to-five-day visits to the Aryan Nations’ former headquarter in Hayden Lake, Idaho to observe activities and interview participants at Aryan Nations World Congresses and other more informal gatherings. Fieldwork in Southern California included observations of various social gatherings and 22 stints in activists’ homes ranging from two days to five weeks. Involvement in these settings allowed for, among other things, insight into how Aryans talk and feel about who they are. These insights are not available through sole reliance on secondary sources and movement propaganda that many studies rely on (see Blee 2002 for an eloquent elaboration of this point). We analyzed secondary sources in an attempt to verify data we collected through primary interview and observational means.

Our data for this article is part of a larger project examining the persistence of the contemporary U.S. white power movement. We analyzed the data using a coding scheme organized around six primary themes: (1) early childhood experiences (e.g., political socialization in the family); (2) educational experiences and peer group socialization; (3) entry in the WPM; (4) level and type of movement participation; (5) ideological orientation; and (6) strategies of identity maintenance. The qualitative coding techniques (Berg 2004; Glaser and Strauss 1967; Miles and Huberman 1994) we used helped us to identify and extract relevant information across our data. While we present our themes in a systematic and organized way below, we do not intend to depict a homogeneous, invariant picture of WPM activists and their experiences.

Negotiating Activist Stigma in Everyday Settings

Aryans face complicated choices about what to conceal and reveal about their political commitments and they manage their stigma with situationally contingent responses that involve varying the degree to which they conceal and disclose their activist identity. In some instances, activists completely cover their Aryan identity in order to “get along” as “normals” and avoid attacks to self. But our observations suggest that full concealment is rare. Aryans

7. States included: Alabama, Arizona, California, Colorado, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Kansas, Kentucky, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Missouri, Montana, Nebraska, Nevada, New Jersey, New York, Ohio, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Utah, Texas, and Washington.

usually seek a degree of expressive balance between concealment and disclosure. The degree of disclosure and how it is accomplished is shaped by the opportunities they perceive in different contexts to express facets of their activist self.

To explain variations in how Aryans cover and reveal their activist identity we focus on the structural characteristics of social settings. Specifically, we describe how different degrees of “looseness” and “tightness” in occasions influence how much they choose to reveal about their identity. Goffman (1963a) observed that social occasions are governed by formal and informal regulations that establish whether individual behavior is either tolerated or restricted. Loose occasions allow for more variety of expression and activity, while tight ones “. . . imply a social rigidity” (Goffman 1963a:205) designating a narrow range of acceptable expression and activities. The relative looseness and tightness of occasions highlights variable *opportunity* for expression that Aryans perceive across different everyday contexts. “Opportunity” is a familiar way for social movement analysts to describe social conditions favorable for political expression and action. Discussions of opportunity and activism, however, are often so far removed from the lived experience of activists that it is difficult to make sense of how they interpret and respond to them (della Porta 1995). Our discussion of situational tightness, looseness, and opportunities here parallels and elaborates the basic point of “opportunity structure” theorists—that actors will exploit favorable circumstances to express their beliefs and grievances and that the degree of opportunity varies across different contexts. On the micro-level of everyday life, activists may cover much of their identity, while simultaneously taking advantage of circumstances they perceive as favorable for self-expression.

Aryans experience work, school, and family as tightly-defined contexts where there are relatively strict codes of involvement that limit opportunities for open expressions of self. At work and school, authorities clearly define formal rules of conduct and the consequences for violating them. Racial extremism is clearly disruptive and off limits in these contexts. In the family, Aryans respond to informal norms of family expectations and their own desire to sustain family relationships by limiting expressions of their radical racism. Activists talk of being very guarded about any display of their Aryan self in each of these settings. Public settings, such as restaurants or retail stores, allow for more varied expressions of self before open conflicts emerge. Consequently, Aryans may be less discreet in displaying their white power affinities, although they balance this against too much revelation that could produce conflict they try to avoid. While their calculated outward conformity to anti-Aryan norms masks who they are, according to our data, it does little to diminish their commitments. To the contrary, they experience concealment and the slight expressions of their Aryanism they are able to manage as resistance. By avoiding everyday conflicts, they persist to fight for Aryan ideals at other times and places.

Responses to Conformity Pressures of Family and Friends

While WPM members’ parents, siblings, relatives, and even nonmovement friends are typically aware of their white power leanings, they do not necessarily share those views (see Wiktorowicz 2005 for a similar point about radical Islamist activists in the United Kingdom). These differences are a significant source of tension when they are together⁸ and Aryans commonly talk of their parent’s disapproval and concern as a strain they seek to avoid. Cal,⁹ a veteran Southern California skinhead, described how his activism influences his relationship with his father:

8. By maintaining these bonds some activists “hold out” for the possibility of eventually converting their relatives. Of the 89 interviewees, only 13 reported that their parents were “fully supportive” of their WPM activism.

9. All names used to designate informants are pseudonyms.

He didn't like it at all. He still doesn't like it. Till this day he doesn't view the skinhead movement as a good thing. He thinks that no skinhead can possibly make anything of himself. He thinks I should be more focused on a career and not so much on the white race and making sure the white race survived, that I should be focused on the here and now. I wish he could accept me for who I am and what I am . . . (interview 8/10/02).

A fellow Southern California activist, Bill, also explains:

Trying to get your family to understand is a never ending void. I had a hard time telling them about my ideology and when I did they ranted and raved about me being an evil Nazi and racist. Tensions are pretty high . . . (interview 6/25/04).

Indeed, many of our informants can describe in vivid detail their family's reaction when they first revealed their Aryan leanings to them. Samuel, a White Aryan Resistance devotee, describes an experience that is typical of young recruits we spoke to who still lived with their parents when they joined the movement:

When I was about 16 my parents found out about my views. They blew a serious gasket. Couldn't believe I thought that way. They wanted me out [of the movement] 'cause they thought I was going to get killed or end up in prison. They tried everything they could to get me out; forced me to go to counselors and all that . . . (interview 3/12/02).

Chris (Southwest Aryan) said his parents threatened him with institutional treatment:

[They were] telling me if that's the way you think then you got mental problems. If you got mental problems, then we're gonna lock you up in a mental place. There's something wrong with you . . . they put me on medication . . . (interview 6/17/98).

Committing to WPM beliefs severely strains friendships as well. Many members talk of losing close companions because of their racist commitments.

After I started getting racially aware and talking to my friends about my new views they started drifting away [and] it was hard you know. I'd been hanging out with some of these guys my whole life and even my best friend thought I was going crazy or something. When you have to deal with these issues it really creates an inner struggle . . . (Hank, Southwest Aryan, 2/10/99).

Activists respond to this inner struggle in several ways. Some disengage from those who disapprove. Eddie, a SoCal Aryan, claimed to live a completely "dual life" (interview 6/26/04) in which friends and family know nothing of his racist activism. As James Downton and Paul Wehr (1997) have shown, avoiding family and friends who oppose one's activism is a strategy used by activists in other movements as well. Some Aryans voluntarily separate themselves by simply not visiting relatives, attending family gatherings, or befriending non-Aryans.

Most activists we spoke with, however, are very reluctant to completely cut ties because of the emotional, relational, and the financial costs involved. For these members, family is not an "either or" question. It is neither necessary nor desirable to completely sacrifice family relations for their political beliefs. They want to both "be Aryans" and sustain their connections to parents, siblings, and other kin. Especially among younger activists, this reluctance to sever relationships with parents stems, in part, from their financial dependence on them. Recruits living at home literally cannot afford it. There is also a desire for approval and other forms of social support from parents and friends that many are not willing to give up. But, while family ties are felt to transcend their activist commitments, they are also unwilling to drop their movement loyalties. Instead, they devise strategies for simultaneously sustaining family bonds and their Aryan devotion. Most often this is accomplished with strategic silence on topics that would draw attention to their extreme racism.

Even after I left my parent's house they would still give me trouble about my personal beliefs. I just try to respect them as best I can and the best way for me to do that is not discussing my beliefs in

front of them. That's the only way I can be around them. Otherwise it gets really brutal; we've had some pretty big fights over the years about this stuff (Samuel, 2/10/99).

I can be in the same room with them [relatives who do not share his views] as long as they don't want to get into a political discussion and I just try to avoid any topics that will cause problems (Tom, Aryan Resistance, 3/12/01).

My philosophy on the family front is to just keep the preaching down to a minimum. I hide my white pride stuff, do the typical suck up crap . . . (Mack, Aryan Front, 6/25/04).

Hiding the "white pride stuff" involves more than just avoiding the topic in conversation. It also means hiding visual evidence of their commitments, particularly tattoos and other adornments. Aryan tattoos are extremely popular among activists and as permanent symbols they convey a deep commitment to the messages they signify. But, as Melanie, a Southwest Aryan Separatist, observes, they are often an "open invitation" to conflict when people see them (interview 1/17/97). Consequently, some activists who may desire tattoos decide to totally avoid them and those who get tattoos often place them in inconspicuous places on the body and cover them around nonmovement others.

I got my first tattoo when I was 14 and I had to get it covered by another so that I could get a job. For most racial tattoos they're best kept where they can't be seen unless you're willing to handle the opposition that having visible racial tattoos come with (Grant, Texas Hammerskin, interview 7/13/02).

I think it's better to avoid getting tattoos you can't cover with a suit. I know some people might think I'm being hypocritical, trying to hide my beliefs but not everyone can make it in this world with a ton of tats; it can make finding work pretty rough" (David, Aryan Nations, interview 7/6/99).

For young activists living with parents, biography intersects with the "tightness" of home life further limiting the forms for expressing their ideological affiliations. Their status as resource-poor and parentally-dependent minors means the costs of exposing their Aryan leanings can be high. Consequently, even the privacy of one's bedroom is so limited that open displays of Aryanism are quashed. For instance, as Charlie, a Southern California Aryan, became increasingly unguarded in his displays, conflict with his parents escalated, and they eventually prohibited such display. To quell family tensions, Charlie hid the offensive materials.

When I first started getting racial I tried to be somewhat subtle. I hung a Vinland flag then I purchased a Celtic cross flag . . . Then I finally said screw it and ordered a basic swastika flag and they (parents) hated it. So I just keep the flags in my room in a box with some other stuff I collect and that way it doesn't cause any problems (interview 1/16/01).

But hiding the flags did not signal the end of his resistance. Short of throwing out his collection, hiding was the only option and it came with some risk of more conflict if his parents found it. Charlie's calculated conformity disguised the actual defiance of his parent's demands for him to reject Aryanism. For him, keeping the flags was a form of struggle amidst the overt compliance that helped him deflect more pressures to conform. Now in his mid-30s, Charlie has remained a committed Aryan for almost twenty years.

Most WPM members report strong desires to find ways they can enact their Aryan self. The interpersonal loyalties felt among family members both constrained and enabled self-expression. Family is a "tight" context that Aryans respond to by limiting displays of their Aryan beliefs. But this tightness is not absolute. The family also allows some leeway for WPM members to disclose Aryan beliefs, as the loyalties felt by parents, siblings, and other kin toward the Aryan make them more apt to tolerate and forgive minor normative transgressions. Aryans exploit opportunities in family settings to display their identity while avoiding total destruction of those relationships. Opportunities to express their ideological commitments can be found in conversations where their Aryan self is clearly pertinent to the topic at hand.

I just stayed quiet about it unless they would ask my opinion about something, and then I just always made sure to throw in my two cents. That's what I still do [with family]. I just show my side little by little . . . (Charlie, Southern California skinhead, interview 6/27/04).

Only if they insist on talking about it, [then] I just basically give them a little bit of piece of my mind and that pretty much shuts them up pretty quick. They don't want to have a discussion; they don't want to go any further in the discussion . . . (Walt, White Aryan Resistance, interview 3/12/01).

Others actively explain their politics, albeit with caution to not totally alienate family. They talk about these efforts as a calculated risk that is well worth it because these expressions help them feel they are authenticating their Aryan self and decreases the dissonance between who they are and how they act. James (American Front) explained that "by working like this I think I feel less isolated from who I really am . . ." (interview 6/13/01). Similarly, Cindy, a SWAS member, explained that these limited expressions of Aryan commitment help her feel more "in tune with being true to myself. It's very difficult, but it's also absolutely essential" (interview 1/20/99).

There is consistent reference among our informants to seeking a balance between deception and disclosure among family.¹⁰ Randy (SoCal Skin) describes the situation as a "compromise."

I'm pretty selective in revealing all of my views. The best I can explain is like a compromise that helps me sustain my personal beliefs without compromising my relationships. I show some of who I am and hide other parts (interview 6/29/04).

Political activists of all stripes encounter this compromise at various times in their everyday life (or, for that matter, anyone inhabiting a deviant role they have chosen and are committed to). It is common to hear activists talk of feeling alienated and having to "bite their tongues" or "sit on their hands" when political topics are raised at family dinners or other occasions with family or friends. The tense feelings of divided loyalty between family and friends and the movement can be so strong that some activists feel some regret for their beliefs.

It's not easy when you're the only one in your family who cares more about the future of your race . . . Sometime it makes you feel like you need to apologize for being racially aware . . . (Paul, Aryan Front, interview 6/26/04).

Others talk of situations where they openly "agree to disagree" with family and friends then suppress discussion on controversial topics.

When I told my family and when I talk to friends about it I just to let them know that this is how I see the world and it may seem pretty radical but it's something that's taken me time to come to understand and it's not something that people will understand right away or agree with right away, people have different opinions on things and they can still be friends (Luke, Idaho Aryan, 7/29/99).

The Aryan activists we observed talk about the importance of sustaining family ties, in spite of the ideological differences and strong conformity pressures they must endure. They conceal facets of their activist self to avoid the conflict that their stigma brings, while simultaneously probing the limits of allowed expression. The moments of expressing their valued activist self may appear as minimal accomplishments, yet they experience them as meaningful acts that signify their capability to withstand or counteract normative expectations and maintain some congruence with their most salient identity. Sustaining their Aryanism in the face of conformity pressures to stifle displays of that self is a part of their everyday activism.

10. Aryans who are the most committed to completely concealing their identity from others may be the least likely to agree to interviews or observation. Balancing revelation and concealment was a common strategy among our respondents. Of the 89 subjects, we identified 58 who claimed to frequently balance expressions of their extremism during interaction with individuals who oppose their Aryanism. Observation of Aryans' daily lives confirmed that balancing is a common interactional strategy.

Managing Expressive Constraints at Work and School

The workplace is filled with sources of tension for Aryans. It is a context where activists directly confront a culturally-diverse world that is the antithesis of what they desire. They perceive a clear (and in their view, extremely biased) expectation to adapt to non-Aryan cultures. For instance, many jobs encourage employees to learn at least some foreign language (e.g., Spanish to serve Hispanic clientele). Aryans see such demands as capitulation to multicultural ethics, which they define as a major problem with contemporary life. The culturally-diverse context severely limits opportunities for openly expressing their white power identity. Aryans feel obliged to adhere to workplace norms that prohibit displays of racial hatred and they expect to be fired if their extremism is revealed to employers and coworkers. Indeed, more than half the participants we interviewed attribute their loss of a job to an employer's opposition to their white power beliefs. So keeping their job means outwardly conforming to an "oppressive" cultural diversity.

Activists speak of a sense of realism and practicality about voicing extremist attitudes at work and the internal fortitude required to play one's work roles in ways that are not disruptive. But they are quick to stress that they do this without the inner identification to multicultural values they see dominating their work environment.

[I'm] practical about things. We can't all move to a compound in Idaho. A pure white homeland is not going to happen in a big shoot-out tomorrow afternoon. We've got to deal with what we have in front of us. For many white nationalists that means blacks at work, Jew bosses, you name it . . . If you're going to be a racistist you have know who you are, in your mind, and what you believe but that doesn't mean you can't at the same time live in the world and deal with it (William, Southern California activist, interview 6/9/00).

Some deal with the workplace oppressions they perceive by avoiding others to reduce the time they must cover their beliefs.

One coping strategy I use is . . . I try to limit the time I have to personally interact with these types (i.e., non-Aryans) for my health and sanity. But it is unavoidable, especially at work, and in that situation I just act professionally . . . (Angie, Southern California activist, interview 6/9/00).

Others play at being a multiculturalist. They describe an ironic pleasure in "getting over" or "fooling" non-Aryans such as coworkers, schoolmates, teachers, and coworkers, but also deep frustrations about having to deny their most salient role. Yet, they experience their role playing as a form of resistance that amplifies and reinforces their Aryan self (also see Einwohner 2006).

I try to think about work like [White Aryan Resistance leader] Tom Metzger said. I may swallow my words all day so I don't get fired, but it's kind of fun after a while to act like a lefty wing scum bag and spout off a bunch of liberal crap just to keep them fooled . . . It keeps me strong (Lance, Southern California skinhead, interview 6/27/04).

That Aryans are circumspect about revealing their beliefs at work should not be surprising. Most employees consider the impressions they give off and how these may affect coworkers, bosses, and opportunities for promotion. But, WPM activists are not totally silent about their beliefs at work. Our respondents search for expressive balance through opportunities to communicate their racial consciousness without disrupting the workplace or completely discrediting themselves. Frank, a SoCal skinhead, explained:

I just go to work and do my job. If the Mexicans at work pull any shit I'll tell 'em what I think . . . I don't hide it. But it's not usually a problem because I handle myself so that I'm not making a big deal advertising it or going around yelling, "nigger this" "nigger that" . . . (interview 6/10/00).

Others communicate their beliefs directly to others when they feel pressured by them.

When I have to deal with this liberal shit at work I just usually bite my tongue unless they insult me directly . . . unless someone attacks me first, then I'll say something. I don't raise a big fuss, I usually just let the niggers cry about how they're oppressed . . . (Cal, Southern California, 7/19/04).

Others are more stealthy about how they convey Aryan principles in their work.

I can't reveal my beliefs at work because [it] is so intolerant of racism. I know that I'd be unemployable in my field if colleagues learned about me being white power . . . but it is galling to have to concede even that much to the racial enemy. I've found that life involves trade-offs, and it takes time to discover how fully open you can be about your views while still maintaining a life for yourself in the world as we find it . . . (Richard, Aryan Nationalist, interview 6/28/04).

Covering their identity to get along at work includes interacting and cooperating with those they define as racial "others."

See, it's kind of weird, I guess. I get along with nonwhite people in situations like at work. I don't hate them per se. It's really a hard situation. I mean, uh, of course I'm racist. I don't want them here. At the same time, you know, I don't want to kill all of them or anything like that (Ralph, Aryan Nations, interview 7/29/99).

Ralph has been active for more than 25 years since the age of 12. He, like many Aryans, struggle with the inconsistencies of getting along with "enemies" while wishing them vanquished or worse. They reconcile these inconsistencies by believing that getting along does not mean "giving in" and that being "friendly" with individual "racial others" is not an endorsement of "race-mixing." This is a strategic ploy that, they claim, does not diminish their white power commitments.

Aryans do not need to provoke nonwhite coworkers or outwardly express the contempt they feel toward minorities in order to sustain their activist self. They often secretly read racist literature, listen to Aryan music, and surf white power Web sites as a way to link into Aryanism and reinforce their most salient identity in a context where they are constrained to keep their racism quiet. They also talk of an ongoing internal dialogue that helps justify their decisions to restrain themselves and hold back their white power affinities.

"You can't always speak your mind. I tell myself that sometimes it's better to just keep it down and save it for the right place. [I will listen to] a Final War or Brutal Attack CD [white power music bands] . . . to get my head cleared . . ." (Ralph, Aryan Nations, interview 7/30/99).

That the expression remains internal does not weaken or lessen its significance to them. Rather, their strategic silence is an active part of resisting the repression they must endure to keep their job.

The education system is the institution that Aryans typically blame most for creating and perpetuating the multiculturalism they despise. They feel they are under constant surveillance at school by peers and authorities on the lookout for deviance of any type, particularly racism, which prompts intense social control. Activists typically talk of high school and college as a necessary evil—a context dominated by the oppressive multiculturalist values they despise, but one that holds the promise of a degree that is necessary to find the kind of work they need to support themselves and the movement. Trent (Southern California Aryan) explained:

You can't improve your race without first improving yourself. The movement is changing, we're adapting to the world and there's a new game plan these days. It's all about being low key while you're in school so that if you decide to go into Special Forces or run for office or be an attorney (interview 6/17/04).

Many of our interviewees committed to the movement during their high school years and recall in detail the tensions they felt as an Aryan outsider and how they dealt with it. As with work, most talked of "going along to get along."

In high school I didn't go around my school preaching and I tried to keep my beliefs to myself, but some of my enemies were aware of my beliefs . . . At one point I started getting all of this crap from teachers when I started to read Turner Diaries. One teacher said I was too young and not developed to understand. My counselor said it was politically incorrect so I had to say that I was researching white power groups and didn't believe in them . . . (Bradley, SWAS, interview 3/19/99).

When I was in school I didn't discuss these topics much with teachers and counselors, I figured it would only get me labeled. I just kept my views inside when I was at school. I studied and got pretty good grades (Wyatt, Aryan Nations, interview 7/12/99).

It's (school) like a game. I listen to what they say, but don't buy into it. I just remember who I am and what I believe. As long as they think I'm conforming to their ideal student, then they don't ride you . . . (Schmidt, Southern California activist, interview 9/14/02).

Like work, the Aryans we interviewed felt that relations with others at school were bound by tight codes of conduct with excessive monitoring and little opportunity for open self-expression. In these contexts, covering their identity is less about loyalty to significant others and interest in sustaining relations with them, as in the family, and more about avoiding retribution (e.g., job loss, expulsion, etc.) for their beliefs. Nevertheless, most activists we interviewed found ways to deploy their white power identity to achieve some self-esteem and consistency with their Aryan self within the constraints of these tightly-bound contexts. Some expressed themselves privately.

In school I was very circumspect about my beliefs. I kept a journal of all my thoughts and feelings. No matter what it was, I wrote it down and I still do this. It really helps out when you're swimming in emotion and you just want to scream at the top of your lungs. Let everything flow from your head to your pen. When I was in school the journal was pretty much my only outlet to vent (Jane, Northern Hammerskin, interview 7/28/00).

Others looked for ways to publicly, but surreptitiously, express their ideological leanings. Melinda, still in high school at the time of our interview, explained:

It is very hard to sit quietly during some bad white man lesson in history class. Knowing you're the only person in an entire school can be pretty painful. So I just keep quiet a lot but then find times when I can casually slant things a particular way or slip in one of our points from time-to-time . . . (Southern California, interview 8/23/02).

In some instances, activists simultaneously acquiesced to expectations and contradicted them by revealing their beliefs to a single teacher or student they had determined would tolerate it with minimal reaction. Byron recalled:

writing this history midterm. I had to write three essays. Each of them started with, "I'm sure this is the answer you want," followed by a quick summary of the correct answer, and then a paragraph that started with, "But I don't believe that" followed by what I felt on each subject . . . in a moderate way (Idaho Aryan, interview 7/21/00).

Aryans experience work and school as the primary institutional settings that perpetuate their categorization as social outcasts. But, they cannot easily avoid these contexts. Inside the movement, members place a great deal of emphasis on the notion that being a good Aryan requires that they get a degree and a good job to support themselves and the movement. Thus, they must tolerate work and school by outwardly complying to multicultural norms. They constantly guard their expressions, while exploiting the limited opportunities to minimally display their Aryanism. They acknowledge that these displays are risky and hold little potential for changing their status in these contexts, but nevertheless experience these displays as meaningful challenges to the status quo that accentuate feelings of efficacy and persistence in the face of ideological opposition.

Active and Passive Identity Displays in Public

Aryans must also decide how much to reveal of themselves in everyday public spaces such as restaurants, stores, banks, and other service settings. These places are routinely populated by a diverse array of people who are relatively unknown to one another. For most people, the limited interaction with strangers in public settings is routine and not overtly political in

meaning, but for committed Aryans these culturally-diverse spaces are yet another context where they see multiculturalism supported and they must interact with blacks, Jews, gays, and others whom they despise. Brian describes a sense of alienation in public that is common among our interviewees.

You can't go anywhere without scum. The malls are shoulder to shoulder with people, dirty, smelly, ugly people that have nothing to do with my people, my culture. I get sick of looking at my people acting like disgusting heathens, listening to nigger music, trying to be gang members, the drugs, I can't relate to any of it. I'm surrounded by sludge. The only escape I have was when I get together with racialists . . . (Idaho Aryan, interview 7/21/00).

Likewise Jimmy explained: "When I go out I'm disgusted by what I see: wiggers, niggers, and all these other muds. I feel completely alone in this cesspool of diversity" (Washington skinhead, interview 4/28/97).

Kathleen Blee (2002) has noted that many Aryan activists take great care to suppress their racist leanings in public: "those who use overtly racist symbols in public or who adopt an exaggerated racist style [are seen] as movement novices" (p. 167). Only the most inexperienced or maverick racists openly display their Aryan identity to others in public settings. Veterans tend to operate with a great deal of circumspection around non-Aryans. This can mean completely covering their identity so as to not draw attention and just "get along" in these settings.

I make a conscious effort to keep my mouth zipped or keep my remarks so that they're somewhat socially acceptable when I'm around most average people in average places. In doubt, I keep my mouth shut. It is not wise these days to broadcast white power views even if it is truth (Ethan, Aryan Resistance, interview 1/16/01).

Without an attitude of restraint, white power activists anticipate that they would be constantly retaliating against the evils they perceive as surrounding them in everyday public settings. If they reveal their identity in overt and disruptive ways, they expect hostility from non-Aryans that will disrupt the mundane tasks they are trying to complete and even threaten their safety. Most of our respondents talk about the aggressive looks and comments they get from those who suspect them of racial extremism. Some talked of incidents in which they were asked to leave restaurants, grocery stores, and being denied other services when owners and patrons identified them as Aryans. Most of our interviewees talked about working to restrain themselves and using covering strategies to mask their real attitude as an important accomplishment that helps them sustain their Aryan selves.

These efforts play out in consistent ways across various contexts. For example, even WPM leaders who we expected to revel in the tensions and pressures open Aryanism brings to bear on them at times avoided playing up their activism in public because they "just want to be left alone." One of the authors observed an intriguing exchange between Richard Butler, the now deceased leader of Aryan Nations, and two young recruits who made a pilgrimage to the group's compound in Hayden Lake, Idaho to meet Butler. A small group from Aryan Nations met the young skinheads at a restaurant in the small town of Coeur d'Alene, Idaho. At the end of lunch, the two skinheads turned to the group as they departed to extend a pronounced "sieg heil" salute. No one returned the gesture except for Butler who, looking uncomfortable, responded with a small, hardly detectable gesture. When asked about the exchange, Butler said:

I don't like to make a big nuisance out in public. You just want to go out for a lunch and not have any problems because you're racist. These younger guys, it was their first time up here so it was important for them to identify themselves and show me respect and that's okay but it's just not always necessary . . . (interview 4/8/97).

Butler's observation parallels Blee's (2002:167) point about the heightened care that seasoned Aryans take to play down their affiliation in contrast to "movement novices." The young

neo-Nazis responded as raw racists out to prove their allegiance, while the rest of the group did not accentuate their affiliation. Yet they also did not totally conceal their Aryanism either. Butler's notoriety made it impossible for him to be totally incognito and to participate in the meal with him meant publicly affiliating with the movement. The shadow of Butler's stigma enveloped the author, Simi, who felt extremely uncomfortable and self-conscious during the excursion. Additionally, other members of the lunch party openly displayed some movement symbols—e.g., two Aryan Nations uniforms and exposed racist tattoos such as the German cross and Nazi swastika. The group's presence visibly disturbed restaurant patrons who stared at them repeatedly and spoke in hushed tones. The Aryans were very aware of the effect they had on others and clearly sought to avoid more attention by speaking in their own hushed tones, being very polite to the waitstaff, and avoiding eye contact with other patrons. There was no demonstration of overt defiance or antagonism toward others, only passive displays of movement symbols.

This example illustrates a common approach Aryans use to deploy their identity in public settings. As in other everyday contexts we have discussed, they are attuned to avoiding conflict by suppressing the more extreme aspects of their activist identity. Yet, they also take advantage of opportunities they perceive to express their activist self. These opportunities are found in the relative "looseness" of public settings that are not typically bound by the same degree of formal behavior codes and the immediacy of social controls that Aryans experience in work, school, or even family situations. A range of people and activities are often tolerated as long as they do not disrupt the activities or services of others in the setting. Aryans often respond by passively displaying Aryan symbols (e.g., tattoos, clothing insignia, etc.) while simultaneously suppressing more active expressions of their Aryanism (e.g., loud racist talk, overt confrontations with "racial enemies" etc.). Of course, the extent to which they openly deploy their identity is a matter of degree. While they may feel less constrained in public, they are still quite attuned to the need to shield themselves from attacks against self. Thus, in the diner, the group openly displayed their movement insignia, but otherwise remained reserved. Talk included virulent racist themes, but the comments were made "under the breath" to be heard only by other activists at the table around them. We saw this pattern repeated across restaurants, bars, groceries, sporting events, court houses, and doctor's offices.

Passive displays of movement symbols is a tactic Aryans use to balance expressions of their activist self and achieve some sense of self-esteem, efficacy, and authenticity while simultaneously attending to others' resentment of them by limiting full demonstrations of their radicalism. Their displays are not so much for others, but to communicate and reinforce who they are to themselves. Our informants describe feelings of honor and pride when challenging normative conventions through symbolic displays.

We know they're looking at us and talking about us. That's fine. That doesn't change how we feel when we're wearing these [symbols]. It's not about the stares or name calling, it's about honor and displaying honor by wearing your uniform and honoring your heritage and race even if most of our own people are blind (Mick, Aryan Nations, interview 4/8/97).

Other WPMers feel that open displays of white power symbolism are acts of courage, a trait highly esteemed among Aryans. Nathan, a Colorado skinhead, strikes a balance between concealment and disclosure by not "getting in people's faces" about his white power beliefs, but not completely masking his leanings either.

With my head shaved and all the tats I've got, when I'm out in public people get a pretty good idea of who I am. I guess I look the part so a lot of the time I figure I'll go ahead and wear a white power t-shirt and that feels pretty good being that open about it and not really hiding much (interview 7/16/02).

Feeling "pretty good" about expressing his most salient sense of self is a significant accomplishment for someone bearing such a highly-stigmatized status. These small-scale expressions of their Aryan self are a primary strategy for outwardly expressing their activism and

provide them a palpable sense of resistance that contrasts with their conformity across many everyday contexts.

Aryans perceive the unambiguous expression of racism and the creation of a white dominated world as ideal, but what they actually do in covering or guarding token expressions of their ideology is a reflection of different situational constraints. This is why WPMers sometimes express the exact opposite of what might commonly be expected from them. For instance, one of the authors and an Aryan skinhead played doubles pool for more than an hour against a team of one white and one African American. Afterward, Nathan, the white power skinhead, walked over to the two, shook hands with both, and began small talk with the African American. He later explained:

I'm not going to be a dick to him just cause he's black as long as he's cool and that and we're just playing a game of pool. I'll be respectful, but then that doesn't mean that if I could make things the way I want he'd be around either. You know what I mean? (interview 8/21/02).

Stan, a veteran OC skinhead, explained that his public interactions with racial enemies are punctuated by impression management that stresses a sense of cultured civility.

Now me, as a skinhead, I go to a restaurant and they [a minority] bring me my food and I say, "thanks," and I leave them a tip if they're worth it. They bring out my food on time, they don't make a mistake, I give them a tip and say, "Thanks a lot" and "Have a good night." I might be a white power skinhead but I'm not rude and I'm not an illiterate low class (interview 6/12/01).

These types of individual displays resemble an organizational strategy Mitch Berbrier (1998, 1999, 2000, 2002) has identified among some WPM groups who attempt to neutralize the stigma of racism with public legitimation efforts. Specifically, they try to combat stereotypes of Aryans as boorish, irrational, and violent racists with claims that they are thoughtful, respectable, mainstream people who are simply interested in their cultural heritage. In short, they are reframing their public message to change how people perceive them. At the individual level, the displays of civility toward enemies that we observed also disguise the extent of their racism. These WPMers are part of the most radical and extreme groups in the movement, but they navigate many everyday situations with great flexibility in how they display their Aryanism to others, even those they detest.

This surface civility toward racial enemies does not imply friendship, respect, or endorsement of multiculturalism. Civility is merely perfunctory politeness that reflects deference to situational expectations and interest in avoiding conflicts, not respectful consideration for the persons involved. Seth described his everyday attitude towards his racial enemies by saying, "If a black dude is sitting near us at the movies or dinner, I don't freak out as long as they don't cause any problems. It's not worth it" (Northern Hammerskin, 7/16/02). Another WPM veteran explained his group's attitude toward proprietors of a nearby Asian-owned convenience store.

We're cool over there. Hell that's where we usually buy beer, we don't go in there looking to talk shit or fuck with them; they treat us fine and we do the same . . . (Keith, Southern California skinhead, interview 3/26/02).

One way that commentators have interpreted these seemingly contradictory ways of being is by assuming that Aryans who "get along" with non-Aryans are less committed to the cause than they claim to be or, alternatively, that such expressions of civility are insincere. Our observations and interviews suggest that they do not see courtesy or civility toward racial others as a contradiction at all. Rather, they explain it as a necessary strategy to get by in everyday contexts and one that is consistent with broader movement decrees. Interacting with African Americans, Jews, and others they despise is unavoidable and without an attitude of restraint and flexibility, they feel that they would be constantly "retaliating" against the "evils" they perceive. If they were always fully "out" about others their stigma

would complicate even the most routine daily activities (e.g., buying beer, a meal, movie, and other services). In short, these Aryans are practicing the old adage of “picking one’s battles” to avoid those conflicts in which the reward is perceived as worth the effort. We expect that almost all activists, regardless of their ideological leanings, feel and act similarly from time to time in their daily lives.

Aryans’ calculated outward conformity masks ongoing inward reminders of their commitment to racial hatred and white power. Many spoke of reinforcing their extremist self through an ongoing dialogue with themselves and others as an essential part of the expressive balancing they try to find. In a particularly clear example of this, Terry explains how he helps buttress his wife’s commitments as she faces constant exposure to racial enemies at work.

She works with a couple of black girls, they’re not her friends so to speak but they are very close as everybody is. The manager and the assistant manager, they’re her friends, they’re white, the black workers are work associates that she will talk to and never be rude to but I help her understand that in the time of war we are to cut their heads off (Terry, American Front, interview 6/29/04).

For WPM activists, every decision to conceal their activist identity is also a decision about what to reveal about the self. By avoiding conflicts they also avoid direct challenges from others to their most salient sense of self. When they perceive opportunities to display a modicum of their activist self, they exploit the opening, probing the limits of what is tolerable. For them, efficacy and resistance is found through the expressive balance they are able to attain.

Conclusion

We have explained that, by using various ploys of concealment and revelation, Aryans project an image of themselves that hides much about their extremism. They do so primarily to avoid the strong interactional tensions that flow from their stigmatization by others. Downplaying and concealing their Aryanism in everyday situations such as family interactions, work, school, and public settings moderates the social psychological demands of an identity that draws strong ire and contempt from others. But, it is never a straightforward issue about how much to conceal or reveal who they are. Covering their identity is complicated by the role expectations that oblige Aryan activists to be open to others about their beliefs. If they are open to others about their beliefs then they risk repression, but completely concealing who they are produces discomforting inconsistencies with their most salient identity. How they manage this dissonance is crucial to sustaining their activist identity. Working this out requires expressing some degree of their activist beliefs. Aryans are not simply trying to “pass as normal,” but to find an expressive balance between revealing a degree of their “Aryan self” while covering some of the more extreme features. Their disclosures are a form of individual everyday activism to resist social controls that subjugate them to others’ values and identity expectations. These displays are meaningful to activists as a form of resistance to the constraints they perceive. They feel they are fulfilling the obligations of their activist role.

Mundane everyday struggles demonstrate the creative capacities for “persistence and inventiveness” that occur under social constraints (Scott 1985, 1990). Concealing some of the most salient aspects of their activist identity is not a sign of Aryan weakness, passivity, and acquiescence to non-Aryans’ normative expectations. They do not play down their identity because they are ashamed of their stigmatized qualities or accept normalized assumptions of moral worth. As Kanuha (1999) observes:

If passing is constructed and subsequently employed to mitigate the effects of social discrimination due primarily if not solely to stigma [then] *passing is not an act of assimilation, but an act of resistance to*

social oppression . . . Passing becomes an act of resistance because [the] passer never really assimilates (pp. 39–40; emphasis in original).¹¹

Their disguised struggles amidst overt compliance are part of a calculated survival strategy they accomplish daily across numerous contexts. As we have argued elsewhere, Aryans have constructed a rich, albeit hidden, infrastructure of “free spaces” where they openly express their Aryanism to one another in ways that sustain WPM collective identity (Futrell and Simi 2004). But, for most Aryans, these safe havens are relatively few and far between, while everyday life is constant. They find some esteem and authenticity as an Aryan activist in the nominal displays of self that they manage in everyday settings.

To be sure, this form of resistance leaves a lot to be desired for Aryans. As Jocelyn Hollander and Einwohner (2004:549) note, no form of resistance is pure, for even while “resisting power, individuals or groups may simultaneously support the structures of domination that necessitate resistance in the first place.” Cautiously expressing resistance to some forms of power means complying with others (Scott 1985). “After all, [the Aryans] remain within the social system they contest” (Leblanc 1999:17 as quoted in Hollander and Einwohner 2004:549) and by doing so sustain it to some degree. Their public posture of deference and conformity provides latent support for the very system they are struggling against. Their resistance suggests a radical consciousness at the level of ideas, not necessarily borne out in radical action (Scott 1985:316).

This picture of Aryans challenges the popular stereotypes of them as belligerent fanatics always out to fight. The reality is that many often hide behind a veil of normality. Consequently, Aryan resistance may be more widespread, albeit hidden, than some observers suggest (Hoffman [1998] 2006). One conclusion is that we must be cautious about writing off the WPM as a dying movement, as some seem eager to do. The danger in doing so is complacency, inattention, and poor policy toward this form of extremism. The minimalist resistance we detail here is not likely to recede completely from the contours of everyday life. One question that is beyond the scope of this article is whether this resistance can be transformed into more open and radical forms of mobilization. It seems reasonable that this is a possibility that presently lies dormant in the radical consciousness of Aryans’ everyday efforts.

Einwohner (2006:52) has called for a better understanding of activist experiences under repressive conditions as a way to elaborate our perspectives on the dynamics of identity work and impression management that facilitate collective resistance. We emphasize that repressive conditions are not only experienced when actors engage in normal activism, but across everyday settings and mundane activities where they must deal with unsympathetic others. Dealing with stigma is not limited to radical movements such as the WPM. All social movements are controversial and, consequently, activists of all stripes are stigmatized to some degree and devise ways to manage it (Linden and Klandermans 2006:214). It is especially important to understand how the dynamics of stigma, identity, and impression management play out in activist’s daily lives as these contexts make up so much of their lived experience.

Our case of extremely stigmatized radical racists provides a point for comparing and contrasting the experiences of activists in other (less radical) movements and across a variety of settings. The micro-level situational focus we emphasize is underutilized in social movement analysis, but is important for revealing what social movement members do in everyday life. This approach also reflects recent calls in the field to better develop research that addresses activists’ actual life experiences. Given the sheer volume of time that activists spend negotiating everyday situations, our approach has relevance well beyond the case of Aryan activists. We hope this study helps to stimulate more theorizing about resistance, identity, and the everyday acts that sustain movement members.

11. As several analysts have shown, the stigmatized may also openly engage the stigma in ways that redefine their deviance and “disavow their imputed inferiority” and shame (Anspach 1979; Crocker and Major 1989; Gussow and Tracey 1968:317; Jones et al. 1984).

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