



**FACHSTELLE GENDER UND
RECHTSEXTREMISMUS**

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Overlooked and Underrated: Women in Right-Wing Extremist Groups in Germany

Theoretical Analysis and Practical Recommendations for State
and Civil Society

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Introduction

During the last three decades there has been an increasing amount of research and monitoring conducted on the subject of right-wing women in Germany. Despite this, right-wing extremism continues to be perceived as predominantly a “male problem.” The stereotypical view sees white women as peaceful, non-violent, loving and caring individuals. This is highly problematic, as it hinders an accurate perspective on the power, influence and activities of right-wing women in Germany and therefore impedes the development of effective counter-strategies to deal with them. The general level of awareness concerning the racist, anti-Semitic and radical attitudes of girls and women in German civil society, in social work and education, in the media, as well as in local government is very low. There is a clear need for a gender-sensitive approach in all strategies and actions to prevent right-wing extremism.

Right-Wing Extremism in Germany and the Underrepresentation of Women

Over the last few decades, Neo-Nazi and other extreme right-wing organisations have grown in popularity, particularly amongst the youth. In many regions, but especially in the Eastern part of Germany, Neo-Nazi violence is an omnipresent threat for everyone who is assumed not to have a white German identity. Neo-Nazis and other extreme right-wing organisations are responsible for the growth of so-called “no-go areas” for People of Color and other Black people, immigrants, Jewish people, gays and lesbians, disabled and homeless people or for anyone who appears to be affiliated to an “alternative” youth culture. Right-wing families settle in various regions across Germany (East and West) and attempt to exert their dominance in these regions both through the assumption of political power, as well through dominating the local population in terms of numbers. Often Nazis are not immediately recognisable and right-wing women in particular work strategically to enforce their racist ideas on their environment by becoming heavily engaged with care and social work (for example in neighbourhoods, in nurseries and in sports clubs).

The stereotypical view of white women sees them as peaceful, non-violent, loving and caring individuals. Indeed, the popular image of the “peaceful woman” has existed since ancient times, for example in Greek and Roman mythology as well as in philosophical writings. Additionally, women are greatly underrepresented in historical research and academic writing. We are all too familiar, for example, with the standard representation of women assuming the caring role, taking care of the home, the fire and the children, while the men go hunting and assume the role of hunter-gatherers. However, women were actively involved in the German National Socialist movement in a variety of positions and functions as active perpetrators. And even after the end of World War II, women assumed positions in extreme right-wing organisations and political parties in West Germany. Some

were ideological masterminds and propagandists, working in leadership positions as well as participating as members of militant (and even terrorist) groups. Very often women were involved with youth work.

During the last 20 years, there has been a marked increase both in the number of active extreme right-wing women as well as a growth in the number of women's groups in the extreme right-wing scene. The possible roles and positions which can be assumed by women have also expanded: from activists, street fighters and gang leaders to local government politicians, and from demonstration coordinators to internet activists. Many right wing families settle in the rural areas of East and West Germany, with ultra-nationalist families often focussing on specific regions. Right-wing women seek to influence social issues in these areas by assuming roles in local government or simply by becoming "friendly neighbours." Girls and young women choose careers in the health, education and social sectors, whereas ultra-right-wing mothers often get involved in parent organisations at school or kindergarten.

Research on the role of women in right-wing organisations, which only began in earnest in feminist groups and academic circles during the 1980s, is now finally gaining recognition. Prior to this, women in Nazi Germany were conceived of exclusively as victims and right-wing women in the present day have been represented as passive participants. Yet still, state authorities, security services and the media rarely focus on women within right-wing extremist groups, entirely underestimating their sphere of influence. This needs to change.

What follows is a summary of policy recommendations in the following areas:

- Social Work and Education
- Pre-School Workers and School Teachers
- Right Wing Gender Ideology
- Media Representation
- Exit-Programs
- Sports Clubs
- Regional Parliament
- Police and Security Services

Recommendations for Social Work and Education

The German right-wing political party NPD encourages its female members and associates to study social work and education. There are a rising number of right-wing social-work students and many of these have their political identities revealed by antifascist groups. Teachers, students, principals rarely know how to react - there are no "best practice" guidelines yet. There are also documented cases of employees in youth centres, kindergartens, preschools and community centres noticing

themselves that a female colleague is active in the far right scene, or gaining this information from a journalist. It is quite a challenge for social workers and their institutions to react.

We recommend:

- The development of professional training courses on this issue for all education and social care workers
- Implementation of the topic in university courses
- Development and implementation of a principle of “democratic principle” for institutions – discussion on how to recognise and acknowledge right-wing affiliation and how to respond to this (including possible judicial steps)
- Awareness-raising within civil society and the responsibility of politicians

Recommendations for Education Pre-School Workers and School Teachers

It is important that professional training is made available for teachers and other childcare workers working in kindergartens and schools. Educational assistants require guidance on how to recognise right-wing individuals, especially mothers, as well as their ideology, clothing and lifestyles. Teachers and other childcare workers in kindergartens and schools need guidance and support on how to work with children who are growing up in right-wing families, as well as how to deal with those right-wing mothers who engage in the parents’ organisations and publically reveal their ideological standpoint (for example, reading racist children-books to their own and other children).

We recommend:

- Professional training and coaching for teachers concerning:
 - Working with children who reside in right-wing families
 - Working with parents
 - General awareness-raising and the development of specific policies to respond to right-wing ideology
- Intensifying inclusive and democratic approaches as well as gender-reflected concepts in kindergarten and schools
- Implementation of the topic on the curricula of colleges or universities of social work.

Training Providers: Development of Right-Wing Gender Ideology Expertise

Educational assistants, teachers and social workers working with young people need to be aware of the specific motives connected to gender ideology within far-right politics and pay particular

attention to the specific attraction for young women and young men. If educational professionals want to prevent young people from getting involved in the right-wing scene, their work needs to be gender-sensitive.

We recommend:

- Conduction of academic qualitative research on gender ideology in far-right groups, in particular an exploration of what the specific attraction is to children and young people
- Provision of training to educational assistants, teachers and social workers to
 - recognise the impact of gender on the motivation of young people to enter the right-wing scene, and
 - to be enabled to develop counter-strategies
- The inclusion of gender-reflected concepts in state-funded programs to prevent right-wing extremism

Media Representation of Right-Wing Women

There is already a lot of information concerning the strategies and actions of right-wing women in Germany (for example academic research and monitoring by civil society since the 1980s). Still, many media reports on right-wing extremism are either not at all gender-sensitive (for example documentaries in which only men appear) or are gender-biased (for example documentaries where women are presented in a very stereotypical way). Those reports ignore the role of gender ideology in extremist right-wing politics. One current example is the media coverage of the NSU (National Socialist Underground, German far-right terrorist group) murders. A leading perpetrator, Beate Zschäpe, is often presented as “the girlfriend of...” or only in connection to sexualized topics. Her racist ideology and violent actions are very much downplayed in comparison to those of male terrorists.

We recommend:

- The inclusion of this topic in the professional training of journalists
- The mainstreaming of gender-reflected perspectives in media reports

Exit-Programs

In Germany there are various privately- as well as state-funded programs for former right-wing activists who wish to exit the scene. To date, none of these programs have focussed specifically on the needs of women, even though these situations can be very gender-specific (for example when mothers with children try to leave the scene). Professionals in various fields (for example divorce

courts, social welfare offices, etc.) lack awareness of the situation of former right-wing women who are considering leaving the scene

We recommend:

- The conceptualisation and implementation of exit-programmes need to be gender-specific and gender-sensitive. State funded programs should include gender-mainstreaming strategies
- The development of professional training for legal professionals, civil servants and social workers

Sports Clubs

In 2011 Nadja Drygalla, was forced to leave the Olympic games rowing team because her long-term relationship to a Neo-Nazi activist became public. For at least four years prior, she and her boyfriend had been training in the sports club without any serious response or discussion being initiated by the club management. Their right-wing affiliation was common knowledge. The media response to the case was gender-biased and problematic: Drygalla was presented as a victim of circumstances and the responsibility of the association leaders was downplayed. Sports clubs (especially martial arts groups) often have right-wing members and there remains a need for the managers of sports clubs to perceive and deal with right-wing men and women in their membership.

We recommend:

- Awareness-raising training for the people in charge of running the sports associations
- The development and implementation of a “democratic principle” for sports association, in particular
 - How to recognise right-wing ideology
 - How to respond to it
- The conduction of campaigns within the sports club, and in the wider public

Regional Parliaments

Right-wing women are active in German regional parliament. Marianne Pastörs is a representative of the NPD in Mecklenburg-Vorpommern. She is however perceived and treated differently to, and with far more courtesy than, her male colleagues by representatives of the democratic parties: an activity which weakens the agreement not to cooperate with extreme right-wing representatives.

We recommend:

- Education and awareness-raising training for members of political parties and their representatives on the strategies of right-wing women and how to tackle them
- Awareness-raising training for members of the general public
- Making use of the mentoring programme “Lola for Lulu” which supports new politicians and makes them aware of the problem

Police and Security Services

Because police officers and members of the security services severely underestimated the role of women in right-wing extremist groups, the crimes of the NSU went undetected for years. Our research has shown that powerful combination of institutionalised racism and sexism resulted in a specific form of profiling which meant that white German women being “filtered out” in the search for suspects.

We recommend:

Professional development and awareness-raising training for police officers and members of the security services with regards to the perception of right-wing extremism, in particular from a gender perspective

A revision of the standards which govern the monitoring of right-wing groups. These should include a scrutiny of the role of right-wing women and their organisations

Professional development and awareness-raising training for police officers which specifically focuses on the role of right-wing women in acts of violence by Neo-Nazis. Often women are not interviewed or considered to be suspects, although they often provoke racist attacks by claiming that they have been harassed by “foreigners.” Although it is usually the right-wing men who become physically violent, the role that right-wing women play in these racist attacks should not be overlooked.

Our achievements

1. We have provided training sessions in kindergartens and preschools in different regions. We started a network of teachers, principals, administrators and heads of kindergartens who are aware of the problem and wish for further support to develop appropriate professional responses.
2. We have developed training programmes for leaders of sports associations in different regions (in particular martial arts groups) and started an open dialogue-process within the associations about the prevention of right-wing extremism. The goal has been to jointly develop “democratic principles” and practical advice with members and leaders.
3. We initiated a discussion with associations of schools of social work about how to introduce the topic into curricula as well as in “democratic principles.”

4. We have monitored and analysed the trial of Beate Zschäpe: We made specific recommendations for the parliamentary committee on gender-specific failings, which have included recommendations for training for police and security agencies as well as media outlets
5. We have initiated a discussion with a group of journalists who are aware of the gender-specific failures in the reporting on right-wing extremism. We have initiated a process of awareness-raising; we have influenced media coverage in general and cooperated with schools of journalism.
6. We have entered into a cooperation with state representatives against child molestation: how to identify right-wing activists within non-professional groups working against child abuse and how to react. We have also provided awareness-raising training and coaching to a network of grass-roots organisations. As a result we have created a 60 page-brochure that has been widely distributed to centres for victims, and which is publically discussed.
7. We have begun the process of informing associations about this topic. We cooperated with different associations, for example the “German Women’s Circle”, which until this point had not dealt with the topic right wing extremism at all. We also organized a conference with them about “right-wing women” and we continue to plan our next public campaigns.
8. We provide coaching for youth clubs and community centres about how to identify the problem and how to responding to it. We are putting together a compendium of educational recommendations.