



# Defiant conformists: gender and resistance against genocide

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## Abstract

This article argues that college-educated women play a crucial part in successful resistance against genocide because they are more likely to forge secure inter-regional networks and, consequently, better able to shelter victims of mass-persecution than their male peers. We develop our argument through a study of Jewish rescue networks in the Netherlands during the Holocaust. College-educated women were especially valuable during rescue efforts due to their ability to operate as *defiant conformists*. These women – a small minority who were anything but traditional – could more fully exploit their biographical availability and university networks by concealing interregional resistance work through the strategic performance of traditional feminine roles. Statistical analyses of geocoded rescue networks reveal that rescue networks involving college-educated women were more successful because they funneled Jews across the country without getting exposed. More in-depth exploration of distinct networks identifies three dramaturgical strategies that college-educated women deployed to facilitate clandestine and geographically expansive rescue work: 1) strategic coquetry; 2) strategic self-devaluation; 3) strategic motherhood and wedlock. Taken together, our findings suggest we should focus on how gender and other forms of social status interact to produce the relational and dramaturgical underpinnings of civilian agency in times of emergency.

**Keywords** Gender · Resistance · Genocide · Holocaust · Civilian agency · War

Over the last two decades, feminist scholarship on nonviolent resistance has revealed that “gender-blind” research promotes a biased account of privileged actors and overlooks important relational underpinnings of mobilization (Berry, 2017, 2018; Krause, 2019). This article examines the gendered and relational dimensions of civilian resistance during the Holocaust by investigating rescue networks for victims of mass persecution. Rescue efforts by male civilians are widely studied and

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recognized (e.g. Braun, 2019), but gendered analyses of rescue behavior are less common and have produced inconsistent and typically cursory results (Anderson, 1993; Becker & Eagly, 2004; Henry, 1986; Fagin-Jones & Midlarsky, 2007).

We believe this is the case because scholars of gendered rescue do not fully engage with ideas developed at the intersection of gender and collective action theories, which highlight the importance of role-play (Connell, 1987; Gallo-Cruz, 2020; Kandiyoti, 1988) intersectional effects (Berry, 2017; Einwohner, 1999; Viterna, 2013) and gendered network effects (Carpenter & Moore, 2014). Drawing on these ideas, we argue that the interaction between gender and other forms of social status can create clandestine and effective opportunities for collective rescue operations as it allows for the activation of social networks through the strategic exploitation of gender stereotypes. To be more specific, we argue that college-educated women can play a crucial role in protecting victims of mass persecution. College-educated women are especially valuable during rescue efforts due to their ability to operate as *defiant conformists*. Regardless of gender, university participation makes people biographically available for rescue operations by reducing the personal constraints on high-risk collective action (Fox & Brehm, 2018; McAdam, 1986) and unlocks access to large extensive networks that transcend regional boundaries (Staniland, 2018; Morris 1986). Regardless of college education, gender roles provide women with distinct strategies to create safe spaces (Gallo-Cruz, 2020). However, it is the interplay between gender and college education that has a particularly powerful impact on rescue success as it simultaneously shapes networks, personal constraints, and strategies. Woman who entered higher education in the 1930s were anything but traditional or ordinary and had a unique disposition to exploit this configuration.

We develop the arguments outlined above through an integrative multi-method analysis (Seawright, 2016) of Dutch rescue of Jews during WWII. We proceed in two steps. First, based extensive bodies of post-war testimonies, we present a quantitative analysis on rescue networks and Jewish evasion throughout the Netherlands. We compare college-educated women rescuers to all other rescuers to establish that, indeed, college-educated women – and not college-educated people or women per se – were more likely to establish secure interregional rescue networks and shelter larger numbers of Jews. In addition, this quantitative section rules out the possibility that alternative mechanisms such as age or youthful adventurousness, social class and political networks or preferences can account for these patterns.

Second, to gain more insight into why this was the case, we zero in on prominent college-educated female rescuers who saved large numbers of Jews. This in-depth qualitative analysis of autobiographies, post-war testimonies and secondary literature identifies three distinct roles that non-traditional college-educated women performed to facilitate and support interregional resistance networks: 1) strategic coquetry; 2) strategic self-devaluation; 3) strategic motherhood and wedlock. While the Dutch women involved were defiant for their time in their pursuit of higher education, they conformed to gendered stereotypes during rescue activities because this allowed them to fly under the radar as they funneled Jews across the country and carried out other rescue work that typically required risky long-distance travel. As a result, these *defiant conformists* were able to exploit their gendered biographical availability and university networks to forge secure interregional relationships. Put

together, our findings have important implications for the study of gender and clandestine mobilization as they reveal how gender interacts with other forms of social status and positioning to shape the possibilities for clandestine mobilization.

## The rescue of Jews in the Netherlands during the Holocaust

In 1940, the Nazis defeated the Dutch armed forces and took over what was then Holland. After this invasion, the Nazis occupied the Netherlands for five years. They began their systematic oppression by restricting Jewish daily life, registering Jews, forbidding “racial mixing” and requiring permits for day-to-day activities. Within two years, they started mass deportations to Eastern European death camps like Auschwitz. By the end of the war the Nazis killed 73 percent of Jews in the Netherlands, the highest murder rate of Jews in Western Europe (Flim, 2018; Griffioen & Zeller, 2008).

Only 28,500 Jews in the Netherlands managed to escape deportation. With increasing oppression, escape and hiding became more difficult, and only a small number of non-Jewish civilians stepped up to help the Jewish population. Key Dutch rescue organizations were created in response to the violence and discrimination. These rescue organizations played a crucial role in the protection of Jews, which often required high-risk missions to transport people, documents and other vital information across the country.

With time, the need for broader networks and interregional coordination became important. Localized helpers realized that, despite their best intentions, they could not manage to keep Jews sheltered for prolonged periods of time without more help and extensive contact points across the country. As rescue networks expanded, the coordination and the transmission of important information and people across regions became crucial. Relocation, in particular, was crucial to retain secrecy and protect Jewish people (Braun, 2019). Some rescuers were more effective than others.

## Existing research on gender and rescue

Many academics have lumped men and women together when analyzing and explaining rescue work and have failed to discuss gender differences explicitly in their main theories (Braun, 2019; Gross, 1994). With regard to the Holocaust more specifically, studies that do acknowledge gender in rescue work have produced inconsistent results. First, a series of quantitative studies find no significant gender differences in participation in Jewish rescue missions (Fagin-Jones & Midlarsky, 2007). Contradicting these findings, other academics have argued women’s domestic duties limited, courage or access to the social networks that spark resistance activities (Henry, 1986). Finally, some scholarship suggests the exact opposite and argues that women were more likely to rescue Jews. While some have made brief note of women in active roles at the forefront of resistance (Poznanski, 1998), the more common argument here is that women sheltered Jews in need because of their inherent domesticity and maternal impulses (Moore, 1997). Moore, for instance, writes:

“[T]he general conclusion; reinforced by research from Germany and elsewhere, suggests that matriarchal nurturing impulses were a major feature in this predominance of female participation in the hiding of Jews” (Moore, 1997, 117). Along those lines, psychologists suggest that women were more likely to engage in Holocaust rescue activities because they had more empathy (Anderson, 1993) and compassion (Oliner & Oliner, 1988; Becker & Eagly, 2004).

These inconsistent findings can probably be explained by conceptual confusion. There are four conceptual issues with the rescue literature outlined above. First, work on women rescuers during the Holocaust typically essentializes women as caretakers who were tied to domestic roles and detached from male-dominated public and political spheres. Yet social mobilization research from conflicts elsewhere shows that the essentialization of women in patriarchal societies as domestic actors can lead oppressors to underestimate their political and social potency, thereby creating opportunities for action (Gallo-Cruz, 2020; Thomas, 2021). We use this work to support our findings that women rescuers during the Holocaust were able to take advantage of gendered essentialisms and stereotypes to become more effective.

Second, we believe research needs to deploy an intersectional perspective to explain the success of women rescuers. Most of the rescue research that mentions female rescuers assumes a fixed category of “women”, implying their identities are static (Brown, 2017). However, intersectionality theory tells us that women are “constituted as women” as a result of multiple intersections—or interactions—between gender and other identity facets like nationality, race, sexuality, culture and religion (Connell, 1987; Crenshaw, 1990). These interactions or co-formations of identity result in different behavioral outcomes and opportunities for civilian agency in war. Indeed, broader wartime social mobilization scholarship has revealed that the success of movements is influenced by how gender intersects with other forms of status and positionality (Berry, 2017; Krause, 2019; Viterna, 2013).

Third, scholars who have focused on rescue and gender commonly look at gender as an individual characteristic instead of examining how gender shapes collective networks. From recent work on rescue, it has become clear that the protection of threatened neighbors often requires collective action and the use of pre-existing social ties to develop and sustain connections (Braun, 2019; Fox & Brehm, 2018; Gross, 1994). Using the evidence below, we argue that if one wants to understand rescue operations one must also consider the impact gender has on the broader social networks in which rescuers are embedded before and during times of conflict (Carpenter & Moore, 2014).

Fourth, scholarship on gender and resistance against genocide often collapses participation in rescue operations and the production of *successful* rescue operations (e.g. Fagin-Jones & Midlarsky, 2007). Scholarship on collective action in general (Giugni Annual Review of, 1998) and rescue operations in particular has revealed that the determinants of successful operations are distinct from the determinants of mobilization (Braun, 2019).

We address the four issues above by arguing that the interaction between gender and social status can increase the effectiveness of collective rescue activities because this interaction activates social networks and biographical availability through the strategic exploitation of gender stereotypes. In particular, we argue that

college-educated women in the Netherlands anchored resistance against the Nazis because – compared to their male peers – they could more fully exploit their biographical availability and secure interregional networks to transport both resources and people. Below we will first explain why college education is important for the formation of interregional ties. We then explore why women were better positioned to exploit these network opportunities through the strategic deployment of gender norms.

## Theoretical background

Academic work on insurgency (Staniland, 2014), clandestine networks (Braun, 2019), resistance organizations (Finkel, 2017) and social movements (Morris, 1986) has revealed powerful resistance often involves challenging much stronger opponents across wide swathes of territory, and this requires the establishment of long-distance communication channels (Finkel, 2017), the procurement of weapons, ammunition, illegal documents and others supportive materials from disparate regions with unique access to resources. It also entails the transportation of these resources across space, the establishment of interregional networks of well-hidden shelters that enable movements to funnel persecuted individuals to places where they are less visible (Braun, 2019), and the formation of interregional identities and coalitions that can anchor strong resistance for prolonged periods of time (Staniland, 2014).

Despite the importance of interregional ties for the organization of sustainable resistance campaigns, relatively little is known about how they are formed and maintained. Nonetheless authors on movements, resistance networks and insurgent organizations all seem to agree that institutes of higher education are important hubs for ties that transcend local boundaries. Universities have formed the backbone for interregional Islamist movements (Staniland, 2014), nation-spanning student networks sheltering Jews (Braun, 2019) and broad-based mobilization for civil rights (Morris, 1986). As young people are drawn to universities from all over the country, colleges provide an important source of interregional ties. Equally important, college students are more likely to form the backbone of interregional networks as they often lack the personal constraints that increase costs of mobilization such as full-time employment, marriage or family responsibilities (McAdam, 1986). This biographical availability is an important force in shaping movement participation in general and participation in rescue missions (Fox & Brehm, 2018). While biographical availability only facilitates resistance during college, networks are more durable in that they can be activated even after people graduate.

However, the existence of broad networks with biographically available recruits does not automatically create strong and successful resistance against genocide as both the odds and costs of detection are extremely high. When compared to their male peers, women college students are better able to exploit the interregional networks unlocked by universities when repressors adhere to traditional gender norms and scripts of appropriate behavior. In this case women play a more important role than men by maintaining long distance connections between resistance operations

in different local communities. Women can exploit the gendered expectations of (typically male) repressors by strategically playing up essentialist feminine roles and scripts (Connell, 1987) that enhance security in general (Gallo-Cruz, 2020; Kandiyoti, 1988) and conceal interregional rescue work of a public nature in particular.

Women living in patriarchal societies are underestimated, and this general underestimation opens up a “gendered opportunity” (Parush, 2004) for resistance work. The misogynistic and gendered contexts in which women operate equip them with a “gendered cloak of femininity” (Gallo-Cruz, 2020) that allow them to take part in resistance activities without being caught. Women can take advantage of their “benefit of marginality” (Parush, 2004) by engaging in what Erving Goffman would call “impression management”, curating “frontstage” performances in order to present themselves in a particular way to the world (the “audience”). Goffman notes that performers may present a particular frontstage image of themselves for their own benefit, or for the benefit of others (Goffman, 1956). If attempting to present a “false” reality or perception of themselves, performers “must take care to enliven their performances with appropriate expressions, exclude from their performances expressions that might discredit the impression being fostered, and take care lest the audience impute unintended meanings” (Goffman, 1956, 44).

Women resisters engage in creative identity management (Einwohner, 2006) by exploiting context-specific notions of what men and women were supposed to be and how they were supposed to act through gendered performances. Through the “everyday” gendered performances we outline below, the Dutch women became much more effective and successful rescuers and were able to achieve much bigger movement goals. Although gendered performances may be internalized and we may “do gender” on a subconscious level (West & Zimmerman, 1987), such performances may also be strategic and conscious decisions (Tibbals, 2007). The strategic performances analyzed here fit under what Connell calls “emphasized femininity”, a term she uses to discuss women’s conventionalized behaviors. Emphasized femininity can include “the display of sociability rather than technical competence”, “fragility”, male “ego stroking”, “sexual receptivity”, “motherhood”, and the “acceptance of marriage and childcare” (Connell, 1987, 187). Connell notes, importantly, that “[t]his kind of femininity is performed, and performed especially to men” (Connell, 1987, 187). Emphasized femininity becomes particularly useful when women are aware of its potential and figure out how to use it to their advantage.

Below, we expand upon these ideas by developing a comprehensive gendered and performative analysis of Dutch women who strategically “passed” (Einwohner, 2006) as traditional and compliant supporters of the Nazi regime, concealing their true selves and emotions in order to advance broader rescue and resistance agendas. Put differently, they temporarily engaged in what Gayatri Spivak calls “strategic essentialism” (Eide, 2010) by exploiting traditional (essentialized) gender roles in order to achieve significant outcomes in the long-term. Such strategic performances reveal that doing “normatively acceptable versions of gender” can be a conscious and strategic form of resistance to achieve a broader goal (Tibbals, 2007, 731).

There are several ways in which the performance of emphasized femininity can facilitate the formation and concealment of long-distance networks. In this paper we theorize three: 1) strategic motherhood and wedlock; 2) strategic coquetry; and 3)

strategic self-devaluation. Each of these strategies enabled women to travel and hide their resistance activities.

The first strategy is women's strategic performance of motherhood and wedlock to conceal important rescue activities. In many cultures, mothers and wives are perceived as apolitical, passive and peaceful (Berry, 2017; Noonan, 1995). As a result, these gendered roles can serve as a cover for other activities and mobilization efforts (Gallo-Cruz, 2020; Noonan, 1995). Women have strategically used gendered roles like motherhood and marriage to mobilize for peace and protest against war, and such roles allowed them to remain politically invisible to repressors while successfully establishing both national and transnational networks (Gallo-Cruz, 2020). They have engaged in the strategic use of motherhood in violent settings during the Argentine, Bosnian, Chilean, Colombian, Indonesian, Liberian and Rwandan conflicts (Berry, 2017; Gallo-Cruz, 2020; Krause, 2019; Noonan, 1995). Although the women cited in the aforementioned scholarship were actually mothers and were not performing motherhood, such work reveals the widespread nature of the strategic emphasis on motherhood and marriage and how it can facilitate resistance efforts through the formation of interregional ties.

The second strategy that facilitates rescue work across distances and the establishment of networks is strategic coquetry. Watkins, Smith and Aquino write that “scholars have been reticent to talk about the use of sexuality as an instrumental tool of social influence that can be used to gain compliance, assets, favor, or any other desired end” (Watkins et al., 2013, 174). Addressing this gap, they focus on strategic sexual performances, which can include kissing, flirtation, winking, and banter, among others. When engaging with heterosexual men, women “may trade on subtle sexual performances, such as flirtation, that make men feel masculine, potent, and desirable” in order to achieve their specific goals (Watkins et al., 2013, 177). References to strategic coquetry are speckled throughout wartime literature. For instance, focusing on the Liberian wartime context, Utas references a woman civilian who carefully developed and maintained a relationship with an armed actor in order to ensure her own safety and protection (Utas, 2005). Relatedly, Sharoni et al. note that during WWII British women spies would go to checkpoints and flirt with German soldiers “in an attempt to avoid their baggage, which may have concealed weapons or radios, from being searched” (Sharoni et al., 2016, 80). There are also examples of Jewish Communist women who “used their charm” to recruit German men for the communist cause (Poznanski, 1998, 242). These references, although brief, point to broader patterns of strategic coquetry at a global level.

The third strategy we focus on is strategic self-devaluation. In societal spaces that expect women to be passive and uneducated, the performance of incompetence may serve to accomplish challenging movement goals, such as cross-national rescue work. Such performances fit under what James Scott calls “feigned ignorance”, a term he uses to describe everyday resistance peasants used to push back against restrictions posed by dominant classes (Scott, 1985). Focusing on women specifically, Silvia Gherardi and Barbara Poggio relatedly look at the “tactical use of ‘female’ stereotypes” in male-dominant organizational settings and find that women may act clueless and conceal how much they know “to survive and, perhaps, get ahead in settings, which tended to be hostile towards them, or at any rate, treated

them with suspicion” (Gherardi & Poggio, 2001, 254). In other words, performances of ignorance and inferiority as strategic self-devaluation can be used as part of a broader risk-management strategy.

Through the combination of broader network access from their universities and the strategic performances of the aforementioned gendered roles, Dutch college-educated women carried out important work as *defiant conformists* during WWII. Because of their access to strong networks and they could also act more freely and go more easily “under the radar”, facing considerably fewer risks than men, who, as discussed below, the Nazis already viewed in a much more suspicious light. As a result, they were more successful than their male counterparts when taking advantage of university networks across spaces and protecting Jews. Importantly, college-educated women were able to play the role of defiant conformists because they were anything but traditional or ordinary. In the 1930s, they were extraordinary women who were able to enter the Dutch university system. They were special outsiders who could strategically engage in roleplay and exploit networks. Our argument is therefore not challenged by but openly embraces arguments on selection effects. This body of work has demonstrated that we often overestimate the effect of education because selection in higher education is not random but correlates with other factors, (e.g. Heckman, 1979). Indeed, we believe it is the selection of special women that produced defiant conformity.

## Quantitative analysis

The analysis of resistance activities is not an easy one as it is nearly impossible to observe and study present-day resistance activities because the actors need to limit their public exposure to protect themselves. Archival documents on past resistance movements open opportunities for academic analysis because such groups are no longer active or under threat, and therefore need not exist in secret. Furthermore, after wars and with the arrival of new forms of government, many resistance movements have stepped out of hiding to be publicly recognized for their work. This can lead to many new archival and testimonial resources (Braun, 2019). We take advantage of these resources to examine resistance activities from a specific period: the clandestine protection of Jews during the Holocaust in the Netherlands.

An advantage of a focus on the Netherlands is that the German occupiers considered it a kin nation. As a result, perceptions of ethnic and racial differences between Dutch Gentiles and German occupiers were minimal. This allows us to zero in on the intersection between gender and education while keeping intersections between race and ethnicity constant. In addition, this focus allows us to draw on different quantitative and qualitative datasets. We rely on an integrated mixed method analysis (Seawright, 2016). In this section we will use quantitative data to assess our thesis in three ways. First, we would expect that—net of general gender and college education effects—women with a college education were more likely to have secure interregional ties. Second, we would expect that—net of general gender and college education effects—women with a college education rescued more Jews. Third, we



would expect that the number of Jews rescued by college-educated women can be attributed to the latter (secure interregional ties).

## Data & variables

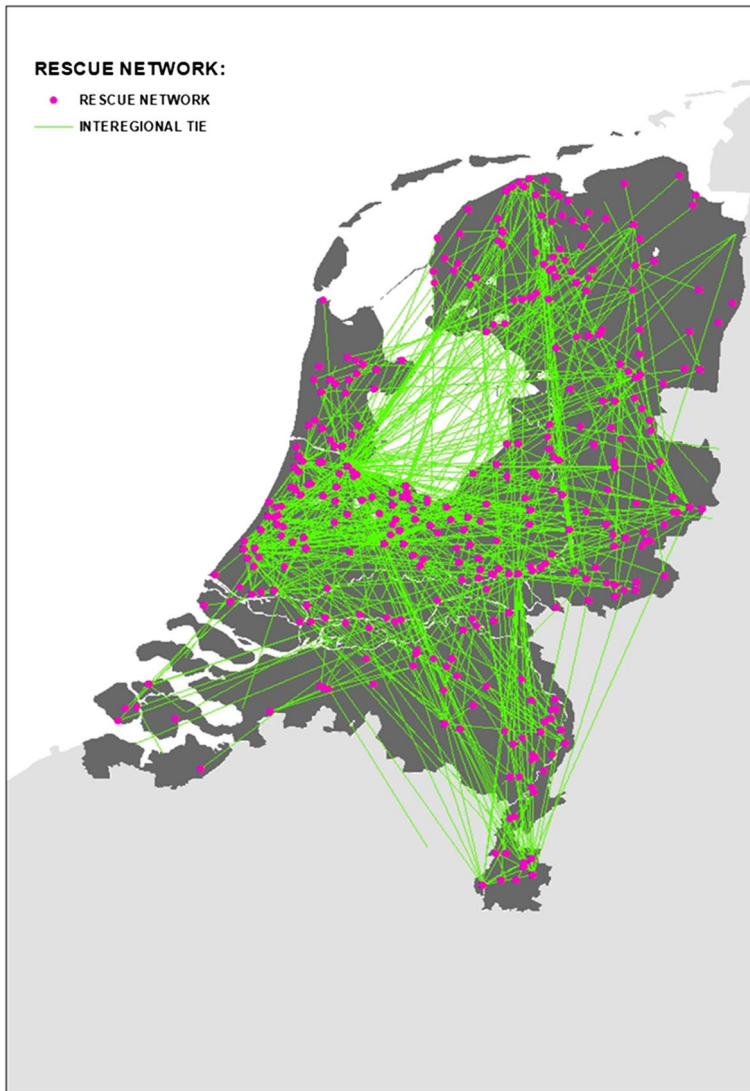
To investigate the above, we needed information on rescuers, their success, gender, education and interregional networks. At the core of our analysis lies a dataset that provides geo-referenced information on a large majority of Dutch rescuers and the social networks in which they were embedded. The dataset was constructed using post-war testimonies compiled by Yad Vashem, a research and memorial institute dedicated to preserving information about the Holocaust and honoring the memory of those who perished. The Yad Vashem rescuer database is a collection of names and information about non-Jewish individuals who helped to save Jews during the Holocaust. After a nomination, Yad Vashem started a multi-stage investigation. In addition to archival work, interviews with Jewish survivors and other rescuers were conducted to assess the trustworthiness of the nominee. A public commission (supervised by a Supreme Court justice) examined all Yad Vashem entries, and individual rescuers who passed approval were awarded a medal in addition to public acknowledgement and documentation in the database (Gutman et al., 2003). Rather than use pseudonyms, we have chosen to use the real names of the rescuers out of respect for their work and have described their histories with color to recognize them as human beings who lived unique lives that went well beyond the data presented below.

Based on the testimonies, we coded the place of rescue, the number of Jews who were sheltered, whether a rescuer was arrested or not as well as the rescuer's gender, social class, age, political involvement, church membership and professional background. The latter piece of information was used to reconstruct the level of education of all rescuers. We marked rescuers as college-educated if they were attending university during the war, had attended university before the war or were employed in a profession that required an academic degree. We used the number of rescued Jews as an indicator of rescue success.

In addition, the Yad Vashem files proved to be particularly useful for the reconstruction of the social structure of clandestine organization and activities, as almost all records begin with a brief description of how different rescuers and Jews met one another. Coding this information allowed us to assess who worked with whom and where. (See the Online Appendix for example testimonies.) We marked rescuers as having a relationship if the testimonies mentioned they funneled Jews, illegal documents, food supplies or other resources to each other. This resulted in a database of 1,013 rescuers who were active in 269 different counties and formed 5,380 inter-relationships.

Although most network ties were formed between rescuers active in the same locality, 18 percent of all 5,380 ties transcended municipal borders. Of all rescuers 53 percent had at least one interregional tie. As rescuers often got arrested not all these ties provided secure connections between regions. We therefore marked all ties that involved at least one rescuer (of either or both rescuers forming the tie)

who got arrested during the war and removed them from the analysis. This resulted in the removal of 28 percent of all ties. In total 32 percent of all rescuers in our file had secure interregional ties (i.e. ties connecting different counties that did not involve arrests of either of the two rescuers forming the tie). These secure interregional ties are mapped in Fig. 1, which reveals that secure interregional networks covered almost the whole of the Netherlands. We marked rescuers as being engaged in secure interregional rescue networks if they formed at least one secure tie (a tie via which neither of the rescuers got arrested) to a different county.



**Fig. 1** Secure Interregional rescue ties in the Netherlands 1940–1945

## Descriptive analysis

As a first cut at the data we compared the proportion of college-educated people among rescuers and the general working population in 1947, the closest census year for which data on university enrollment is available. Table 1 reveals that rescue networks do not at all mirror the population in terms of college education. Both men and women with college degrees were strongly overrepresented among rescuers. The share of men with a college education was 31 times (12.8 divided by 0.405) among rescuers than among the general population. But in line with the main argument put forward in this article, overrepresentation was even more pronounced for college-educated women. While 7.5 percent of all rescuers were college-educated women, only 0.06 percent of the Dutch population aged eighteen years or older went to college, making the share of college-educated women 123 times (7.5 divided by 0.061) higher among rescuers than among the general population. A note of caution is warranted. While in our analysis of rescuers, we look at people who attended college or were employed in jobs that require college education, the population data marks all college graduates. This introduces two measurement problems. First, there might have been college graduate rescuers who did not work in jobs that required a college degree. Second, some of our rescuers might have never finished college. While the former seems plausible, we know that the latter is quite rare given that dropout rates in the Netherlands are incredibly low (CBS, 1958). If we consider the former bias, it seems reasonable to assume that the overrepresentation of college-educated female rescuers is even higher than what the data suggest.

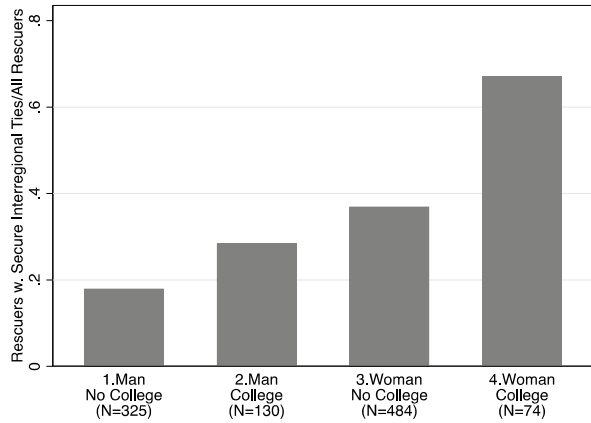
Figure 2 breaks down rescue success (measured as the number of rescued Jews) and secure interregional relations between rescuers by gender and education level. The top panel of Fig. 2 (Fig. 2a) visualizes the proportion of rescuers with secure interregional ties by different gender and education categories. The first thing to note is that, regardless of education level, less than 30 percent of all male rescuers formed interregional ties during the war. The contrast with women rescuers is stark. Whereas almost 40 percent of women without a college education established secure interregional ties, close to 70 percent of all college-educated women rescuers were embedded in secure networks that transcended local borders. This confirms the notion that the interplay between gender and college education—and not college education or gender per se—shaped resistance against genocide.

Do these interregional ties actually save lives? Based on the Yad Vashem testimonies, we can make rough estimations of how many Jewish lives depended on a

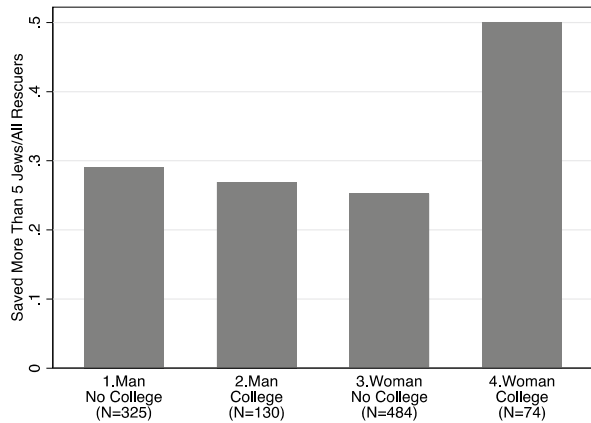
**Table 1** College-educated Rescuers compared to the General Population (CBS, 1952)

	Dutch Population (> 18) 1947	Rescuers	Ratio Population/Rescuers
Total #	9,625,499	1,013	
% College-educated Men	0.405%	12.8%	31.707
% College-educated Women	.061%	7.5%	123.130

**Fig. 2** Rescue of Jews and Secure Interregional Ties by Gender & College Education



(a) Proportion Rescuers w. Secure Interregional Ties/All Rescuers



(b) Proportion Rescuers who Rescue more than 5 Jews/All Rescuers

particular rescuer. Unfortunately, for some cases the testimonies only provide vague descriptions instead of exact numbers of sheltered Jews. Most importantly, 107 rescuers were listed as saving “many” Jews as opposed to a precise number. To deal with this problem we deploy a somewhat crude measurement strategy, focusing on rescuers who saved more or less than five Jews. We mark rescuers who saved “many” Jews as saving more than five. Since this threshold is arbitrary, it is important to note that below we analyze rescue success using different thresholds. Figure 2b compares the number of saved Jews across gender and education level. A similar pattern to what we observed for interregional ties emerges. Whereas between 20 and 30 percent of all men and women without a college degree saved more than five Jews, 60 percent of all college-educated women saved more than five Jews. Hence, while gender and college education do not seem to influence the intensity

of rescue activities independently, the intersection of the two does. If we compare Fig. 2a and b, it therefore seems plausible that the rescue success of college-educated women can at least in part be attributed to their ability to forge secure interregional ties.

## Multivariate regression

To investigate the relationship between gender, college, secure interregional ties and rescue success more systematically, we deploy a multivariate analysis via which we condition on age, involvement of left-wing groups, church membership, social class, regional demographics and the repressive capacity of the Nazis.

Beginning with age, there is a possibility that interregional networks and rescue success are not driven by the interplay of college education and gender but by the interplay of gender and age. Perhaps young women were better able to strategically deploy feminist roles when compared to their older peers because they were more adventurous (London, 1970) or more biographically available (Fox & Brehm, 2018). To control for this possibility, we include an interaction term between gender and a dummy variable that marks all rescuers who were between the ages of 18 and 25 during the war.

We also explore whether the distinct rescue patterns of college-educated women could be accounted for by the fact that they were more likely to be engaged in the left-wing political movements that dominated some college campuses. These movements themselves and not access to college could have made interregional networks available to women. To account for this, we interacted gender and a dummy variable that demarcated women active in left-wing rescue organizations.

In a recent book, Braun (2019) highlights the importance of minority churches for the formation of rescue networks in general and interregional networks in particular. To explore this relationship, we therefore also marked rescuers who were members of minority congregations. In particular, we consider Catholics in protestant counties, Dutch Reformed in Catholic counties and members of smaller Christian congregations as religious minorities.

Two additional sets of control variables were obtained by pairing the rescuer file with municipality level statistics. As we wanted to avoid comparing municipalities that were completely different in terms of ethnic composition, the first set included basic demographics such as logged population size in 1930 and the proportion of the local population that was Jewish in 1941. This data was obtained from Beekink et al. (2003). The second set taps the repressive capacity of the Nazis. Previous research has revealed that the strength of Nazis and the support they were able to obtain from local populations varied greatly across the Netherlands. It seems plausible that repressive capacity and mobilization potential would influence both the nature of rescue networks and deportation (Croes & Tammes, 2004). Therefore, we controlled for the percentage of the population voting for the Dutch National Socialist Party before the German invasion, the per capita number of auxiliary police officers deployed to track down Jews, the percentage of police officers who were members of the National Socialist Movement and the per capita number of people

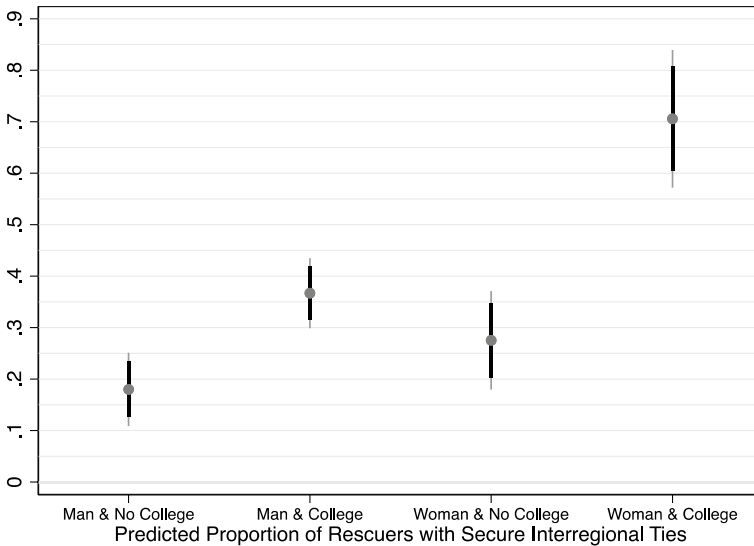
working for the Nazi security apparatus in charge of Jewish deportations (the SIPO-SD). Voting data were acquired from the Central Bureau for Statistics (CBS, 1937). All other data on repressive capacity was obtained from the post-war purge archives of the Ministry of Justice housed at the *Nationaal Archief* in Den Hague (2016). The different measures of repressive strength could not be captured in a reliable index variable, suggesting that each of them demonstrates different dimensions of local repression.

Finally, it is possible that college-educated women came from more affluent backgrounds and had more resources available to facilitate their rescue activities. To investigate this possibility, we coded the professions of the parents of all college-educated women rescuers, and marked rescuers as being from a higher-class background if their parents had finished their higher education studies. Based on the testimonies, we were able to acquire this information for 62 of the 76 cases. Only 26 of these 62 women rescuers were from distinctly higher-class backgrounds (i.e. their parents were employed in jobs that required a college degree). Somewhat surprisingly, the data reveals that higher-class women rescuers had less secure interregional ties and rescued fewer Jews. Descriptives and sources for all variables in the model can be found in Table 1 and Table 2 of the Online Appendix.

If our main thesis holds, we would hypothesize three things. First, we would expect that—net of general gender and college education effects—women with a college education were more likely to have secure interregional ties. Second, we would expect that—net of general gender and college education effects—women with a college education rescued more Jews. Third, we would expect that the number of Jews rescued by college-educated women can be attributed to the latter (secure interregional ties). Although the third hypothesis might at first sight appear tautological, it is not. It is for instance possible that secure interregional ties are irrelevant to rescue success. More importantly, even when secure ties are relevant it is possible that the relationship between college-educated woman and rescue is not mediated by them.

We assess the first hypothesis by regressing whether a rescuer had a secure interregional tie on the interaction between gender and college education while conditioning on all the control variables outlined above. Full Models can be found in Table 3 of the Online Appendix. Logistic regression results with county clustered standard errors are visualized in Fig. 3. In these visualizations we fix all independent variables at their median. The regression analysis displays a remarkable resemblance with the descriptive analysis presented above, confirming that the models capture the data well. Male rescuers without a college education had less than a 20 percent chance of having a secure interregional tie. Both gender and college education have a small but significant effect on the presence of secure interregional ties. Both men with a college education and women without a college education have around a 30 percent chance of having a secure interregional tie that can be used to funnel resources and Jews from one locality to the other. However, it is the interaction between gender and education that has the greatest effect. More than 70 percent of all college-educated women rescuers established rescue networks with other parts of the country without getting arrested.

To investigate the second and third hypotheses, we regress the number of rescued Jews on the interaction between gender and college education while conditioning



**Fig. 3** Predicted Proportion of Rescuers with Secure Interregional Ties by Gender and College Education with 99 (gray) and 95 (black) % confidence intervals (fixing all independent variables at their median)

on all the control variables outlined above. To assess the extent to which the rescue advantage of college-educated women is driven by their formation of secret interregional network ties, we ran two sets of models. Whereas the second set of models includes a dummy variable marking rescuers who formed secure interregional ties, the first set of models excludes this variable. Although establishing mediation effects with observational data is not free from problems, comparing across these two sets of models could shed some light on how much of the rescue advantage of college-educated women can be accounted for by secure interregional ties. If the difference in rescue activities between college-educated rescuers and their fellow rescuers disappears after inclusion of the network measure, we can be more confident that interregional ties play a substantial role in the rescue successes of college-educated women. We use different thresholds to distinguish between rescue intensity. To be more specific, we use logistic regression analysis to distinguish between rescuers who helped shelter thresholds of more than 5, 10 or 25 Jews. In addition, we look at the estimated count of rescued Jews using a negative binomial framework.

Full models can be found in the Online Appendix. The results are visualized in Figs. 4 and 5. Again we fix all independent variables at their median. While Fig. 4a, c, e and g present the interaction effects of gender and education when we exclude the secure interregional tie measure, Fig. 4b, d, f and h present the interaction effects of gender and education when we include the secure interregional tie measure. Figure 5 summarizes the independent effect of having secure interregional ties on the rescue of Jews.

Figure 4a reveals that 31 percent of male rescuers without a college education helped rescue more than five Jews. The percentage of male rescuers with a college education

**Fig. 4** Rescue of Jews by Gender, College Education and Secure Interregional Ties with 99 (gray) and 95 (black) % confidence intervals. **a** > 5 Jews & No Secure Interregional Tie, **b** > 5 Jews & Secure Interregional Tie, **c** > 10 Jews & No Secure Interregional Tie, **d** > 10 Jews & Secure Interregional Tie, **e** > 25 Jews & No Secure Interregional Tie, **f** > 25 Jews & Secure Interregional Tie, **g** # Jews & No Secure Interregional Tie, **h** # Jews & Secure Interregional Tie

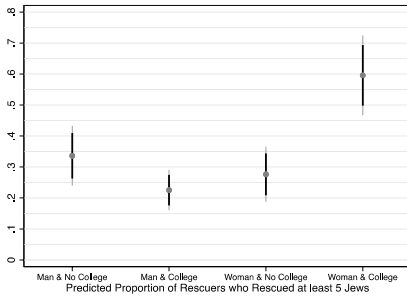
(27 percent) was not significantly different, while that of women rescuers without a college education was slightly but significantly lower (23 percent), suggesting that the impact of gender and education per se was fairly limited. In contrast and in line with our expectations, more than 60 percent of all college-educated women rescuers helped to rescue more than five Jews, revealing that gender and education interacted to shape rescue activities.

What happens after we include the secure interregional tie measure in the model? Fig. 5 shows that having a secure interregional tie has a strong and positive influence on the rescue of Jews. Having a secure interregional tie increases the likelihood of rescuing more than five Jews by 20 percent. Comparing Fig. 4a with Fig. 4b sheds some light on the extent to which the rescue activities of college-educated women are shaped by the formation of secure interregional ties. Controlling for the presence of secure interregional ties decreases the independent effect of being a college-educated woman on rescue activities by 12 percent (60–48 percent). Although we need to be skeptical when modelling mediation effects when using observational data, this reduction provides at least suggestive evidence for our third hypothesis that a considerable part of the rescue advantage of college-educated women can be accounted for by their ability to maintain interregional ties without getting discovered.

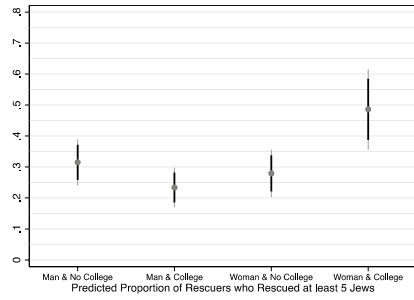
The remainder of the models reveal that these results become even more pronounced when we use different thresholds or the estimated numbers of rescued Jews as independent variables. In all models we see that both the interplay of gender and college education (Fig. 4a, c, e and g) as well as the presence of secure interregional ties have a strong independent effect on rescue activities. In addition, we see in all models that the former effect is greatly reduced when the latter is included in the model. For instance, when we use the estimated number of rescued Jews as an outcome variable (comparing Fig. 4g and h) we see that the rescue advantage of college-educated women almost completely disappears after we control for the presences of secure interregional ties. This again drives home the point that college-educated women played an important role in clandestine resistance against the Holocaust because of their unique ability to forge secret connections across spaces.

Taken together, the analysis in this section provides compelling evidence that college-educated women rescuers engaged in more interregional rescue activities without getting arrested, and as a result were more successful when sheltering threatened Jewish neighbors from repressive authorities. This further reinforces the notion that non-traditional college-educated women who operated as defiant conformists could more effectively exploit university networks while concealing their illegal activities.

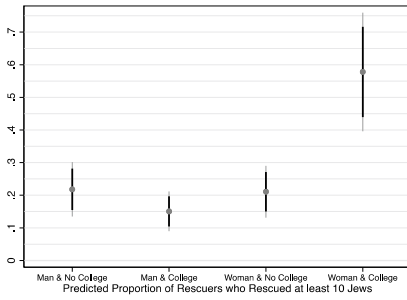




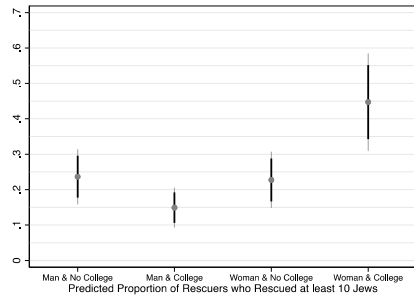
(a) >5 Jews & No Secure Interregional Tie



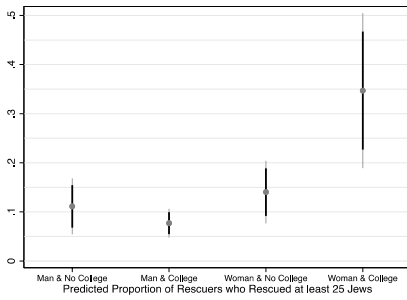
(b) >5 Jews & Secure Interregional Tie



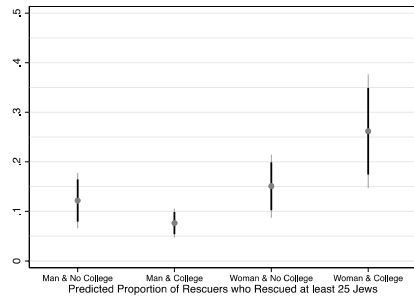
(c) >10 Jews & No Secure Interregional Tie



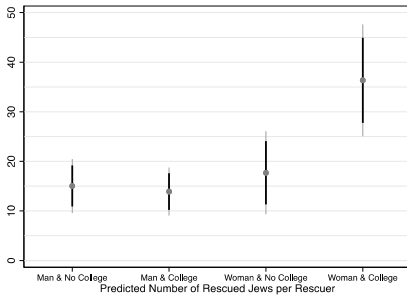
(d) >10 Jews & Secure Interregional Tie



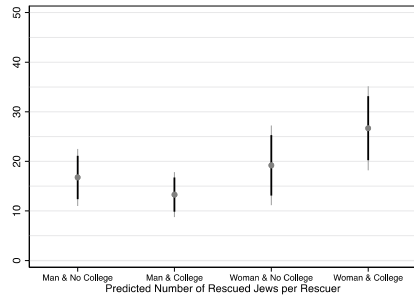
(e) >25 Jews & No Secure Interregional Tie



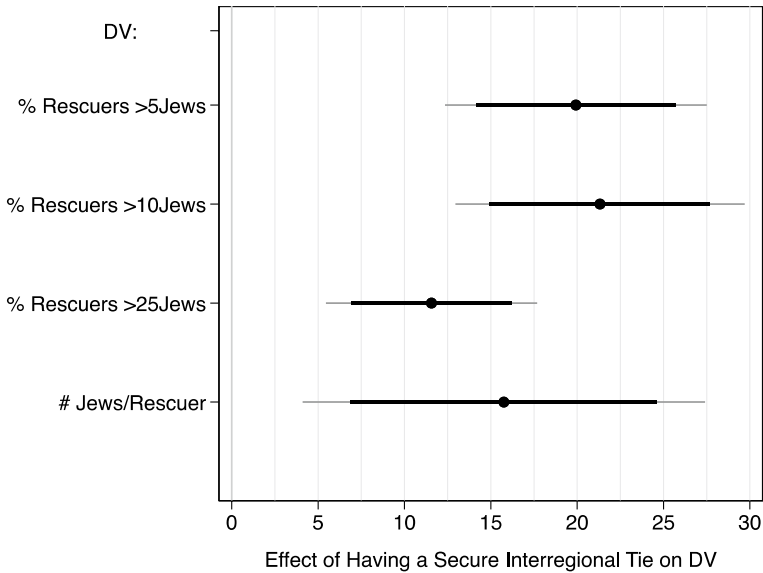
(f) >25 Jews & Secure Interregional Tie



(g) # Jews & No Secure Interregional Tie



(h) # Jews & Secure Interregional Tie



**Fig. 5** Predicted Rescue of Jews by Gender, College Education and Secure Interregional Ties with 99 (gray) and 95 (black) % confidence intervals (fixing all independent variables at their median)

### In-depth exploration of college-educated women rescuers

Whereas the previous section demonstrated that college-educated women played a crucial role in resistance networks for Jews, this section will zero in on important cases to reveal why this was the case. We used our quantitative data on rescue operations to systematize the case selection for qualitative analysis by selecting “on the line” cases that scored high on both the main explanatory and independent variable (Seawright, 2016). Hence, we selected all college-educated women rescuers who, according to post-war testimonies, saved more than five Jews. In total we identified 37 women rescuers who met this profile. For 70 percent of these women rescuers, we were able to conduct a more in-depth analysis of available biographies, post-war testimonies (including oral histories) and secondary literature. The theoretical literature and empirical examples on collective action by women from both war and non-war disciplines (outlined above) deductively informed us about the possible strategies and patterns we would find in the primary and secondary sources about Dutch women rescuers. We studied these sources to see how they interacted with these patterns (or if they presented new ones), carefully coding how the women became involved in rescue operations and why they managed to rescue so many Jews. The codes we deduced seemed to capture our data well— 84 per cent of all highly-educated women rescuers used at least one of these strategies. This revealed the important convergence of university networks and gendered performances in producing successful rescue operations. In a subsequent step, we refined our coding of gendered performances in dialogue with existing literature on gender role-playing in times of conflict (Connell, 1987; Gallo-Cruz, 2020; Kandiyoti, 1988).

## University networks

Many women became involved in rescue work while at university, which gave them the freedom to engage in risky activities and broad network access to support rescue activities across the country. The story of Gezina van Der Molen illustrates this pattern. Van Der Molen grew up in a conservative but well-off household. Her father started his career as a protestant education inspector, and was a prominent member of the conservative Antirevolutionary Party (ARP). He believed that women should not work outside of the household, which clashed with Gezina's ambitions. During her youth, Gezina became interested in early feminist thought and believed that traditional gender roles stifled her potential. An excellent student, she was determined to go college. But this was something her father could not accept, and she was instead forced to become an elementary school teacher. When this did not work out, she was sent to nursing school.

Deeply unhappy in these traditional feminine professions, Van Der Molen sought and acquired a job as a journalist via a family friend. This new job allowed her to travel and become financially independent from her parents. In 1924, after saving enough money she decided to go to the Orthodox Protestant Free University to study law at the age of 32 to escape the “ghetto of family, children and church” that she believed kept women hostage. After becoming the first woman to graduate from the Free University with a law degree, she decided to write a dissertation on Alberico Gentili, the famous Italian pioneer of international and human rights (Klinken, 2006).

During her college years, Gezina was a student journalist and wrote for *The Amsterdammer*, while also participating actively in Christian student associations. Via these networks she and several people she met in law school started to run the underground newspaper *Vrij Nederland* during the war. Gezina and her college roommate Mies Nolte eventually started publishing their own underground newspaper, *Trouw*. The distribution networks of this publication were used to funnel Jews away from Amsterdam to southern parts of the country (Klinken, 2006). The network became known as the Trouw Group, and it saved the lives of at least 20 Jews (Flim, 2018). The backbone of this illegal outlet was formed by college acquaintances who moved back home and dropped out of school after the German authorities announced students could only attend college after formally declaring their loyalty to the “Aryan race”. Almost half of all students refused and returned home doing nothing, creating a pool of “biographically available” recruits for mobilization throughout the Netherlands (Flim, 2018).

The power of university networks is also evident when we look at the rescue activities of Iet van Dijk. Like Gezina, Iet came from a non-traditional background. She was raised on the island of Sumatra in the Dutch colony of Indonesia by an emancipated mother who worked as a teacher (Withuis, 1993). Iet excelled in school, and when she was 18 she was accepted to the University of Amsterdam to study medicine (Van Dijk, 2018). As a student she joined a sorority, where she met Alice Brunner, Mieke Mees, Hansje van Loghem, Tineke Haak, and Gisela Söhnlein, with whom she set up connections all over the Netherlands to rescue Jews, from the Northern province of Friesland to the Southern region of Limburg

(Knegtmans, 1998). Similar to what we saw with the Trouw Group, the network, known as the *Amsterdam Student Group*, came to rely heavily on female students who returned home to live with their families across the country after the German occupiers forced students to sign a declaration of loyalty (Van Dijk, 2018).

We also see the influence of university networks in the case of Gisele van Waterschoot van der Gracht, who moved to Amsterdam during the war (Santen, 2008). Gisele grew up in the Southern region of Limburg, where her father was the inspector general for the Dutch mining industry. Although she initially had a conflict with her parents over her future, Gisele went on to attend university in Paris and became a renowned stained-glass maker. At university, she came into contact with a wide range of artists (Santen, 2008). Via one of her teachers, Gisele met the prominent poet Roland Holst. After becoming good friends, Holst introduced Gisele to several other artists from Amsterdam, Bergen (his hometown) and the eastern part of Holland (Santen, 2008). When Jewish artists from both Germany and the Netherlands needed to go underground, this network of people sheltered them for prolonged periods of time (Santen, 2008). Gisele funneled people between Limburg, Bergen, her studio in Amsterdam and the east of the country.

### **Dramaturgical performances**

Compared to their male peers, women students maximized the use of their university networks and more effectively established connections across the Netherlands to shelter Jews. In order to do so, the women rescuers engaged in strategic performances to avoid detection that played on the unequal gendered expectations of the Nazis. Research on the Nazi dictatorship reveals particularly conservative views and goals for women. The ideal Nazi woman was a wife and mother, and “Nazi leaders endorsed conservatives’ view that women’s ‘nature’ was unsuited to academic study” (Stephenson, 2001, 70). Hitler, for instance, announced that “[f]uture motherhood must be the unalterable objective of girls’ education” (Stephenson, 2001, 70). Women were considered “emotional and instinctual” as opposed to “rational and theoretical”, which were labels reserved for men (Stephenson, 2001, 70). *Kinder, Küche, und Kirche* was a traditional German phrase used to describe women’s place in society. It restricted them to three conventionalized areas/duties: childrearing, the kitchen, and the church. It became part of Nazi propaganda, and Hitler invoked the *Kinder, Küche, und Kirche* perspective by making a “call for women to return to hearth and home” (Bridenthal, 1973, 148).

To conceal their university network rescue activities, women developed three dramaturgical performances that played on these conservative expectations, particularly when traveling to deliver important documents to network ties across the country and to place Jews in safe houses: 1) strategic motherhood and wedlock; 2) strategic coquetry; and 3) strategic self-devaluation. Of the women rescuers who met the profile of having rescued more than five Jews, 84 per cent engaged in at least one of these strategies.

## Strategic motherhood and wedlock

Rescue networks knew that men were more likely to be stopped and arrested than women, so they often sent women on challenging missions that required travel and other outings in public, such as transporting Jewish children between cities. In an interview, Piet Meerburg, a leader of the Amsterdam Student Group, confirmed: “It was much more suspicious for a boy of twenty to travel with a child than a girl. It was absolutely a big difference. We went to fetch the children from the crèche together, but then the woman student accompanied them on the train to Friesland and Limburg” (Dwork, 1993, 53). This reveals that sending women on public missions was, in fact, a rescue network strategy that was based on an initial movement risk assessment that men were more likely to be stopped and arrested than women. While on these missions, however, our analysis shows that the women took further steps to protect themselves and the Jewish children they were funneling between regions by performing motherhood and wedlock.

The story of Gezina Van Der Molen, introduced above, reveals the use of strategic motherhood in practice during rescue missions. Her disdain for traditional gender roles notwithstanding, Van Der Molen often relied on feminine stereotypes to facilitate evasion while accompanying Jews to hiding places and moving important documents across the country to reach other network ties. Gezina would smuggle Jews in a baby carriage and hide papers in her bra to conceal rescue activities and avoid arrest (Klinken, 2006). Through the Trouw Group rescue network that she helped found, Gezina and her companions smuggled over 20 Jews out of Amsterdam to network ties in the South (Klinken, 2006).

Throughout Dutch WWII accounts, there are many other examples of the strategic use of motherhood. For example, Alice Brunner, an English student at University of Amsterdam, often took children from Utrecht to Friesland and Limburg (Flim, 2018, 180). Once, while transporting a Jewish child by train, a German soldier joined Brunner in her train car and asked about the child. After a brief conversation during which Brunner feigned ignorance and declared she was the mother of the child, the soldier complimented her for her “beautiful dark-skinned Aryan baby” (Van Rens, 2013). She and the baby managed to escape and avoid arrest after this conversation and performance.

Like Brunner, An de Waard frequently took Jewish children to safehouses across the country by train. An studied law in Utrecht and was a member of the Utrecht Children’s Committee, a rescue group that emerged in that city. She was recruited by Anne Maclaine Pont, a fellow art history student (Flim, 2018). When An traveled with Jewish children to safe houses around the country, she “would turn her ring around to give the impression that she was a married woman traveling with her child” (Flim, 2018, 77). This is evidence of the strategic nature of her action and the performance of both marriage and motherhood as a strategy to deceive Nazis and other onlookers.

Marion Pritchard, a Dutch resistance student studying at the Amsterdam School for Social Work, also pretended to be the mother of Jewish children (Van Iperen, 2019). She said it was particularly common to take children to the North: “A lot of children were hidden in the North of Holland because that is where the farms were

and there was more food and opportunity” (Slesin, 2007). At one point, Marion and fellow students took 25 children up North to a district called Gooi. Pritchard said she would receive phone calls from the resistance to take “packages” (children or babies) to different parts of the country. In total, she stated in an interview that she helped rescue approximately 150 people, many of whom were children. She also regularly registered herself as the mother of Jewish babies before taking finding them hiding spots around the country (Van Iperen, 2019).

After having difficulty finding a safe house for a Jewish father and his children, Pritchard actually moved with them to a small villa outside of Amsterdam in the town of Huizen, where she then strategically performed motherhood for a total of two years while with them in hiding: “I maintained the fiction for the people in the neighborhood that they were my children,” she explained (Block & Drucker, 1992; Van Iperen, 2019).

### Strategic coquetry

Iet van Dijk, the previously mentioned activist from the Amsterdam Student Group, engaged in strategic coquetry in order to avoid arrest while carrying out rescue work. In the summer of 1944 her dramaturgical skills were put to the test when two SIPO-SD officers tried to seize a young Jewish boy from a house in Amsterdam. After flirting with the two German men, Van Dijk lied that Jacob was her own child born out of wedlock. Enamored by her blonde curls, the senior officer decided not to further investigate Van Dijk and instead invited her out on a date (Van Dijk, 2018). Iet accepted the invitation before leaving the house together with baby Jacob, who made survived the war because of her careful performance and was sheltered between Amsterdam and Friesland. It is not clear whether Iet’s date with the military officer ever took place (Van Dijk, 2018).

The story of Mieke Mees, a friend of Iet van Dijk and a fellow medical student, also reveals the use of strategic coquetry to avoid arrest during rescue work. Mees put forward a “frontstage” image of herself while away from home on an important mission to rescue Hanna van de Voort, a fellow member of the Amsterdam Student Group who was captured by the Nazis. In July 1944, Hanna was arrested by the Sicherheitspolizei, the German security police, and was interrogated in Eindhoven. In response to this arrest, Piet Meerburg, a leader of the Amsterdam Student Group, “sent the beautiful Mieke Mees, to try to obtain Hanna’s release” (Gutman et al., 2003). Mieke was sent on this release and rescue mission specifically because of her looks. But once there, she flirted and “managed to arouse the interest of the Sipo commander and made a date to go out with him on condition that he release Hanna, who Mieke referred to as ‘that silly woman from Tienray’ (Gutman et al., 2003). While speaking with the commander, Mieke “made it clear that she was rather put out about the imprisonment of a naive, simple woman from Tienray who had nothing to do with anything. As a result Hanna was released. Mieke did not show up for her date with the SD officer” (Flim, 2018, 126). In this instance, Mees strategically used her external appearance and performed in such a way as to get the commander to make an exchange. She also employed a gendered narrative, referring to

her rescue colleague Hanna as a “silly woman” in order to convince the commander that her rescue colleague was not who the Nazis thought she was.

Gisele van Waterschoot van der Gracht, the visual artist discussed above who attended university in Paris, also frequently engaged in strategic coquetry while moving across the country as a way to help her successfully protect Jews. As a distraction, she once flirted with SIPO-SD officers who wanted to search her studio, promising them a wonderful night (Santen, 2008). She also brought baked goods to police stations to get access to arrested Jews and pretended to be the girlfriend of a prominent Nazi to cross security lines (Santen, 2008).

Similarly, the Frisian underground network relied on strategic women to maintain long-distance contacts and smuggle resources and Jews across the country. One of its leaders, Van Den Helm, explained that women drew less suspicion on public transport while on rescue missions (Meyers, 2011). To illustrate this point, he provided details on the story of an unnamed college-educated female rescue worker. Carrying a suitcase filled with illegal food coupons for Jews in the Northwest, this woman took a seat in a first-class cabin in which German officials were travelling, knowing these cabins were not inspected as carefully (Meyers, 2011). After sitting down she started conversing and flirting with one Wehrmacht officer as a way to maintain her cover and successfully transport the food coupons (Meyers, 2011).

### Strategic self-devaluation

In addition to strategic motherhood, wedlock and coquetry, women rescuers also deployed strategic self-devaluation in order to get Nazi perpetrators to underestimate their potential so they could successfully rescue. For instance, Zus Paré, a student in Den Haag, often feigned stupidity while on rescue missions by pretending she did not speak German (Willems, 2018). The rescue work of Iet Van Dijk also reveals this how strategic self-devaluation worked in practice. Van Dijk and her medical school companion Mieke Mees would pick up Jewish children from the Plantage Kerklaan neighborhood in Amsterdam, where they would remove their stars and dress them in plain clothing (Flim, 2018). Together, the two women “took away more children than anyone else”; Iet mostly traveled north to Friesland, and Mieke went south to Limburg (Flim, 2018, 60).

Carefully crafted performances of strategic self-devaluation made it possible for Iet to funnel around 140 Jews from the west to the north of the country (Flim, 2018). Iet was a “blonde, short, and exceptionally driven” young woman” (Flim, 2018, 31). Several people who worked with Van Dijk described her as a great actor who was not afraid to use her performance skills to survive risky situations (Van Dijk, 2018). She avoided arrest in several dangerous situations because she “had a talent for looking really stupid” (Van Dijk, 2018, 84). In particular, she would pretend to be an overly naïve and “stupid blonde” (Van Dijk, 2018, 168). Nina Mesdag, a source who knew Iet while she was doing this rescue work, said: “Iet could look so incredibly stupid. And that saved her. I mean, she looked so stupid getting on the train—as if she didn’t have all her marbles... so they let her go” (Flim, 2018, 96).

Diet Eman’s rescue work also demonstrates how effective strategic self-devaluation could be in a wartime setting to conceal rescue activities. Eman was a rescue

worker from The Hague who trained in business and languages, and after the war worked as a head nurse at a hospital in Venezuela (Eman, 1994). During the war, Eman traveled throughout Holland to distribute illegal documents and find safe hiding places for Jews. One day, she was traveling by train on an important mission back to The Hague, carrying blank IDs, ration cards, and Resistance orders for Allied pilots. Suddenly, the Gestapo got on the train and started checking IDs. They required her to get off the train, and began walking towards a tunnel: “When we got into that tunnel and he [the soldier] started talking, I began to act really stupid. I thought to myself, Diet, your best chance is to be really dumb. You haven’t the slightest idea how you could have received a bad ID.” (Eman, 1994, 188). When taken to prison later that same day and the Nazis did not manage to get any information out of her, she states: “I realized then that I had convinced him that I was really stupid” (Eman, 1994, 194). To save herself, she says she worked hard to “convince them that [she] was stupid, uneducated, and very scared” (Eman, 1994, 277). She notes that this was challenging, and that her real character was quite different: “I was always a tomboy.” (Eman, 1994, 3). Hein, the man who would later become her fiancé, similarly wrote in his journal: “Diet is a tomboy, and mischievous” (Eman, 1994, 9). By strategically creating these undervalued and underrated images of herself that differed markedly from how she was in real life, Diet did not seem like potentially suspicious person to the Nazis. Instead, her performance fit with Nazi views of women as uninformed and incompetent.

## Conclusion

Through a case study of rescue networks for Jews in the Netherlands during WWII, this article has demonstrated that college-educated women improved rescue network outcomes because they were *defiant conformists*. When compared to their male companions, college-educated women were more successful within university networks because they could conceal interregional resistance work through the strategic performance of traditional feminine roles. These gendered performances made them more successful, but the limited visibility and clandestine nature of their activities also impacted later recognition of their work.

Drawing on research from gender theory and social mobilization, this article has revealed that a dramaturgical perspective on gender and civilian resistance helps to explain the success of rescue movements. In the context of war and militarization, 1) women are less likely to be seen as political agents and combatants and feminized roles allow for clandestine activity because they attract less suspicion; and 2) women can draw on existing skills and knowledge from non-war settings in order to strategically deploy emphasized femininity to exert agency and enhance security during times of war.

The article underscores the unique ways in which gender shapes the structure of social networks in general and rescue networks in particular. While the importance of social networks for mobilization against mass persecution is now well established (Braun, 2019; Fox & Brehm, 2018; Gross, 1994), the gendered dimensions of such networks have remained largely unexplored. By performing traditional feminine



roles in a way that obscured the true motives behind their long-distance travel, the Dutch women above were well-positioned to produce important social bridges between different network localities. With the evidence presented, we have revealed that scholars of civilian resistance should, in addition to the cultural, normative dimensions of gender, also focus on its relational underpinnings and networked effects.

This paper joins a very recent body of work that demonstrates how in times of crisis mobilization against violence is often undertaken by outsiders and minorities who, because of their structural positions, have more resources to successfully resist oppressors (Braun, 2019; Escudero, 2020; Gallo-Cruz, 2020). Much like undocumented minorities on US college campuses, religious minorities in Europe and national minorities in Belgium, college-educated women in the 1940s were people from exceptional backgrounds with exceptional talents who overcame many challenges to get where they wanted to be. Although members of mainstream, “ordinary” society can and frequently do step up in times of need, this article has focused on the resistance acts of defiant conformist outsiders, who—in normal times—stood out in their society.

But given our findings and focus on women in this article, what other potential for generalizability is there? Would women be able to successfully deploy similar strategies and have similar impacts in other settings? The concept should presumably travel to places where mobilization is 1) collective; 2) clandestine; 3) where college expands networks; and 4) where the conservative and traditional nature of gender norms allow women to downplay their agency and exploit stereotypes. This fourth point requires elaboration. Limited work from other disciplines suggests that the possibility to strategically take advantage of conventionalized gender norms can vary greatly depending on the gendered expectations within societies. In her work on women suicide bombers and terrorist networks, for instance, Thomas notes that while gender does impact the lethality of suicide bombing attacks, “the female advantage is more apparent only in societies where a woman’s role in public life is limited” (Thomas, 2021, 769). Historical examples of bondswomen on the Underground Railroad further illustrate gendered and intersectional variation across space. For instance, one woman fugitive snuck onboard a boat headed North by pretending to be a domestic worker carrying items of clothing, “play[ing] on dominant understandings of racialized gender roles” of the time period (Council, 2020). Others disguised themselves as male coachmen, taking advantage of “male captives’ greater opportunities for mobility” at a time when enslaved women were trapped on plantations doing reproductive and field work (Council, 2020). Put differently, these examples suggest there might be gendered advantages in other places, societies, and time periods, but that these would depend on the prevailing gendered norms within those spaces.

In this article we have examined clandestine collective action resistance strategies against a totalizing, Nazi surveillance state, but there is also evidence that suggests our theory travels to the domain of public (non-clandestine) collective action. For instance, there are related public collective behaviors during other genocides and contexts of human and cultural erasure. Scholars of North American dispossession have noted that high-status, educated white women used their social positions,

skills and networks to protest against the removal of Native Americans. Historically, there are also other ways in which gender and other forms of social positioning (not necessarily education) have combined to increase resistance possibilities. While Native American women in general exerted great influence in all village activities, including politics and diplomacy and were frequently the most important counselors, higher status, senior Native American women could engage in unique resistance strategies due to their social positioning (Carpenter & Moore, 2014; Perdue, 1998). For example, Perdue (1998) and Carpenter and Moore (2014) underscore that respected, venerated clan mothers and senior women developed petitions as resistance against Indian removal. More specifically, Perdue (1998) writes that “Cherokee women invoked motherhood as the source of their power and used their status as mothers to make public appeals” (Perdue, 1998, 55).

Relatedly but more recently, in her work on ethno-religious communal conflict violence in Nigeria, Krause (2019) found that communal violence was less likely to break out when older male community members (‘elders’) worked to convince younger community members not to participate in killings. From their work on the Rwandan genocide, Fox and Brehm (2018) found that “comparatively older men of relatively high socio-economic status may have been more likely to rescue” than younger men who were expected to fight and become involved in violence (1640). Taken together, all of these examples point to the importance of examining other forms of social positioning and intersections with gender and suggest certain individuals may be uniquely positioned to exert specific types of agency to resist violence.

Lastly, it is also important to reflect on this article’s shortcomings. We have clearly demonstrated how a focus on intersectionality can improve our understanding of gender and rescue operations. However, further research along these lines is required. While our article explicitly explored how gender interacts with education, it does not shed light on other intersections such as those involving race or ethnicity. Above, we focused on rescuers and perpetrators who belonged to the same racial and ethnic group. This helped us keep alternative factors constant but probably also shaped our findings in important ways. For example, because the Germans considered the Dutch to be “ethnically pure” co-Aryans with the same morals, it is likely this increased the effectiveness of the strategic femininity performances we describe above. Had the women not been blonde and fair skinned or had they failed to satisfy the racist expectations of their German occupiers in other ways, their rescue work may have been far less successful.

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