

Sexuality and Nazism: The Doubly Unspeakable?

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THE HISTORY OF SEXUALITY in Nazi Germany unites two subjects vulnerable to sensationalist coverage: sex and Nazism. Film scholars have observed a tendency to eroticize National Socialism in that medium, a phenomenon that reflects (and perhaps perpetuates) the dangerous allure of fascism.¹ Film, however, often claims to be fiction and always claims artistic license. Perhaps more startling is the persistent misrepresentation of sexuality under Nazism in outlets that allegedly produce nonfiction. In a recent front-page story, the *Los Angeles Times* characterized Lebensborn as a place where “11,000 children were born to women who mated with elite SS officers,” although all serious investigations describe Lebensborn as a home for pregnant women who could demonstrate the racial acceptability of their offspring-to-be.² Popular perceptions of many historic episodes are stubbornly resistant to evidence, but it is worth asking whether there is something special about the combination of Nazism and sex.

If words appear inadequate to describe either the excruciating violence of Nazism (Adorno’s “to write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric”) or the sensory pleasures of sex (Barthes’s “Bliss is unspeakable”), we might expect to be doubly frustrated as we struggle to conjure up the intersections of Nazism and sex.³ Yet in the end, Adorno revised his claim that post-Holocaust poetry was impossible, and Barthes explored a language for sexual bliss.⁴ Thus it is perhaps fitting that the last twenty-five years have seen remarkable advances in our understanding of sexuality under Nazism. Three major developments can account for this sea change. One is a growing interest in the scientific bases of Nazi racism, specifically, the science of eugenics. A second is the emergence of women’s history. The third is the lowering of taboos about studying sexuality and, particularly, sexual minorities. As a result, some subfields within the history of sexuality in Nazi Germany are now well developed. We have detailed studies of the ways that Nazi racism shaped women’s reproductive lives as well as good research on the persecution of homosexual men. One strength of this literature is its integration of the history of sexuality into the study of Nazi racial ideologies and practices. Another is its pursuit of larger issues of change and continuity. Historians of sexuality have carefully explored the balance between those aspects of Nazi policy and practice that were innovative and those that evolved from preexisting social mores and scientific ambitions.

Nevertheless, enormous gaps in the literature remain. One reason is the uneven nature of the sources. It is easier, for example, to formulate a research project on the

¹ For well-known eroticized representations of Nazi Germany on film, see Liliana Cavani’s *Night Porter* (1974) and Lina Wertmüller’s *Seven Beauties* (1975). See also Susan Sonntag’s statement on this point, “Fascinating Fascism,” in *Under the Sign of Saturn* (New York, 1980).

² Carol J. Williams, “Breeding to Further the Reich,” *Los Angeles Times*, 21 January 2000, A1, A14. On Lebensborn, see Catrine Clay and Michael Leapman, *Master Race: The Lebensborn Experiment in Nazi Germany* (London, 1995); Georg Lilienthal, *Der “Lebensborn e.V.”: Ein Instrument national-sozialistischer Rassenpolitik* (Stuttgart, 1985).

³ Theodor W. Adorno, *Prisms*, trans. Samuel and Sherry Weber (Cambridge, Mass., 1981); and Roland Barthes, *The Pleasure of the Text* (New York, 1975), 21.

⁴ Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, trans. E. B. Ashton (New York, 1973), 363.

persecution of homosexual men than on that of heterosexually “promiscuous” women. The former violated easily identified paragraphs of the criminal code (Paragraphs 175 and 175a) and, if sent to concentration camps, had their own label (the pink triangle). While a study of convictions under Paragraph 175 or of pink triangles hardly exhausts the history of gay men in Nazi Germany, it is an indispensable beginning and a relatively straightforward research task. There is no comparable, easily defined set of records on heterosexually “promiscuous” women (as distinct from those legally categorized as prostitutes), making it difficult for a researcher to identify and isolate women persecuted on the basis of “sexual promiscuity.”

Even good sources, however, do not guarantee good research. A political climate, both inside and outside the academy, that considered sexuality trivial in comparison to other fields of study long made it difficult for scholars to get such research funded.⁵ The relegation of certain themes to subfields of history, such as sexual violence against women to the subfield of women’s history, has led scholars in other areas, such as the history of the Holocaust, to overlook evidence regarding sexuality.⁶

A related problem concerns the questions asked. We are in the habit of inquiring into groups persecuted by the Nazis, and we recognize the centrality of reproductive sex to the Nazis. But what about sex that was neither “deviant” nor primarily about reproduction? Although such matters are admittedly difficult to quantify, it is probably safe to say that most sexual activity in the Third Reich involved partners who were acceptable to the regime and whose immediate motivation was the desire for pleasure, not for a child. Did the experience of (or access to) sexual pleasure change during the Nazi regime? Did “ordinary Germans”’ enthusiasm for the regime, their ability and willingness to perform certain functions, depend in part on their sexual contentedness? Did leaders of the regime, sensing a connection between sexual pleasure and popular support, work to foster an environment conducive to such pleasure?

Because it is difficult to research such questions, another major challenge to writing a history of sexuality in Nazi Germany concerns methodology. Professionally vulnerable, historians of women and historians of sexuality have understandably favored highly empiricist projects that permit reference to a seemingly unambiguous paper trail. This is particularly the case for those seeking careers in the German academy, whose greater conservatism has made it more risky not only to study gender and sexuality but also to employ methods loosely grouped under the rubric of “discursive analysis.”⁷ Even in the

⁵ Rüdiger Lautmann, “Nichts für Ungut! Kommentierende Bemerkungen zur Forschungslage über den rosa Winkel im Konzentrationslager,” in *Verfolgung von Homosexuellen im Nationalsozialismus* (Bremen, 1999), 104–11.

⁶ Doris L. Bergen makes this point in “Gender and Genocide: Lessons from the Holocaust?” in *Men, Women, and War*, ed. Carol Rittner and Valerie Morgan (New York, forthcoming).

⁷ Kathleen Canning emphasizes the “Atlantic divide” in the relationship between gender history and theoretical approaches in “German Particularities in Women’s History/Gender History,” *Journal of Women’s History* 5, no. 1 (1993): 102–14. This essay cannot detail the distinctions between oft-confused terms such as postmodernism, poststructuralism, deconstruction, and discursive analysis; for useful overviews in the context of German historical writing, see Jane Caplan, “Postmodernism, Poststruc-

United States, Canada, and Britain, scholars sometimes fear that such methodologies might minimize the tangible reality of the immense human suffering caused by National Socialist Germany.⁸

Discursive analysis, however, entered investigations of the history of sexuality even before the 1978 publication of Michel Foucault's *History of Sexuality*.⁹ Arguing against exaggerated fears of discursive analysis in another context, Michael Geyer and Konrad Jarausch have noted that "complicating [the] presumed transparency" of texts can simply mean acknowledging the possibility that the "various layers" of our source materials allow "multiple readings."¹⁰ But even such an approach is a step away from tallying up how many Germans were sterilized on the basis of which diagnosis or tracing the path of decrees regarding nonmarital children through the policy-making process—projects that have proved fruitful in their own right.¹¹ For many subjects related to sexuality, scholars must seek other types of evidence that require other methods of interpretation. In the absence of well-conceived analytic frameworks, attempts to explore such subjects as sexual pleasure and pain have often been dissatisfying at best, voyeuristic at worst.

Historians convinced that exploring sexual pain and pleasure might help us to understand Nazi Germany are uncomfortably aware that their work, taken out of context, might be utilized to sensationalize the grim subject of Nazi Germany. Yet questions about the relationship of sexual experience to Germans' (and other Europeans') encounter with Nazism and to the regime's successes and failures are important. Very recently, and very cautiously, historians have begun to voice them. The most exciting work on sexuality under Nazism may just be getting off the ground.

turalism, and Deconstruction: Notes for Historians," *Central European History* 22, no. 3 (1989); David Crew, "Who's Afraid of Cultural Studies? Taking a 'Cultural Turn' in German History," in *A User's Guide to German Cultural Studies*, ed. Scott D. Denham, Irene Kacandes, and Jonathan Petropoulos (Ann Arbor, 1997), 45–62.

⁸ On problems of representing the Holocaust more generally, see Dominick LaCapra, *Representing the Holocaust: History, Theory, Trauma* (Ithaca, 1994); Saul Friedländer, *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the "Final Solution"* (Cambridge, Mass., 1992).

⁹ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 1st American ed. (New York, 1978). For lesser-known predecessors of the theoretical developments often associated with Foucault, as well as an introduction to their application in the context of sexuality studies, see Carole S. Vance, "Social Construction Theory: Problems in the History of Sexuality," in *Homosexuality, Which Homosexuality? International Conference on Gay and Lesbian Studies*, ed. Dennis Altman et al. (Amsterdam, 1989).

¹⁰ Michael Geyer and Konrad Jarausch, "Great Men and Postmodern Ruptures: Overcoming the 'Belatedness' of German Historiography," *German Studies Review* 18, no. 2 (1995): 269, 255.

¹¹ Gisela Bock, *Zwangssterilisation im Nationalsozialismus: Studien zur Rassenpolitik und Frauenpolitik* (Opladen, 1986); Werner Schubert, "Der Entwurf eines Nichtehelichengesetzes vom Juli 1940 und seine Ablehnung durch Hitler," *Zeitschrift für das gesamte Familienrecht* 31 (1984): 1–10.

Was Nazism Seductive?

In an early foray into women's history, Richard Evans observed that "the most popular, the most widely repeated and (probably) the most generally accepted" explanation for women's support of Hitler was their "supposedly inherent irrationality." Probed a bit further, "irrationality" revealed itself as sexual desire. Evans pointedly observed that commentators who approached everything else Hitler said with skepticism had "taken Hitler's comments in his mob oratory [alone] at their face value, given them a Freudian twist, and presented them as a serious attempt to penetrate the secret of Hitler's appeal."¹² Women, in short, were "seduced" by Hitler.

To be fair, such reputable historians as Joachim Fest and Richard Grunberger—whom Evans named as offenders—did not simply "give" Hitler's comments a Freudian twist. Rather, they drew on a Freudian language made available by social psychologists who had tried to explain the rise of fascism in psychoanalytic terms. Wilhelm Reich linked the rise of fascism to the repression of sexuality in a patriarchal and capitalist society; Erich Fromm and Max Horkheimer saw authoritarian-masochistic tendencies within the family as a breeding ground for fascism.¹³ The Frankfurt School's influence helps to explain why even conservative historians considered a possible role for sexual desire in the rise of fascism, decades before women's history or the history of sexuality became fields of serious historical inquiry. The familiarity of West Germany's educated classes with the Frankfurt School and the revival of interest in that school among university students in the 1960s help to explain the broader popularity of analyses that linked repressed sexuality to fascism.¹⁴ In many fields of history, the possibility that sexuality and politics were intricately linked was unthinkable until a few years ago, but this was not so in studies of Nazi Germany.

Evans's complaint was not that historians considered sexuality but, rather, that they applied different standards of evidence to different subjects. Sloppy reference to sexuality had become a cover for failure to research women's history. Thus blithe references to women's "irrationality," supported by a quick reference to the Frankfurt School, often stood side by side with excellent empirical research into other subjects. The inadequacy of such short cuts quickly became evident when serious research into women's

¹² Richard J. Evans, "German Women and the Triumph of Hitler," *Journal of Modern History* 48 (1976): 123–75, 125, 128. Ron Rosenbaum offers a witty account of historians' attempts at psychosexual explanations of Hitler's own madness (*Explaining Hitler: The Search for the Origins of His Evil*, 1st ed. [New York, 1998], 99–154). For an example of this genre, see Robert G. L. Waite, *The Psychopathic God: Adolf Hitler* (New York, 1977).

¹³ Wilhelm Reich, *Massenpsychologie des Faschismus: Zur Sexualökonomie der politischen Reaktion und zur proletarischen Sexualpolitik* (Copenhagen, Prague, Zurich, 1933); Institut für Sozialforschung (Frankfurt am Main), *Studien über Autorität und Familie, Forschungsberichte aus dem Institut für Sozialforschung* (Paris, 1936); for an early American psychoanalytic approach, see Bertram Henry Schaffner, *Father Land: A Study of Authoritarianism in the German Family* (New York, 1948).

¹⁴ Dagmar Herzog, "'Pleasure, Sex, and Politics Belong Together': Post-Holocaust Memory and the Sexual Revolution in West Germany," *Critical Inquiry* 24 (1998): 393–444.

history got under way. Evidence that Hitler turned women's knees (and brains) to jelly—much less that this was connected to political behavior—was meager. Annemarie Tröger needed only to point out that men had voted for Hitler in greater proportions than had women to discredit the thesis that erotic desire led women to “bring Hitler to power.”¹⁵

Historians' selective recourse to a sexualized psychoanalytic framework to explain women's (but not men's) political behavior says a great deal about the status of women's history through the 1970s. It does not accurately reflect social psychologists' own efforts to explain Nazism's appeal. Members of the Frankfurt School described a “homosexual personality type” that was presumably male but that need not have been homosexually active. The supposed submissive/masochistic tendencies of this “type” made it vulnerable to fascism's seductive appeal. Andrew Hewitt exposes the lasting influence of this “homosexualization of fascism” by tracing such imagery beyond contemporary psychoanalytic treatments to such settings as postwar literature.¹⁶ The homophobia inherent in a conflation of homosexual desire and fascism, Hewitt holds, is all too clear.

In *Male Fantasies*, literary scholar Klaus Theweleit adopted a psychoanalytic approach to describe neither men nor women “seduced” by Nazism but, rather, Freikorps men whose protofascist violence expressed their fear of castration by Red (Communist) women. Significantly, the men to whom fascism appealed were not, in Theweleit's telling, victims metaphorically “seduced” by Nazism; rather, they were perpetrators of very un-“metaphoric” violence. Furthermore, their pathology emerged not from homosexual desire but from misogyny. Men of the Freikorps feared the “disorder” that women created not only through their role in proletarian revolutionary movements but also through their indeterminate, fluid, messy bodies—that is, through their very womanliness. Men of the Freikorps battled “feminine” messiness in women by composing violent fantasies about the destruction of women; they battled “feminine” messiness in themselves by creating brutally “orderly” selves.¹⁷

¹⁵ Annemarie Tröger, “Die Dolchstoßlegende der Linken,” in *Mutterkreuz und Arbeitsbuch: Zur Geschichte der Frauen in der Weimarer Republik und im Nationalsozialismus*, ed. Frauengruppe Faschismusforschung (Frankfurt am Main, 1981). See the debate surrounding the work of Maria Macciocchi (*Jungfrauen, Mütter und ein Führer: Frauen im Faschismus* [Berlin, 1976]; and “Female Sexuality in Fascist Ideology,” *Feminist Review* 1, no. 1 [1979]: 67–82); see also Jane Caplan, “Introduction to Female Sexuality in Fascist Ideology,” *Feminist Review* 1, no. 1 (1979): 59–66; Eva Sternheim-Peters, “Brunst, Ekstase, Orgasmus: Männerphantasien zum Thema ‘Hitler und die Frauen,’” *Psychologie Heute* 8 (1981): 36–41.

¹⁶ Andrew Hewitt, *Political Inversions: Homosexuality, Fascism, and the Modernist Imaginary* (Stanford, Calif., 1996).

¹⁷ Klaus Theweleit, *Male Fantasies*, 2 vols., trans. Stephen Conway, Erica Carter, and Chris Turner (Minneapolis, 1987, 1989). The Freikorps were rightist paramilitary units that came into being upon Germany's defeat in 1918. They battled the claims of new Eastern European states for formerly German territory, and they helped to put down worker uprisings in Germany as well as the short-lived Bavarian Communist government of 1919.

Psychoanalytically influenced works have been criticized on grounds that range from the specific (can we conflate the Freikorps and the Nazis?) to the general (does psychoanalysis “overinflate” the sexual?).¹⁸ Nevertheless, two important points must be made. First, the persistent search for social-psychological explanations for fascism has kept fascism’s possible appeal to the erotic on the intellectual agenda and in the popular imagination. Even historians who reject psychoanalytic analyses must grapple with their influence. Second, such explanations have had relatively little impact on the historical literature. This is the case not just because historians have been “too conservative” to consider sexuality (except as it applies to women, in which case historians have often been “too sexist” to consider women in any other light) but also because of epistemological differences among disciplines. However thought-provoking the work of scholars like Reich, Fromm, and Theweleit, it does not rely on the type of evidence that historians typically require.

Historical examinations of popular culture and consumption may embed the erotic in a material context more convincing to historians.¹⁹ However, as art historians Kathrin Hoffmann-Curtius and Silke Wenk warn, the deployment of cultural artifacts is not without its own dangers. The unexamined use of Nazi-era images of women, including female nudes, in media ranging from museum catalogs to news magazines can reveal problematic, sexualized strategies for achieving distance from Nazism.²⁰ Such presentations can make Nazi Germany an object of pornographic fascination, turn a feminized Germany into the victim of the “seducer” Hitler, or simply locate “sex” in women alone.

Since journalist Udo Pini’s *Leibeskult und Liebeskitsch* (Cult of the body and love kitsch) is frequently cited by historians, it pays to examine it in Wenke’s and Hoffmann-Kurtius’s light. Pini draws attention to the erotic in hundreds of examples from everyday outlets such as dancing, fashion, and picture postcards. His collection of photographs is the centerpiece of the book, and it provides its own argument that the erotic had a firm place in Nazi-era culture. Yet the brief accompanying text too often equates “sex” with “women,” who appear alternately as willing reproductive automata and as lascivious counterparts of sexually hapless German men. Thus in Pini’s telling, “some” young women (but evidently not men) chose spouses not for love (presumably the sole motivation for marriage before 1933) but according to the criteria established by the marriage loans. Lustful women had sex with foreign laborers because

¹⁸ Jessica Benjamin and Anson Rabinbach, “Foreword,” in *ibid.*, 2:xiv–xvii; Randall Halle, “Between Marxism and Psychoanalysis: Antifascism and Antihomosexuality in the Frankfurt School,” *Journal of Homosexuality* 29 (1995): 295–317, 308.

¹⁹ A very useful introduction to these intersections is the edited collection by Victoria de Grazia and Ellen Furlough, *The Sex of Things: Gender and Consumption in Historical Perspective* (Berkeley, 1996).

²⁰ Kathrin Hoffmann-Curtius, “Feminisierung des Faschismus,” in *Die Nacht hat zwölf Stunden*, ed. Claudia Keller (Berlin, 1996); Silke Wenk, “Hin-Weg Sehen,” in *Erbeutete Sinne: Nachträge zur Berliner Ausstellung “Inszenierung der Macht,”* ed. Klaus Behnken and Frank Wagner (Berlin, 1988), 17–32.

“this other male type aroused them with an erotic different from that of the conscientiously fantasyless German men.” In military men’s “fraternization” there is no hint of exploitation; instead, “Parisian girls loved the formal uniforms and the jealous glances of the *Blitzweiber*.”²¹

More thoughtful consideration of the visual appears in works on fashion. Irene Guenther has described fashion as a site where three concerns intersected: racism, economic nationalism, and female eroticism.²² A recent exhibition on fashion under National Socialism demonstrates that designers continued to cater to the elite’s preference for haute couture— although they downplayed the French connection by calling it *Hauptmode*.²³ Fashion thus reached a compromise between popular ideals of female eroticism, on the one hand, and economic and racial nationalism, on the other.

A useful, larger framework for imagining the erotic in Nazi Germany emerges from Hans Dieter Schäfer’s insistence that a more “normal,” even “Americanized” popular culture coexisted with Nazified culture. Although gender and sex were not central to Schäfer’s 1981 analysis, he revealed tantalizing tidbits about an erotic culture that survived Nazi pronouncements against “degeneracy,” such as film magazines’ defense of Marlene Dietrich’s erotic appeal long after her denunciation by the regime.²⁴ Furthermore, while the regime claimed to battle “degenerate” sexuality, it also promised opportunities for a “healthy” sexuality—which, Schäfer claims, helps explain the regime’s popularity. The German Labor Front (Reichsarbeitsdienst, RAD) offered cosmetics courses; Strength through Joy (Kraft durch Freude, KDF) hinted that travel might bring sexual adventure.²⁵ Schäfer’s challenge to images of an utterly regimented culture that could not tolerate anything so individualistic as pleasure is crucial, yet his brief discussions of sexual experience are indicative of the early date of his work. What are we to make of the news that nine hundred girls from the League of German Girls (Bund deutscher Mädel, BDM) returned pregnant from the 1936 party rally? This statement is followed first by evidence of the sexual activity of presumably average East Prussian schoolgirls and then by information on sex within anti-Nazi youth cliques, leaving the reader to wonder about the interplay between political and sexual cultures. We can only conclude that, well, young people had sex.²⁶ If we are battling the crude

²¹ Udo Pini, *Leibeskult und Liebeskitsch: Erotik im Dritten Reich* (Munich, 1992), 219, 326, 353. *Blitzweiber* is a derogatory term for German female military auxiliaries.

²² Irene Guenther, “Nazi ‘Chic’? German Politics and Women’s Fashions, 1915–1945,” *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body, and Culture* 1 (1997): 29–58.

²³ Almut Junker, *Frankfurt Macht Mode 1933–1945* (Frankfurt am Main, 1999).

²⁴ Hans Dieter Schäfer, *Das gespaltene Bewusstsein: Über deutsche Kultur und Lebenswirklichkeit, 1933–1945* (Munich, 1981), 137. Other discussions of the regime’s reconciliation of contrary cultural impulses include Philipp Gassert, *Amerika im Dritten Reich: Ideologie, Propaganda und Volksmeinung, 1933–1945* (Stuttgart, 1997); Jeffrey Herf, *Reactionary Modernism: Technology, Culture, and Politics in Weimar and the Third Reich* (Cambridge, 1984).

²⁵ Schäfer, 124. The German Labor Front was the party’s labor organization; Strength through Joy offered recreational opportunities, including tourism, to workers.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 139.

belief that under the Nazis (or was it until 1968?) Germans were celibate until marriage, whereupon they had sex in order to make babies, then this may be a necessary statement. However, it might be time to investigate finer points.

Research into Nazi organizations—particularly those that created new sexual spaces—reveals in greater detail how the Nazis’ provision of sexual opportunity might have made them appealing.²⁷ Robert Waite has noted that the Hitler Youth (Hitler Jugend, HJ) gave young people an excuse to be out after dark, while the RAD gave many young adults their first taste of life away from their parents’ homes and their first opportunity for unsupervised contact with members of the other sex. Waite has also called attention to wartime sexual activity in neighborhoods near military bases, Pieter Lagrou notes French clerics’ perception of a lively sexual culture in foreign workers’ barracks, while Ebba Drolshagen describes an occupied Western Europe in which well-mannered German soldiers were attractive partners for local women. Despite the greater brutality of the occupied Soviet Union, Marlene Epp finds that ethnic German women there sometimes welcomed German military men as partners. Birthe Kundrus observes that male conscription created a civilian space relatively free of husbands’ supervision in which military wives might have extramarital affairs.²⁸ Since all of these settings enabled sexual exploitation as well as consensual sex, all require a discussion of power even in consensual relationships in light of the intersecting hierarchies of gender, “race,” age, wealth, and political/military position. Still, women as well as men, defeated as well as victorious people, and youths as well as adults might have been attracted to opportunities for sex that the unusual circumstances provided.²⁹

²⁷ For a model historic study of sexualized spaces, see Judith R. Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (Chicago, 1992). For the postwar period in Germany, Maria Hoehn’s examination of military bases and camp followers in Rhineland-Palatinate and Jennifer Evans’s research on sexual space in Berlin show the mutual influence of postwar recovery and sexual geography: Maria Hoehn, *GIs and Fräuleins: The German American Encounter in 1950s West Germany* (Chapel Hill, 2002); Jennifer Evans, “Reconstruction Sites: Sexuality, Citizenship and the Limits of National Belonging in Divided Berlin,” Ph.D. diss., State University of New York at Binghamton, 2001.

²⁸ Robert G. Waite, “Teenage Sexuality in Nazi Germany,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 8, no. 3 (1998); Pieter Lagrou, *The Legacy of Nazi Occupation: Patriotic Memory and National Recovery in Western Europe, 1945–1965* (New York, 2000), 144–56; Ebba D. Drolshagen, *Nicht ungeschoren davonkommen: Das Schicksal der Frauen in den besetzten Ländern, die Wehrmachtssoldaten liebten* (Hamburg, 1998); Birthe Kundrus, “Nur die halbe Geschichte: Frauen im Umfeld der Wehrmacht zwischen 1939 und 1945,” in *Hitlers Wehrmacht: Mythos und Realität*, ed. Militärgeschichtliches Forschungsamt (Munich, 1999); Marlene Epp, *Women without Men: Mennonite Refugees of the Second World War* (Toronto, 2000), 32–34. On romances in occupied Western Europe, see also Madeleine Bunting, *The Model Occupation: The Channel Islands under German Rule, 1940–1945* (London, 1995).

²⁹ Studies of the postwar period, in which rape and “hunger prostitution” coexisted with some German women’s excitement at the prospect of romance with occupation soldiers, make the same point: Sibylle Meyer and Eva Schulze, *Wie wir das alles geschafft haben: Alleinstehende Frauen berichten über ihr Leben nach 1945* (Munich, 1984); Elizabeth D. Heineman, “The Hour of the Woman: Memories of

Particularly in the case of youth, we should think carefully about what we mean when we say “sexuality.” In an effort to debunk images of the BDM as a hotbed of promiscuity (an accusation that brought shame only to the girls, not to their male partners), scholars such as Claudia Koonz have noted that BDM girls, by and large, subscribed to conservative sexual mores. They disapproved, for example, of nonmarital pregnancy, despite the regime’s claim that it valued all racially approved births.³⁰ In focusing on the frequency of premarital sex or the acceptability of nonmarital pregnancy, however, we may be looking in the wrong places. Adult definitions of sexual activity may be inappropriate for adolescents; late-twentieth-century standards for age of first intercourse may not apply to the 1930s. Rejection of nonmarital pregnancy—even a rejection of intercourse for teenagers—need not mean that HJ boys, BDM girls, and RAD recruits of both sexes did not enjoy the erotic opportunities presented by their service. A setting for petting and kissing might have been quite enough to make fourteen-year-old boys and girls look forward to mixed-sex activities with the HJ, and youth who loudly denounced premarital sex at sixteen might well have engaged in it at twenty.³¹ We should also be careful not to minimize the dangers of sexual abuse that could accompany the loss of parental protection even if, in an adolescent setting, abuse did not always include heterosexual intercourse.³² This is not to deny the considerable evidence of nonmarital, adolescent intercourse—it is simply to plead for greater consideration of nonpenetrative sexuality, particularly among adolescents.

If we accept that sexual opportunity as well as sexual repression characterized Nazi Germany, then what is the relationship between the two? Originally published in 1972, Hans Bleuel’s *Das saubere Reich* (The clean Reich) rejected monolithic images of sexuality in Nazi Germany, whether of a repressive or a libertine nature. Yet Bleuel stumbled over the difficult task of reconciling Nazism’s evident contradictions. Following totalitarian interpretations of Nazism, Bleuel presented neopagan rituals and orders regarding the imperative to breed as evidence of sexual experience under Nazism, suggesting a rejection of bourgeois sexual morality, which, presumably, was connected

Germany’s ‘Crisis Years’ and West German National Identity,” *American Historical Review* 101, no. 2 (1996): 354–95.

³⁰ Claudia Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland: Women, the Family, and Nazi Politics* (New York, 1987), 399. For accounts that emphasize the BDM as a site of heterosexual activity, see Gerhard Rempel, *Hitler’s Children: The Hitler Youth and the SS* (Chapel Hill, 1989), esp. 51, 87; Martin Klaus, *Mädchenerziehung zur Zeit der faschistischen Herrschaft in Deutschland: Der Bund deutscher Mädel*, 1st ed. (Frankfurt am Main, 1983), 270–72. In such accounts, male heterosexual activity among the HJ appears unproblematic (it is rarely mentioned at all); only homosexuality in the HJ is problematic.

³¹ Memoirists’ accounts of the HJ/BDM as a setting for adolescent romance include Renate Finckh, *Mit uns zieht die neue Zeit* (Baden-Baden, 1979); Margarete Hannsmann, *Der helle Tag bricht an: Ein Kind wird Nazi* (Hamburg, 1982).

³² See, for example, Jost Hermand’s harrowing account of “strong boys’” use of sexual practices ranging from mutual masturbation to rape to enforce hierarchies in HJ evacuation camps: Jost Hermand and Margot Bettauer Dembo, *A Hitler Youth in Poland: The Nazis’ Program for Evacuating Children during World War II* (Evanston, 1997).

to other Nazi horrors. In the end, however, he concluded that Germans' adherence to a narrow sexual morality made them susceptible to Nazism's promise to restore a wholesome Germany and that postwar societies, unless they shook off restrictive sexual norms, might face renewed danger.³³

Rather than allow National Socialism's apparent inconsistencies to become our own, Dagmar Herzog has suggested that we consider their interrelationships.³⁴ Constant reminders that some types of sex by some types of people were unacceptable let members of "superior" groups know that different rules applied to them. A rhetoric of selective natalism gave racially acceptable Germans permission to enjoy the sex that, incidentally, might lead to pregnancy. In his "sociological semantic analysis" of Nazi Germany, Torsten Reters too has grappled with evidently contradictory messages regarding sexuality. He holds, however, that Nazi-era cultural production was neither incoherent nor hypocritical but offered a vocabulary of options, from *Jede Nacht ein neues Glück* (Every night a new happiness) to *Es wird einmal ein Wunder gescheh'n* (One day a miracle [true love] will occur), to name two popular Nazi-era films. While the regime was neither "prosex" nor "antisex," the overall message was not that "anything goes." Rather, it was a coherent whole that simultaneously rejected Victorian prudery and the "degenerate" sexuality associated with Weimar in favor of a "clean" but distinctly sexual life.³⁵

Ideally, work on such subjects as consumption, culture, Nazi organizations, and the ways that the regime encouraged the racially privileged in their sexual lives will allow even those who have misgivings about psychoanalytic frameworks to consider how Nazism appealed to erotic desires. We need not subscribe to a notion of society-wide neurosis to imagine that Germans might have fantasized about sexual adventure while on a stint with the Labor Service, hoped that stylish clothing would enhance their erotic appeal, or felt their sexual desire reaffirmed since the regime valued their potential offspring. Nazism's appeal to the erotic lay not just in the "aestheticization of politics," to use Walter Benjamin's phrase, but also in the ways the regime addressed leisure, entertainment, work, and consumption. If we focus on such subjects, however, we find that those who felt this appeal become more "normal" and their desire more familiar than if we crudely apply social psychological diagnoses such as "submissive homoerotic masochism" to an entire population. What we learn from examining the

³³ Hans Peter Bleuel, *Das saubere Reich: Theorie und Praxis des sittlichen Lebens im Dritten Reich* (Bern, Munich, Vienna, 1972). A more recent overview, which includes useful information but remains superficial, is Stefan Maiwald and Gerd Mischler, *Sexualität unter dem Hakenkreuz: Manipulation und Vernichtung der Intimsphäre im NS-Staat* (Hamburg, 1999).

³⁴ Dagmar Herzog, "Sexuelle Revolution und Vergangenheitsbewältigung," *Zeitschrift für Sexualforschung* 13, no. 2 (2000): 87–103, esp. 96. See also Dagmar Herzog, "Desperately Seeking Normality: Sex and Marriage in the Wake of War," in *Life after Death: Violence, Normality, and the Construction of Postwar Europe*, ed. Richard Bessel and Dirk Schumann (New York, forthcoming).

³⁵ Torsten Reters, *Liebe, Ehe und Partnerwahl zur Zeit des Nationalsozialismus: Eine soziologische Semantikanalyse* (Dortmund, 1997).

intersections of erotic desire and political responsibility can help us understand the appeal of Nazism and might have application outside the Nazi context.

Same-Sex Desire: Persecution, Homoeroticism, and the Männerbund

Although systematic examination of homosexuality in Nazi Germany awaited the post-Stonewall era, the silence in prior decades was less deafening than one might expect. Raids on gay organizations were headline news during the Nazi years, and men with pink triangles were visible in concentration camps. Accordingly, accounts by eyewitnesses often mentioned the persecution of gay men. In his 1938 book on women in Nazi Germany, American sociologist Clifford Kirkpatrick noted the closing of homophile organizations and the tightening of antihomosexual legislation.³⁶ In his 1946 analysis of the concentration camp system, survivor Eugen Kogon discussed gay men's disadvantageous position in the social hierarchy of prisoners, their brutal treatment at the hands of the SS, medical experimentation on gay men, rape, and the exchange of homosexual sex for food.³⁷

Contemporary accounts, however, did not focus only on persecution. Unsurprisingly, early opponents of Nazism discovered a certain utility in linking Nazis to homosexuality. Despite the leftist parties' official support for the decriminalization of homosexual acts, for example, Socialists and Communists exploited Storm Troop (Sturmabteilung, SA) leader Ernst Röhm's homosexuality in efforts to defame the National Socialists.³⁸ The temptation to bait the Nazis with simultaneous accusations of homosexuality and homophobia was too great to resist, and a single author could at once disparage homosexuals and denounce the Nazi persecution of them.³⁹

³⁶ Clifford Kirkpatrick, *Nazi Germany: Its Women and Family Life* (New York, 1938), 104, 265.

³⁷ Eugen Kogon, *The Theory and Practice of Hell* (New York, 1968), 42, 48, 153, 171, 258–59. Originally published as Eugen Kogon, *Der SS-Staat: Das System der deutschen Konzentrationslager* (Munich, 1946). Page numbers throughout refer to the English-language edition.

³⁸ Manfred Herzer, "Communists, Social Democrats, and the Homosexual Movement in the Weimar Republic," in *Gay Men and the Sexual History of the Political Left*, ed. Gert Hekma, Harry Oosterhuis, and James D. Steakley (Binghamton, 1995), 197–226; see also Alexander Zinn, *Die soziale Konstruktion des homosexuellen Nationalsozialisten: Zu Genese- und Etablierung eines Stereotyps* (Frankfurt am Main, 1997); Friedrich Koch, *Sexuelle Denunziation: Die Sexualität in der politischen Auseinandersetzung* (Frankfurt am Main, 1986).

³⁹ The former was the case with a physician's 1951 account of "sexual problems in the SS": M. Brustmann, "Sexuelle Probleme in der SS," cited in Herzog, "Desperately Seeking Normality." Kogon, generally sympathetic to the plight of gay men in the camps, described homosexual inmates as including "large numbers of criminals and especially blackmailers" and explained that they might enter "sordid relationships" to improve their chances of survival (42). Survivors' memoirs often reveal that authors' homophobia survived the transition from civilian to camp life intact; see, for example, Olga Lengyel, *Five Chimneys: The Story of Auschwitz* (New York, 1983), 197–99.

However indicative of contemporaries' mixed attitudes toward homosexuality, this discourse constituted something other than silence. It expressed the impression that Nazism and homosexuality were in some way linked. As recent research has made clear, the claim that this link included both homophobia and homoeroticism did not just reflect contemporary critics' inconsistent attitudes toward homosexuality. It reflected, at least in part, the Nazi movement's own ambiguous relationship to the subject.

It is appropriate, however, to speak of "silence" in one regard. Until the late 1970s we had almost no testimony from acknowledged gay men or lesbians.⁴⁰ Robert Moeller has evoked the homophobic postwar environment that discouraged those who had been persecuted from coming forward: their crime under the Nazis was still a crime.⁴¹ By the time the political climate had changed, survivors had died, become infirm, or were too wary to give testimony. The handful of existing testimonies of gay survivors is invaluable, but compared to the roughly fifty thousand memoirs (published and unpublished) of Jewish survivors reported by the Israeli Holocaust memorial, Yad Vashem, it is scanty evidence indeed.

The emergence of a gay liberation movement in the 1970s provided the setting for the publication of the first memoir of a survivor, the first systematic scholarly treatment, and activists' efforts to document the persecution of homosexuals.⁴² Although the earliest efforts aimed mainly to record the persecution of gay men (whose sexual activities, unlike those of lesbians, were criminalized), comparative questions were inevitable. Were gay men, like Jews, persecuted simply for being who they were, and did they suffer a similar fate in concentration camps? The outrage that this suggestion provoked revealed a problematic perception that a comparison to gay men was an insult to Jewish victims. In light of this outrage, it is crucial to note that gay-

⁴⁰ Erik Jensen, this volume.

⁴¹ Robert G. Moeller, "'The Homosexual Man Is a 'Man,' the Homosexual Woman Is a 'Woman'": Sex, Society, and the Law in Postwar West Germany," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 4, no. 3 (1994): 395–429. See also Hans-Georg Stuenkel, "Vom unausgeglichene Geschlechtshaushalt: Zur Verfolgung Homosexueller," in *Verachtet—Verfolgt—Vernichtet: Zu den "vergessenen" Opfern des NS-Regimes*, ed. Projektgruppe für die vergessenen Opfer des NS-Regimes (Hamburg, 1988), 46–63, esp. 63. An additional source problem is the disappearance of the records of the SS's Office for the Fight against Homosexuality and Abortion.

⁴² For early survivors' memoirs, see Heinz Heger, *The Men with the Pink Triangle* (Boston, 1980); also the writings of the gay refugee Richard Plant, *The Pink Triangle: The Nazi War against Homosexuals* (New York, 1986). For early academic work, see Rüdiger Lautmann, Winfried Grikschat, and Egbert Schmidt, "Der rosa Winkel in den nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslagern," in *Seminar: Gesellschaft und Homosexualität*, ed. Rüdiger Lautmann (Frankfurt am Main, 1977); Rüdiger Lautmann, "Eine Sexualität am sozialen Rande: Die Schwulen. Damals—Alltag im Nationalsozialismus," in *Der Zwang zur Tugend: Die gesellschaftliche Kontrolle der Sexualitäten*, ed. Rüdiger Lautmann (Frankfurt am Main, 1984), 156–80. Activists' work includes the collection from the Berlin Museum, *Eldorado: Homosexuelle Frauen und Männer in Berlin, 1850–1950: Geschichte, Alltag und Kultur* (Berlin, 1984).

sympathetic scholarship now argues, with a single voice, that the persecution of gay men was different, both in kind and in scale, from that of the Jews.⁴³

The distinctions lay at the heart of Nazi racism. The Nazis sought to eliminate Jews from all of Europe; they endeavored to eliminate homosexuality only from Germany, since homosexuals' threat to "the race" applied only to "Aryans." The Nazis' effort to eliminate homosexuality, even in Germany, did not require the physical extermination of all men who performed homosexual acts. Nazi leaders believed that most homosexuality was not hereditary but learned and thus that many acting homosexuals could be "reeducated," albeit in settings (prisons, concentration camps) that in fact were often deadly. In contrast, they thought that people of Jewish ancestry who did not practice Judaism—who were even baptized—were still Jews: there could be no "reeducation." Even in the case of men whom the regime considered "real" homosexuals, as Geoffrey Giles has documented, the regime hoped that castration could provide a "correction."⁴⁴ The experience and effects of castration or internment were horrible, often deadly, but the logic behind the Nazis' responses to homosexuality was different from that behind their treatment of Jews.

Finally, key figures in the Nazi hierarchy, notably Hitler, were simply less obsessed with homosexuals than with Jews. This meant that homosexuality might be punished harshly, mildly, or not at all, depending on the social and political placement of the accused. Thus not only was Ernst Röhm's homosexuality tolerated until he became politically inconvenient, but, as Burkhard Jellonnek notes, solid social standing provided protection against police crackdowns on street prostitution and sex in public places, both the province of the young and the poor.⁴⁵ Claudia Schoppmann has revealed that hunting down lesbians was less important than protecting from wrongful suspicion wholesome "Aryan" maidens who expressed conventional female intimacies. For this reason, among others, proposals to criminalize female homosexual acts were rejected. Lesbians suffered less from persecution unique to themselves than from the regime's larger vision for women, which hit unwed women particularly hard since it included intense pressure to marry and discrimination against women in the workplace.⁴⁶

⁴³ The same was not necessarily true of gay activists; see Jensen, this volume. For a good summary of the arguments, see Günter Grau, "Introduction," in *Hidden Holocaust? Gay and Lesbian Persecution in Germany 1933–45*, ed. Günter Grau (New York, 1995).

⁴⁴ Geoffrey J. Giles, "'The Most Unkindest Cut of All': Castration, Homosexuality, and Nazi Justice," *Journal of Contemporary History* 27 (1992): 41–61.

⁴⁵ Burkhard Jellonnek, *Homosexuelle unter dem Hakenkreuz: Die Verfolgung von Homosexuellen im Dritten Reich* (Paderborn, 1990).

⁴⁶ Claudia Schoppmann, *Nationalsozialistische Sexualpolitik und weibliche Homosexualität* (Pfaffenweiler, 1991); summarized in English in Claudia Schoppmann, "National Socialist Policies towards Female Homosexuality," in *Gender Relations in German History: Power, Agency, and Experience from the Sixteenth to the Twentieth Century*, ed. Lynn Abrams and Elizabeth Harvey (Durham, 1997). In 1938, when Austria was incorporated into the Reich, its laws criminalizing female homosexual acts remained valid for that territory. In this context, women were prosecuted under a Nazified system of justice for lesbian sexual acts. See Claudia Schoppmann, *Verbotene Verhältnisse: Frauenliebe 1938–1945*,

The use of different frameworks for understanding the persecution of gay men and Jews has enabled scholars to move beyond the “concentration camp paradigm.” But this paradigm has not been the only handicap confronted by scholars studying the persecution of homosexuals under Nazism. As both Rüdiger Lautmann and Günter Grau have noted, much work on the persecution of gay men has simply reiterated the *fact* of persecution, describing the “macropolitical actions” of the Nazis, on the one hand, and offering chronologies and statistical summaries of the persecution in various localities, on the other.⁴⁷

As valuable as this detail is, recent and ongoing studies demonstrate a greater range of gay male experience than such accounts suggest. Jellonnek’s analysis of regional variations in the persecution of gay men demonstrates, at the local level, the differences between anti-Semitic and antigay persecution. The Nazi regime sought Jews everywhere—in major cities, in small towns, in the countryside. By contrast, its efforts against homosexuals were more aggressive in urban areas with well-developed gay subcultures than in small town and rural settings.⁴⁸ John Fout’s ongoing work on gay men in Nazi Germany emphasizes the variety of sites, beyond the concentration camps, that were significant in the persecution. Tens of thousands of men convicted of homosexuality in civilian courts were sent to prison, where a majority either completed their sentences or perished without setting foot in a concentration camp. Those convicted by the military judicial system were either executed or given punitive assignments in “cannon fodder” units. Homosexual men categorized as mentally ill were sent to mental hospitals, where they were sometimes “euthanized.”⁴⁹ Andreas Pretzel and Gabrielle Roßbach’s anthology on Berlin includes chapters that detail the methods of collecting evidence and obtaining confessions and the distinct roles of the criminal police, the

1st ed. (Berlin, 1999). Despite the great value of Schoppmann’s work, it is unfortunate that the study of lesbians in Nazi Germany remains a one-woman show. See also Claudia Schoppmann’s oral histories (*Days of Masquerade: Life Stories of Lesbians during the Third Reich*, trans. Allyson Brown [New York, 1996]).

⁴⁷ Lautmann, “Nichts für Ungut!”; see also Günter Grau’s review of several recent books in *Zeitschrift für Sexualforschung* 13 (2000): 263–71.

⁴⁸ Jellonnek. On the special dangers of the big city, see Andreas Pretzel and Vera Kruber, “Jeder 100. Berliner: Statistiken zur Strafverfolgung Homosexueller in Berlin,” in *Wegen der zu erwartenden hohen Strafe: Homosexuellenverfolgung in Berlin 1933–1945*, ed. Andreas Pretzel and Gabrielle Roßbach (Berlin, 2000), 169–85.

⁴⁹ John Fout, “Background Presentation,” paper delivered at USHMM colloquium, April 2000.

Gestapo, and the Special Courts (Sondergerichte).⁵⁰ Even within concentration camps, gay men's experience varied by preinternment community and date of imprisonment.⁵¹

Unlike earlier overviews of the persecution of gay men, these more detailed studies force us to confront the permeable border between victimization and complicity. As Manfred Herzer points out, the majority of homosexuals, "due to their extremely effective disguise, among other things, belonged to the willing subjects and beneficiaries of the Nazi state just like other German men and women."⁵² Pretzel and Roßbach reveal that gay men, particularly prostitutes, denounced their sexual contacts to the police, enabling further arrests.⁵³ Men who were prosecuted upon their outing might previously have persecuted others from their positions in organizations such as the Hitler Youth and the SS.⁵⁴ Although many gay men in the SA were killed in the Röhm Purge of June 1934, the fact remains that Ernst Röhm and his friends enthusiastically pummeled Jews and political opponents in service to the Nazi cause. Fout notes that 70 percent of the men sentenced under Paragraphs 175 and 175a served their sentences, were released, and were then drafted into the Wehrmacht, where they aided Germany's domination of Europe.⁵⁵

Military draftees and voluntary SA recruits can hardly be compared. Yet the fact that gay men, as men, participated in such organizations as the Wehrmacht and the SA draws our attention to a question that alternately concerned and titillated earlier commentators on the Nazi regime. What was the relationship between all-male organizations, hypermasculine militarism, homoeroticism, homosexuality, and Nazism?⁵⁶

In a series of works spanning more than three decades, George L. Mosse explored precisely this relationship.⁵⁷ According to Mosse, in the late eighteenth century the

⁵⁰ Andreas Pretzel, "Erst dadurch wird eine wirksame Bekämpfung ermöglicht: Polizeiliche Ermittlungen," in Pretzel and Roßbach, eds., 43–73; Gabrielle Roßbach, "Sie sahen das Zwecklose ihres Leugnens ein: Verhöre bei Gestapo und Kripo," in *ibid.*, 74–98; see also Frank Sparing, "... wegen Vergehen nach Section 175 verhaftet": Die Verfolgung der Düsseldorfer Homosexuellen während des Nationalsozialismus (Düsseldorf, 1997).

⁵¹ Joachim Müller, "'Wohl dem,'" Andreas Sternweiler, "... wegen dringenden Verdachts," and Andreas Sternweiler, "Nachteiliges über ihn," all in Joachim Müller and Andreas Sternweiler, *Homosexuelle Männer im KZ Sachsenhausen* (Berlin, 2000).

⁵² Manfred Herzer, "Das dritte Geschlecht und das Dritte Reich," *Siegessäule* 2, no. 5 (May 1985): 31, quoted in Jensen, this volume.

⁵³ Pretzel, "Erst dadurch," 62; Roßbach, 81.

⁵⁴ Andreas Pretzel, "Ich wünsche meinem schlimmsten Feind nicht, daß er das durchmacht, was ich da durchgemacht habe: Vorfälle im Konzentrationslager Sachsenhausen vor Gericht in Berlin," in Pretzel and Roßbach, eds., 119–68, esp. 127, 140–47; Brade, "Was einmaliges im Lager," in Müller and Sternweiler.

⁵⁵ Fout.

⁵⁶ A recent biography of Hitler has attracted considerable criticism for the author's slippage from evidence that the young Hitler inhabited a homosocial, even homoerotically charged environment to the claim that Hitler was probably homosexual. See Lothar Machtan, *The Hidden Hitler*, trans. John Brownjohn (New York, 2001).

⁵⁷ George L. Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology: Intellectual Origins of the Third Reich*, 1st ed. (New York, 1964); George L. Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality: Respectability and Abnormal Sexuality*

European bourgeoisie began to articulate an ideal masculinity that united intellectual strength, moral virtue, and physical beauty. It projected the antithesis of these qualities onto various “others”: women as well as working-class, Jewish, and homosexual men. The Männerbund, which translates imperfectly as “male collective,” united men of disciplined mind and body who, undistracted by women, transformed their deep bonds with each other and their leader into a powerful creative force. Prior to the First World War, sympathetic theorists of the Männerbund declared this productive male bond to be homoerotic in nature, although true men of the Männerbund bore no similarity to the dandified homosexuals of negative stereotype.⁵⁸ After the First World War, the ideology of the Männerbund reached its peak in fascism—the ultimate anti-Socialist, anti-Semitic, homophobic, misogynist ideology. But in the masculinity of the interwar period, especially as practiced in fascism, a powerful tension existed between the homoerotic bonds of the Männerbund and the vilification of the homosexual, whose “otherness” was necessary for positive definitions of masculinity.

Mosse’s overall framework was powerful, but it awaited testing and refinement. While Mosse described sweeping transformations in ideologies of masculinity in the modern period, subsequent research has explored the Männerbund in greater detail and in more limited settings. In this context, Eve Sedgwick’s effort to theorize the relationship between homosociality and homoeroticism has proven significant, even if the object of her focus, late-eighteenth- and early-nineteenth-century AngloAmerican literature, initially appears remote from Nazi Germany. Sedgwick cites feminist analyses that establish “an intelligible continuum of aims, emotions, and valuations link[ing] lesbianism with other forms of women’s attention to women: the bond of mother and daughter, for instance, the bond of sister and sister, women’s friendship, ‘networking,’ and the active struggles of feminism.”⁵⁹ Although Sedgwick does not say so, Nazi authorities would have recognized this continuum. After all, it was their belief that female friendship and lesbianism might easily be confused that prompted them to reject proposals to criminalize lesbian acts, even as the fear that feminism and lesbianism were linked had been an argument in favor of criminalization.⁶⁰ Sedgwick asks: If we accept this continuum for women, why, in the case of men, do we assume a radical break between homosexuality and male bonding—a break so radical that scholars often consider homophobia to be a *necessary* element of male homosociality? Adopting the notion of “homosocial desire,” Sedgwick instead posits a continuum between male homosociality and male homosexuality.

in *Modern Europe*, 1st ed. (New York, 1985); George L. Mosse, *The Image of Man: The Creation of Modern Masculinity* (New York, 1996).

⁵⁸ Hans Blüher, *Die deutsche Wandervogelbewegung als erotisches Phänomen* (Berlin, 1914); Hans Blüher, *Die Rolle der Erotik in der männlichen Gesellschaft* (Jena, 1917). See also Mosse, *The Crisis of German Ideology*, 204–17.

⁵⁹ Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York, 1985), 2.

⁶⁰ Schoppmann, *Nationalsozialistische Sexualpolitik*.

It was precisely this continuum, Eleanor Hancock asserts, that made the case of SA chief Ernst Röhm so explosive. Röhm, according to Hancock, found his masculinity, homosexuality, devotion to the Nazi movement, and membership in the *Männerbund* perfectly compatible. His differences with other Nazi leaders over the acceptability of homosexuality addressed a basic conflict about whether sexuality was a public or a private matter. The significance Nazis attributed to race and reproduction has led some historians to conclude that they did not recognize a “private” sphere of sexuality. Yet high-ranking Nazis accepted nonprocreative affairs and low birth rates among their ranks, and Hitler was not alone in considering Röhm’s homosexuality irrelevant as long as he was effective. Still, Röhm’s homosexuality “broke the distinctions established between homosexual desire and homosocial male bonding” and thus elicited a violent response among many within the party’s upper ranks. For men who found deep meaning in the homosocial element of Nazism, Hancock suggests, Röhm’s blurring of boundaries was intolerable.⁶¹

Geoffrey Giles, too, argues that concerns about homosexuality were not simply an *ex post facto* explanation for the Röhm Purge, intended to deflect attention from the “true” reason for the action: the need to ease the army’s concerns about the power of the SA. Does this mean we should see fears of homosexuality rather than institutional competition as the “real” reason for the purge? Giles does not propose that we replace one explanation with another; rather, we should see the Röhm Purge as having been designed to serve multiple functions. The purge would reassure the army that the SA would be kept in check. The leadership also intended the purge to mollify an important group of allies: cultural conservatives, who were as troubled by the SA’s rowdiness as they were by Berlin’s gay nightlife. Likewise linking concerns about sexuality to the purge, Todd Ettelson emphasizes different styles of *Männerbunde*. The SA’s brand of *Männerbund*, whose raucous brutality and open homosexuality displayed contempt for “feminized bourgeois morals,” was useful in the Nazis’ efforts to sow disorder in the Weimar Republic and to gain power. This style of masculinity, however, became a liability when the Nazis had to govern a state. Once in power, the Nazis required a more disciplined form of *Männerbund*, such as that of the armed forces and the SS. Thus, confirming the army’s position and addressing the place of homosexuality in the *Männerbund* were linked.⁶²

According to Nicolaus Sombart, Germany was unusual in the extent to which ideologies of the *Männerbund* permeated political life, which may help explain why Sedgwick’s homosocial locus is in literature, while Hancock’s, Giles’s, and Ettelson’s are in

⁶¹ Eleanor Hancock, “‘Only the Real, the True, the Masculine Held Its Value’: Ernst Röhm, Masculinity, and Male Homosexuality,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 8, no. 4 (1998): 640.

⁶² Geoffrey J. Giles, “The Institutionalization of Homosexual Panic in the Third Reich,” in *Social Outsiders in the Third Reich*, ed. Robert Gellately and Nathan Stoltzfus (Princeton, 2000), 233–55; Todd Ettelson, “Old Warriors and New SA Men: Masculinity in ‘The Night of the Long Knives,’” paper presented at the conference “Gender, Power, Religion: Forces in Cultural History,” German Historical Institute, Washington, D.C., 2001.

the SA.⁶³ Peter von Rönn and Harry Oosterhuis also hold that the tension between homosociality and homosexuality was central to the life of the Nazi state. In his work on Nazi-era psychiatry, Rönn proposes that in the mid-1930s, when the authority and work of policing bodies such as the Gestapo and the SS expanded, the practical importance of the Männerbund increased. In this context, the fight against homosexuality became too important to be left to medicine; consequently, to justify taking control of the battle against them, SS chief Heinrich Himmler declared homosexuals to be a political threat rather than a medical problem.⁶⁴ Oosterhuis has noted that Nazi ideologues openly declared their ambition to create a state based on the Männerbund theorized at the turn of the century, though they were fully (albeit uncomfortably) aware that the Männerbund had been theorized as homoerotic. Thus, when Himmler began his harsh persecution of homosexual men, he was not just battling homosexual individuals who incidentally had found their way into such institutions as the SS or into such larger collectives as the German *Volk*. Rather, in Oosterhuis's formulation, he feared that "the National Socialist men's *state* threatened to destroy itself because organizations like the SS and the Hitler Youth could become hothouses for homosexuality" (emphasis added).⁶⁵ In this context, Gudrun Schwarz's claim that SS wives were not peripheral to an organization conceived as utterly male but, rather, that SS couples were understood as the cell of elite "Aryan" society could help to bridge the current yawning chasm between studies of the Männerbund and women's history.⁶⁶

And what of the lived experience—as opposed to the ideology—of male homosexuality and the Männerbund? John Fout, who has researched thousands of interrogations of men accused of homosexual behavior, believes that suspects' testimony may represent "the largest source of autobiographical statements from men who had sex with other men to be found in the modern world."⁶⁷ Aside from their obvious value in researching the Nazi persecution, these records constitute an incomparable source for reconstructing the lives of men who engaged in same-sex behavior—and not only for the Nazi years,

⁶³ Nicolaus Sombart, "Männerbund und politische Kultur in Deutschland," in *Männergeschichte, Geschlechtergeschichte: Männlichkeit im Wandel der Moderne*, ed. Thomas Kühne (Frankfurt am Main, 1996), 136–54. Sombart's assertion, however, is not based on a thorough comparative exploration of political cultures; historians of other states may take issue with Sombart's claim that women's minimal role in public life in turn-of-the-century Germany was exceptional. In Bernd Widdig, *Männerbünde und Massen: Zur Krise männlicher Identität in der Literatur der Moderne* (Opladen, 1992), debates about the Männerbund in Wilhelmine and Weimar Germany are intimately linked to debates about the form of state and political power.

⁶⁴ Peter von Rönn, "Politische und psychiatrische Homosexualitätskonstruktion," *Zeitschrift für Sexualforschung* 11, nos. 2–3 (1998): 99–129, 220–60.

⁶⁵ Harry Oosterhuis, "Male Bonding and the Persecution of Homosexual Men in Nazi Germany," *Amsterdams Sociologisch Tijdschrift* 17, no. 4 (1991): 27–45, esp. 37.

⁶⁶ Gudrun Schwarz, *Eine Frau an seiner Seite: Ehefrauen in der "SS-Sippengemeinschaft"* (Hamburg, 1997).

⁶⁷ John C. Fout, "The Nazi Demonization of the Homosexual in World War II," paper presented at the conference "Departures: New Feminist Perspectives on the Holocaust," University of Minnesota, April 2001.

since suspects often described decades of sexual experience. Particularly in the case of groups whose same-sex experience is otherwise poorly documented, Nazi-generated records might recast the narrative of modern gay history more generally. Fout discovers, for instance, that sexual practices of rural men differed significantly from those of urban men.⁶⁸

Thomas Kühne turns our attention back to men's organizations. In his work on masculinity and the Wehrmacht, Kühne challenges not the claim that homosociality excludes homosexuality (as Sedgwick does) but, rather, the claim that masculinity as practiced in the Wehrmacht excluded femininity. According to Kühne, men of the Wehrmacht simultaneously valorized "hard" masculinity in battle and "soft" feminine tenderness to one's comrades. Interestingly, Kühne characterizes the latter as "maternal masculinity"—caring for one's comrade as a mother would—rather than as an erotic bond.⁶⁹ Kühne's claim that the mother-son bond was a model for warmth between men is a useful reminder of the significance of loving relationships between men and women who were not sexually involved (or interested).⁷⁰ Indeed, Kühne's analysis might be seen as a challenge not only to the privileging of the heterosexual couple but also to queer studies' privileging of sexuality.

If homoeroticism is marginal to Kühne's analysis of masculinity, however, heteroeroticism as an element of male camaraderie is also curiously absent. Although he describes the "masculine/hard" bonding devices of "sarcastic language and excessive alcohol use,"⁷¹ Kühne does not inquire into heterosexually marked (and often exploitative) practices that frequently accompany such rituals of male bonding: bragging about heterosexual conquests, sharing pornography, setting out as a group to seek women for sex. Rather, he finds a tender heteroeroticism (for example, bonds with wives back home) to be in tension with the tender homosocial bonds of the Männerbund.

Perhaps Kühne's ongoing work will address these points. In the meantime, in theorizing homosocial bonds in a gendered manner, Kühne has taken a step few students of Männerbünde in Nazi Germany (outside the gay history "ghetto") have been willing to take.⁷² In recent years, we have seen important studies of the internal dynamics of such groups as the Wehrmacht and the order police, which massacred Jews in occu-

⁶⁸ John C. Fout, "Homosexuality in Rural Hesse and Saxony in the Nazi Era," manuscript, 2001.

⁶⁹ Thomas Kühne, "... aus diesem Krieg werden nicht nur harte Männer heimkehren": Kriegskameradschaft und Männlichkeit im 20. Jahrhundert," in Kühne, ed., 174–92; see also Thomas Kühne, "Zwischen Männerbund und Volksgemeinschaft: Hitlers Soldaten und der Mythos der Kameradschaft," *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* 38 (1998): 165–89.

⁷⁰ See also my discussion of this point in Elizabeth D. Heineman, "Whose Mothers? Generational Difference, War, and the Nazi Cult of Motherhood," *Journal of Women's History* 12, no. 4 (2001): 139–63.

⁷¹ Thomas Kühne, "Kameradschaft—'Das Beste im Leben des Mannes,'" *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 22 (1996). Kühne notes in passing homoerotic overtones in some soldiers' diaries and letters.

⁷² On this point, see also Ann Taylor Allen, "The Holocaust and the Modernization of Gender: A Historiographical Essay," *Central European History* 30, no. 3 (1997): 349–64.

pied Poland.⁷³ While it is possible that the sources examined by the authors of these studies offer little information about homosexuality per se, it is impossible to miss the fact that the Wehrmacht, order police, and countless other organizations were Männerbünde. Nearly a century has passed since the publication of works that theorized a homoerotic element to the Männerbund and nearly forty years since Mosse's elaboration of the role of the Männerbund in fascism. It is now time that more historians of the male organizations so critical to the functioning of the Nazi state address masculinity and sexuality in a systematic manner.

Race and Reproduction: What's Sex Got to Do With It?

In his history of the movement for homosexual rights, Magnus Hirschfeld described the place of sexuality in German medical training of the 1890s:

Venereal disease was talked about, to be sure... Professors did speak about normal and abnormal births, described in anatomy the final structure and in evolutionary biology the developing structure of sexual organs ... [but] their functions, to say nothing of sexual feelings and needs, went entirely unmentioned... Such a thing as normal sex drive (that is, desires and acts) was officially nonexistent, and concerning drive disturbances, which went by the name of "perversities," people only whispered strange and horrible things.⁷⁴

Hirschfeld's observations raise a point pertinent to the history of sexuality, not just nineteenth-century medical education. Is a history of reproduction, reproductive politics, or venereal disease a history of sexuality? Because the "racial state" implemented such radical eugenic policies, this question comes to the fore in the case of Nazi Germany.

Some of our best work in Nazi-era women's history concerns reproductive policies such as compulsory sterilization, selective abortion, screening for marriage, and marriage loans. Yet curiously, like Hirschfeld's professors, the authors of these works discuss reproduction while making little mention of the sexual desires and experiences that make conception possible in the first place. The point is not that such works are unsatisfying. In studying racialized reproductive politics, scholars like Gisela Bock and

⁷³ Particularly important for English-language readers are Omer Bartov, *Hitler's Army: Soldiers, Nazis, and War in the Third Reich* (New York, 1991); Christopher R. Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (New York, 1992).

⁷⁴ Quoted in James D. Steakley, "Per Scientiam Ad Justitiam: Magnus Hirschfeld and the Sexual Politics of Innate Homosexuality," in *Science and Homosexualities*, ed. Vernon A. Rosario (New York, 1997), 133–54, 135–36.

Gabriele Czarnowski have helped unravel one of the most significant aspects of racial policy under the Nazi regime: the relationship between racial ideology, population policy, and reproductive experience. The point is that histories of reproduction that omit any discussion of sexual desire or sexual experience throw into especially sharp relief the absence of crucial elements of sexuality from our discussions.

As Gisela Bock observed in an early essay, attempts to control reproduction ranged from incentives to marriage and childbearing for the racially and eugenically “fit” to disincentives, roadblocks, and compulsory sterilization for those whose offspring the regime considered undesirable. Efforts to control the composition of the population extended further to “euthanasia” and genocide.⁷⁵ By describing this continuum, Bock rejected a sharp division between studies of those privileged and those despised by the regime, and she insisted that race and sex were intertwined all along the continuum. This framework has profoundly shaped the field.

For Bock, the denial of reproductive autonomy made women, as a group, victims of Nazism. The denial of birth control and abortion turned childbearing and rearing into “compulsory labor” for “desirable” women and made sterilization the fate of “undesirables.” In the context of debates about women’s status in the Nazi regime, Bock’s work has proven highly controversial. Rather than revisit these debates, which have been well analyzed elsewhere, I will focus here on the implications of her work for a history of sexuality in Nazi Germany.⁷⁶

In Bock’s work, sexual activity per se entered the discussion when it served as a diagnostic marker. A girl’s or woman’s errant sexual behavior could earn her the label “asocial” or a medical diagnosis of “feeble-minded,” making her a candidate for sterilization. Czarnowski noted a similar phenomenon in rejections of applications to marry, and Irmgard Weyrauther found that inappropriate sexual deportment could result in the denial of a Mother’s Cross to otherwise qualified women.⁷⁷ In short, “sexually promiscuous” women faced penalties in the Nazi state. The regime not only denied them medals and restricted their reproduction; it also institutionalized them, imprisoned them, and sent them to concentration camps. We will return to the subject of sexually errant women as targets of the regime later. First, however, it is important to note the limitations as well as the contributions of this research.

⁷⁵ Gisela Bock, “Racism and Sexism in Nazi Germany: Motherhood, Compulsory Sterilization, and the State,” in *When Biology Became Destiny: Women in Weimar and Nazi Germany*, ed. Renate Bridenthal, Atina Grossmann, and Marion A. Kaplan (New York, 1984), 271–96.

⁷⁶ Atina Grossmann, “Feminist Debates about Women and National Socialism,” *Gender and History* 3 (1991): 350–58; Adelheid von Saldern, “Victims or Perpetrators? Controversies about the Role of Women in the Nazi State,” in *Nazism and German Society 1933–1945*, ed. David Crew (London, 1994), 141–65. Bock has recently devoted greater attention to female perpetrators; see Gisela Bock, “Ordinary Women in Nazi Germany: Perpetrators, Victims, Followers, and Bystanders,” in *Women in the Holocaust*, ed. Dalia Ofer and Lenore J. Weitzman (New Haven, 1998), 85–100.

⁷⁷ Bock, *Zwangssterilisation*, 389–410; Gabriele Czarnowski, *Das kontrollierte Paar: Ehe und Sexualpolitik im Nationalsozialismus* (Weinheim, 1991), esp. 205–9; Irmgard Weyrauther, *Muttertag und Mutterkreuz: Der Kult um die “deutsche Mutter” im Nationalsozialismus* (Frankfurt am Main, 1993).

In emphasizing that the goal of a “perfect Aryan race” made it necessary to prevent “imperfect” Aryans from reproducing, such analyses link “sex” and “race.” However, they accept the division between “races” (“Aryan,” Jewish, Slavic, etc.) as a priori. Indeed, in the Reich proper, such documents as birth certificates and baptismal papers generally established “racial” membership, and evaluations of sexual behavior assumed independent knowledge of the subject’s racial classification. But in broadening her investigation to occupied Europe, where the task of identifying “ethnic Germans” was complicated by such factors as linguistic difference and an absence of satisfactory documentation, Doris Bergen has discovered a more complex relationship between racial designation and sexual deportment. A woman’s application to be recognized as an “ethnic German” might stand or fall on the German authorities’ evaluation of her sexual history (just as men’s or women’s applications might stand or fall on other nonbiological criteria, such as work habits). It is not clear how often such evaluations came into play, but Bergen’s observations could require that we revise our assumptions regarding the independence of Nazi notions of “race.”⁷⁸

Even for those classified a priori as “Aryans,” the limitations of common analyses become clear when we inquire into the significance of sex for other categories of eugenically defined “outsiders.” In Bock’s analysis, “promiscuity” is simply one marker of outsider status, unique only in its greater application to women, with sterilization just one of many possible penalties. Yet other groups targeted for sterilization and denied marriage licenses, such as epileptics, became pregnant or sired children only by having sex. The fact that they were presumably sexually active (or would be upon marriage), not the mere fact of their epilepsy, made it necessary to sterilize them or deny them permission to marry.

The fact that Nazi eugenicists appear to have thought in purely reproductive terms helps explain why historians have written a “sexless” history of reproductive politics under Nazism. We have taken our cues from our sources. If we broaden our vision beyond the years 1933–45, however, we find that this “sexless” discussion of reproduction is not a given; rather, it needs to be explained. In her work on birth control and abortion, Atina Grossmann has observed that some Weimar-era reformers explicitly linked sexual pleasure with reproductive health, considering both in the context of class justice.⁷⁹ Working-class lovers met furtively in borrowed rooms or hidden stairwells, fearing intruders and rushing their encounters, while bourgeois lovers conducted

⁷⁸ Doris L. Bergen, “Sex, Blood, and Vulnerability: Women Outsiders in German-Occupied Europe,” in Gellately and Stoltzfus, eds. Similarly, Polish men’s applications for “Aryanization” (that is, bureaucratic reclassification from “Slavic” to “Aryan” racial membership) upon discovery of their wartime relationships with German women depended in part on details of the sexual story. If the woman was married or a prostitute, the application was denied and the man usually executed or sent to a concentration camp; if she was single and pregnant, he might be “Aryanized” in order to enable marriage and a legitimate birth. See Elizabeth D. Heineman, *What Difference Does a Husband Make? Women and Marital Status in Nazi and Postwar Germany* (Berkeley, 1999), 58–59.

⁷⁹ Atina Grossmann, *Reforming Sex: The German Movement for Birth Control and Abortion Reform, 1920–1950* (New York, 1995). Although her book includes the Nazi and immediate postwar period,

their sexual affairs in comfort and privacy. Denied contraceptives and abortion, sexual intercourse brought as much fear as pleasure to working-class women. If impulsive pleasure resulted in unwanted pregnancy, the proletariat was disproportionately vulnerable to poverty and to maternal and infant death.

Because proponents of such class analyses were silenced after 1933, Grossmann too represents a Nazi-era bureaucracy that was obsessed with reproduction but uninterested in sexual pleasure. Nevertheless, her work suggests useful questions about the role of sexual pleasure in reproductive politics after 1933. Did Nazi-era eugenicists react only against Weimar-era language regarding pleasure, or did they appropriate and transform it? For example, might they have discovered a “right to pleasure” for “Aryans,” whose enjoyment of sex had been assaulted by fears of what Hitler termed the “Jewish disease”—syphilis?⁸⁰ What was the experience of the impoverished masses for whom increased access to contraceptives and abortion, Weimar-era reformers hoped, would bring greater pleasure? Did the crackdown on abortion and contraceptives mean greater sexual misery? Did the booming economy and the expansion of social programs for those who qualified make sex without contraceptives more pleasurable, since unplanned pregnancy less often meant poverty?

Considering how much we know about sterilization and abortion, it is surprising how poorly informed we are about contraceptive use in Nazi Germany. Historians frequently refer to directives that limited the advertisement and distribution of contraceptives and note that the use of contraceptives *other than condoms* was criminalized in 1941. But condoms constitute a pretty big loophole, and their use needs further research. Vending machines selling condoms could be found in hotels and public toilets at least as early as 1927, and they remained there after 1933 despite new regulations regarding the packaging and advertising of condoms and new restrictions on who was licensed to sell them.⁸¹ During the war, military men by the millions were provisioned with condoms.

To be sure, health authorities intended condoms to be used to prevent the spread of STDs, not as contraceptives.⁸² Because of their association with STDs and prostitution, many potential users considered condoms unsavory. Furthermore, condom use was a male, not a female, prerogative. However, just because health authorities endorsed condoms only for STD prevention does not mean that the German public was unaware of their contraceptive applications. Just because women were dependent on men’s

the discussion summarized here applies to the Weimar period (see esp. ix–x, 116–30). See also Randall Halle’s discussion of Herbert Marcuse on this point.

⁸⁰ Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, trans. Ralph Manheim (Boston, 1943), 253.

⁸¹ Nazi-era illustrated magazines, prohibited from advertising contraceptives, instead carried advertisements for catalogs of “hygienic rubber articles,” an easily recognized euphemism for condoms and pessaries. See Elizabeth Heineman, “Sexual Consumer Culture in the Miracle Years,” paper presented at the conference “The Miracle Years Revisited,” Oxford, Mississippi, April 2002. On condom automats in foreign laborers’ barracks, see Lagrou, 145; on teenagers’ access to condoms, see Waite, “Teenage Sexuality.”

⁸² Annette F. Timm, “The Politics of Fertility: Bevölkerungspolitik and Health Care in Berlin, 1919–1972,” Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1999, 115–17, 408–10.

cooperation does not mean that men never agreed to use condoms for contraceptive purposes—or, for that matter, that men never *initiated* such use. While condoms may be of secondary interest in the history of women’s struggle to control their own fertility, they are important in the history of contraceptive practice among cooperating couples.

Annette Timm has argued that we must look beyond the Nazis’ public declarations on race and reproductive health to consider the unspoken ways that authorities may have been concerned with sexual pleasure. Although the documentary trail indicates that it was a fear of sterility and congenital syphilis that led the regime to construct brothels for military men, Timm notes that the spread of STDs in the general population during the war elicited little public-health activity. This has led her to conclude that military brothels may have served another, more important, function: to improve men’s military performance by providing heterosexual outlets.⁸³ In a sense, Timm’s thesis is a logical extension of the analyses of brothels in concentration camps, which can *only* be understood as an incentive for male inmates, since their reproductive health was a decidedly low priority for the authorities.⁸⁴ In declaring that the regime’s noisy concern with reproductive health may not be the whole story, however, Timm illuminates a methodological challenge. Assumptions about men’s “need” for heterosexual outlets may have been so widely held that Nazi policymakers found it unnecessary to discuss the matter explicitly. If this is the case, historians must consider indirect evidence as well as what appears directly in the mountains of documents.

In the case of “race defilement,” we may be closer to integrating discussions of Nazi racial policy with our historical subjects’ experiences of sexual intimacy. There are two reasons for this. First, in their attempts to humanize relationships that the regime saw as purely racial contacts and persecuted viciously, scholars have frequently presented accounts of individuals. These stories rarely include details of the subjects’ sex lives per se, but they embed the presumed sexual activity in a genuinely human experience.⁸⁵ Second, records of investigations of “race defilement” include detailed accounts of sexual events. These records offer information about how, when, and what kind

⁸³ See Timm, this volume; also Annette F. Timm, “The Ambivalent Outsider: Prostitution, Promiscuity, and VD Control in Nazi Berlin,” in Gellately and Stoltzfus, eds.; for a more limited but useful discussion, see Franz Seidler, *Prostitution, Homosexualität, Selbstverstümmelung: Probleme der deutschen Sanitätsführung 1939–1945* (Neckargemünd, 1977), 135–36. See also Insa Meinen, “Wehrmacht und Prostitution: Zur Reglementierung der Geschlechterbeziehungen durch die deutsche Militärverwaltung im besetzten Frankreich 1940–1944,” *1999: Zeitschrift für Sozialgeschichte des 20. und 21. Jahrhunderts* 14, no. 2 (1999): 35–55.

⁸⁴ Kogon; for more recent discussions, see Christa Paul, *Zwangsprostitution: Staatlich errichtete Bordelle im Nationalsozialismus* (Berlin, 1994); Christa Schulz, “Weibliche Häftlinge aus Ravensbrück in Bordellen der Männerkonzentrationslager,” in *Frauen in Konzentrationslagern: Bergen-Belsen, Ravensbrück*, ed. Claus Füllberg-Stolberg et al. (Bremen, 1994), 135–46; Ulrich Bauche et al., eds., *Arbeit und Vernichtung: Das Konzentrationslager Neuengamme, 1938–1945* (Hamburg, 1991), 225–30.

⁸⁵ Marion A. Kaplan, *Between Dignity and Despair: Jewish Life in Nazi Germany* (New York, 1998), esp. 74–93; Robert Gellately, *The Gestapo and German Society: Enforcing Racial Policy 1933–1945* (Oxford, 1990); Raul Hilberg, *Perpetrators Victims Bystanders: The Jewish Catastrophe, 1933–1945* (New York, 1992), 131–38.

of sex figured into relationships. They also say much about the authorities' obsession with sexual practice.

The literature on "race defilement" between Germans and either foreign slave-laborers or prisoners of war has focused on the intersecting gender, racial, and political concerns that made both partners vulnerable upon exposure.⁸⁶ This, however, begins the story at the end of the relationship and tells us nothing about the interplay of sex, love, and power within the relationship itself. As prisoners or slaves, were foreign men deferential to their German female partners, or did deep-seated habits of male dominance and female subordination characterize such couples' intimate interactions? Did sexual intimacy confuse the hierarchies that presumably defined nonsexual relationships between German women and foreign men? The intersection of power and intimacy in "German-Jewish" relationships has been better articulated.⁸⁷ In mixed marriages, the non-Jewish partner could exercise the privilege of a quick divorce, leaving the Jewish partner alone vulnerable, but those who failed to divorce were themselves subject to harassment. As Marion Kaplan reveals, the result was an astonishing variety of human experiences, such as that of the "Aryan" husband whose refusal to divorce cost him his medical practice but who in deference to the new order informed his wife that they could no longer have sex.⁸⁸

We might expect concerns about reproduction to have been central in the regime's treatment of race defilement. Yet, as recent work demonstrates, sex in this context, as in the context of eugenics, had "a life of its own" that extended beyond any connection to conception. In interpreting the Nuremberg Laws, Saul Friedländer notes, the Supreme Court instructed the police and courts to consider heterosexual activities that served "to satisfy the sex drive of at least one of the partners," even if sterility or nonpenetrative activity ruled out any danger of conception.⁸⁹ In her analysis of legal proceedings against accused race defilers, Patricia Szobar has found that the police's and courts' obsession with the details of heterosexual practice went far beyond what was necessary to secure a conviction and stood completely apart from concerns about reproduction. Rather, the proceedings were part of a "discursive struggle to define the

⁸⁶ See, for example, Bernd Boll, "'... das gesunde Volksempfinden auf das Größte verletzt': Die Offenburger Strafjustiz und der 'verbotene Umgang mit Kriegsgefangenen' während des 2. Weltkriegs," *Die Ortenau*, no. 71 (1991): 645–78; Heineman, *What Difference*, 56–59; Gerd Steffens, "Die praktische Widerlegung des Rassismus: Verbotene Liebe und ihre Verfolgung," in *"Ich war immer gut zu meiner Russin": Zur Struktur und Praxis des Zwangsarbeitssystems im Zweiten Weltkrieg in der Region Südhessen*, ed. Fred Dorn and Klaus Heuer (Pfaffenweiler, 1991), 185–200; Kundrus, this volume.

⁸⁷ Cases involving a German man and a foreign woman were less often prosecuted and thus have received less study. See, however, Jill R. Stephenson, "Triangle: Foreign Workers, German Civilians, and the Nazi Regime: War and Society in Württemberg, 1939–1945," *German Studies Review* 15, no. 2 (1992): 339–59.

⁸⁸ Kaplan, 90.

⁸⁹ Judgment quoted in Saul Friedländer, *Nazi Germany and the Jews* (New York, 1997), 159; see also Hermann Graml, "Die Behandlung der an Fällen von sogenannter Rassenschande beteiligten 'deutschblutigen' Personen," *Gutachten des Instituts für Zeitgeschichte* 1 (1958): 72–76.

nature of erotic experience within the aegis of the law.” Given the state’s efforts to label nonprocreative sex as deviant, the result was ironic if not surprising to anyone familiar with Foucault’s analysis of the Victorians. Legal discourse, according to Szobar, “served to expand the realm of the sexual by attributing sexual meaning to even the most casual social interaction,” such as a Jewish man’s glance at an “Aryan” woman across the street.⁹⁰ At the same time, the records are full of incidents that were non-penetrative yet undisputedly sexual by most Western definitions, since they resulted in orgasm: partners masturbated in each other’s presence, masturbated each other, and performed oral sex.

A careful scholar’s response should be to wonder not only at the Nazis’ ability to find sex in nonsexual encounters but also at our own tendency to examine non-commercial, heterosexual acts only in the context of reproduction. We must not only remember that other kinds of sex exist but also resist treating them as marginal (as “foreplay” or as the sexual play of immature partners, automatically less significant than the “real thing”). Even allowing for the possibility of forced, false confessions, the court records make clear that penetration was not always central to Germans’ erotic experience, perhaps because other practices were pleasurable, perhaps because they were good contraceptive strategy. Furthermore, the drive to protect German “blood and honor”—racial purity but also more nebulous standards of propriety—reveals that the Nazis were not *solely* concerned with reproduction. If, as historians, we consider noncommercial heterosexual activity only in its capacity for conception, we do more than just miss an important element of human experience in Nazi Germany. We also overlook an aspect of sexuality that deeply concerned the authorities.

Heterosexually Errant Women, Social Control, and Modernization

Research on heterosexually nonconformist women, ranging from prostitutes to women who had sexual relationships with forced laborers during the war, paints a grim picture of the costs of deviating from the regime’s sexual standards. This very range, however, raises interesting questions about the ways the Nazis’ identification of outsiders linked sexuality to other criteria such as race, class, and medical or psychiatric condition. Existing research suggests that the link between sexuality and gender, at least, was clear: the gender was female. For women, nonmarital sex was a primary marker of “asociability” or “feble-mindedness.” For men, it was not. In his study of “asocials,” Klaus Scherer prints the succinct words of Wolfgang Knorr, physician and expert on “asocials”: “Men and women of equal hereditary basis reveal their inadequacy for social life in different ways. The wife or sexual partner

⁹⁰ See Szobar, this volume.

corresponding to a criminal or work-shy man is the prostitute or, later, slattern.”⁹¹ Errant male sexuality was essentially synonymous with criminal sexuality: nonmarital sexual violence, sex with children, and homosexual forays.⁹²

Recognizing that heterosexually nonconformist women faced significant pressures prior to 1933, scholars have inquired into questions of change and continuity. To what extent did the Nazis’ treatment of heterosexually errant women represent an expansion of previously existing trends toward control in the name of modern science and reform, and to what extent did the Nazi era signal something new? The Nazis did not invent the double standard by which women’s nonmarital sex was brutally condemned while men’s was considered regrettable but unavoidable. Rather, they inherited it from the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie, which had articulated the ideology of “separate spheres,” including distinct sexual expectations for men and women. Michael Burleigh has discovered horrifying consequences of popular acceptance of this ideology in cases of Germans who had women of their families institutionalized because of “moral deficiency” and declined to remove their relatives even when they learned that inmates of the same institutions were being “euthanized.”⁹³

Burleigh’s larger concern, however, is not the sexual double standard but, rather, the role of modern science and the welfare state in creating an environment that made euthanasia possible—indeed, that welcomed it as a solution to social strains. He thus engages historians such as Detlev Peukert, who find in modern science and the modern welfare state the roots of Nazism.⁹⁴ Medical professionals lobbied for a law enabling mandatory sterilization prior to 1933; Weimar-era social workers demanded legislation that would permit them to limit “asocials”’ freedom of movement.⁹⁵ Women perceived as promiscuous and prostitutes were among those whose behavior such measures were intended to correct or isolate, as Gaby Zürn illustrates in her treatment of Hamburg prostitutes.⁹⁶ Social workers and medical professionals, frustrated by their

⁹¹ Quoted in Klaus Scherer, *“Asozial” im Dritten Reich: Die vergessenen Verfolgten* (Münster, 1990), 15.

⁹² For brief discussions of male sexual crimes, see Michael Burleigh, *Death and Deliverance: “Euthanasia” in Germany 1900–1945* (New York, 1994), 184–86; Patrick Wagner, *Volksgemeinschaft ohne Verbrecher: Konzeptionen und Praxis der Kriminalpolizei in der Zeit der Weimarer Republik und des Nationalsozialismus* (Hamburg, 1996).

⁹³ Burleigh, 68–69.

⁹⁴ Detlev J. K. Peukert, “The Genesis of the ‘Final Solution’ from the Spirit of Science,” in *Reevaluating the Third Reich*, ed. Thomas Childers and Jane Caplan (New York, 1993), 234–52. Burleigh, however, also emphasizes the “medieval” conditions that prevailed in psychiatric institutions and the nonindustrialized killing of the post-1941 euthanasia program (see esp. 238–66).

⁹⁵ Bock, *Zwangssterilisation*; see also the edited collections *Der Griff nach der Bevölkerung: Aktualität und Kontinuität nazistischer Bevölkerungspolitik*, ed. Heidrun Kaupen-Haas (Nördlingen, 1986); *Soziale Arbeit und Faschismus: Volkspflege und Pädagogik im Nationalsozialismus*, ed. Hans-Uwe Otto and Heinz Sünker (Bielefeld, 1986).

⁹⁶ Gaby Zürn, “‘A ist Prostituiertentyp’: Zur Ausgrenzung und Vernichtung von Prostituierten und moralisch nicht-angepaßten Frauen im Nationalsozialistischen Hamburg,” in *Projektgruppe für die vergessenen Opfer des NS-Regimes*, ed., 128–51.

lack of progress in the Great Depression and with only the weak Weimar state to support them, welcomed the Nazi state's support of their efforts. The path from social control to sterilization, euthanasia, and genocide was, in a horrifying way, logical.

Although they do not use the term “cumulative radicalization,” studies of the institutional structures of oppression that emphasize interactions among psychiatry, medicine, social work, academic scientists, the police, and the judiciary suggest a process parallel to the “cumulative radicalization” that, according to functionalists, helps to explain the Holocaust.⁹⁷ As members of varying professions tried to expand their authority, the police and judiciary identified certain individuals as criminal, physicians gave them medical diagnoses and psychiatrists psychiatric diagnoses, and social workers pointed to “asocial” behaviors. Each office might also, however, expand its territory by working with other offices, and new administrative guidelines encouraged cooperation in the interests of efficiency. The simultaneous cooperation and competition among these offices drew sexually errant women into an ever-tightening web. All offices had an interest in expanding the interpretive framework for individuals' missteps; none had an interest in questioning the seriousness of errant behaviors.⁹⁸

Many historians have noted the importance of professional ambition in medical professionals' decisions to work with the euthanasia program.⁹⁹ The theme of careerism is less well developed in the literature on sexuality, but careerism as a motivation for physicians researching methods of sterilization or “cures” for homosexuals deserves further study. Peter von Rönn has examined Hans Bürger-Prinz, who built a successful career by pathologizing homosexuals in ways convenient to the regime. Historians might similarly consider the ways professionals' attention to heterosexually “promiscuous” women could simultaneously advance their careers and provide ammunition for the regime's persecution of the sexually errant.¹⁰⁰

While recognizing that the drive for social control in the name of modern science predated 1933, historians have recently argued for a more refined consideration of

⁹⁷ A useful summary of debates between “functionalists” and “intentionalists” can be found in Ian Kershaw, *The Nazi Dictatorship: Problems and Perspectives of Interpretation*, 4th ed. (New York, 2000), 69–133.

⁹⁸ Scherer, 40–41; Christiane Rothmaler, “Die ‘Volksgemeinschaft’ wird ausgehört und ‘wichtiges Material der Zukunft’ zusammengetragen,” in Projektgruppe für die vergessenen Opfer des NS-Regimes, ed., 109–17, esp. 109–10; Bock, *Zwangssterilisation*, 182–209; similarly, Wagner notes the overlapping competencies of the Kripo and Gestapo in pursuing “race defilement” (251).

⁹⁹ Claudia Koonz, “Ethical Dilemmas and Nazi Eugenics: Single-Issue Dissent in Religious Contexts,” in *Resistance against the Third Reich, 1933–1990*, ed. Michael Geyer and John W. Boyer (Chicago, 1994), 15–38; Otto and Sünker, eds.; Gitta Sereny, *Into That Darkness: An Examination of Conscience* (New York, 1983); Henry Friedlander, *The Origins of Nazi Genocide: From Euthanasia to the Final Solution* (Chapel Hill, 1995); Robert Proctor, *Racial Hygiene: Medicine under the Nazis* (Cambridge, Mass., 1988).

¹⁰⁰ Rönn. On the postwar impact of these professionals, see Sophinette Becker, “Bemerkungen zur Debatte über Bürger-Prinz,” *Zeitschrift für Sexualforschung* 4, no. 3. (1991): 265–70; Ernst Klee, *Was sie taten, was sie wurden: Ärzte, Juristen und andere Beteiligte am Kranken- oder Judenmord* (Frankfurt am Main, 1986).

change and continuity over that date. Grossmann insists that, despite the eugenic nature of Weimar-era population programs, only a sharp break in 1933 could transform the programs to the Nazi racist vision.¹⁰¹ Birthe Kundrus notes that while some professional groups were centrally committed to “modern” precepts of racial hygiene, others retained other reference points, such as the family social work tradition.¹⁰² I have argued that change versus continuity depended in part on the targets of efforts to control heterosexually errant women and the institutions called upon to control them.¹⁰³ Girls and women who offended common bourgeois standards of female sexual behavior (“promiscuous” women, prostitutes) had been the focus of official attention and social ostracism well before 1933, and the Nazi government inherited institutions and personnel accustomed to working with this population. Adulterous wives of military men—also a central concern for Kundrus—appeared as a “special problem” during war, and although adultery was also unacceptable in peacetime, the apparent mass phenomenon of wartime adultery required that the state develop new ways of dealing with such women, balancing “public” interests with the interests of the women’s husbands.¹⁰⁴ Finally, those who violated Nazi strictures against “interracial” sex confronted a novel legal structure and apparatus of enforcement in Nazi Germany. While the first two groups (“promiscuous” women and adulterous war wives) were strictly female, this last group included men “of German blood” as well as male “non-Aryan” lovers of German women.

Recent research demonstrates tensions between change and continuity even for women who had long been ostracized because of their sexual behavior: prostitutes. With the reintroduction of regimented prostitution in 1933, local police could prosecute women suspected of practicing prostitution without a license and establish conditions (such as restrictions on movement) that limited the liberties of licensed prostitutes.¹⁰⁵ Significantly, however, the 1933 measure reversed a 1927 law that had banned the registration and regimentation of prostitution in the name of modern reform. Physicians and social reformers, including feminists, had argued for medical control of STDs rather than police control of prostitutes. The rational methods of modern science triumphed over the moralistic, judgmental practices of the nineteenth century, which had blamed a particular group of women for the spread of disease and, unsurprisingly,

¹⁰¹ Grossmann, *Reforming Sex*.

¹⁰² Birthe Kundrus, “Frauen und Nationalsozialismus,” *Archiv für Sozialgeschichte* 36 (1996): 481–99.

¹⁰³ Heineman, *What Difference*.

¹⁰⁴ Birthe Kundrus, “Die Unmoral deutscher Soldatenfrauen: Diskurs, Alltagsverhalten und Ahndungspraxis 1939–1945,” in *Zwischen Karriere und Verfolgung: Handlungsspielräume von Frauen im Nationalsozialistischen Deutschland*, ed. Kirsten Heinsohn (Frankfurt am Main, 1997), 96–110; Birthe Kundrus, *Kriegerfrauen: Familienpolitik und Geschlechtsverhältnisse im Ersten und Zweiten Weltkrieg* (Hamburg, 1995).

¹⁰⁵ In addition to Zürn, see Gisela Bock, “‘Keine Arbeitskräfte in diesem Sinne’: Prostituierte im Nazi-Staat,” in *Wir sind Frauen wie andere auch! Prostituierte und ihre*

failed to control it.¹⁰⁶ The 1927 law, however, was not free of restrictive features, such as mandatory STD checks for those “strongly suspected” of carrying disease—a provision that, as Gaby Zürn emphasizes, resulted in the de facto continued surveillance of prostitutes. Furthermore, with health and social welfare agencies, not the police, now responsible for work with prostitutes, medical professionals and social workers performed punitive functions formerly reserved for the police—assigning prostitutes to workhouses for “reeducation,” for example.¹⁰⁷ Observing these consequences of the 1927 law, Bock offered a classic “continuity” argument in an early essay: Weimar-era “reform” helped to pave the way for the Nazis’ treatment of “asocials.”¹⁰⁸

New work challenges this emphasis on continuity on two counts. Julia Roos has found the liberating features of the 1927 law to have been more significant than heretofore acknowledged. Police continued to harass prostitutes, but prostitutes were now political subjects who could protest this harassment—indeed, who organized against it. The redefinition of licensed prostitutes as women with deficient civil liberties in 1933 thus marked a profound reversal of Weimar liberalism.¹⁰⁹ Drawing attention to questions of change and continuity within the Nazi period, Annette Timm has traced a shift in the uses of licensed prostitution, from a peacetime focus on public health and the control of “asocials,” to wartime efforts to maximize men’s fighting capacity by offering sexual opportunities.¹¹⁰

Timm’s and Roos’s research reopens questions about the relationship between modern science, social welfare, and Nazism. If modern science, social welfare, and Nazism enjoyed such affinity in so many other spheres of action, might this affinity have had unique limits in the sphere of sexuality? If deregimentation was a triumph for modern science and social welfare, did the Nazis *reject* modern science and social welfare in reintroducing regimentation? Or did they *redirect* the object of “modern” methods of state control, sacrificing public health writ large in order better to rationalize the sexual lives of military and laboring men?

Rather than a woman’s exchange of sex for a client’s money or goods, we might see this as an exchange in which the state—not the woman—offered sex in exchange for men’s labor and loyalty. This analysis can apply not only to military brothels but also to brothels for concentration camp inmates and for foreign laborers. The fact that the prostitute becomes nearly invisible in this scenario testifies to her unfree condition: even less than registered prostitutes in more “normal” times, these women could not

¹⁰⁶ Elisabeth Meyer-Renschhausen, *Weibliche Kultur und soziale Arbeit: Eine Geschichte der Frauenbewegung am Beispiel Bremens 1810–1927* (Cologne, 1989); Nancy Ruth Reagin, *A German Women’s Movement: Class and Gender in Hanover, 1880–1933* (Chapel Hill, 1995); Timm, “The Politics of Fertility.”

¹⁰⁷ Zürn.

¹⁰⁸ Bock, “Keine Arbeitskräfte in diesem Sinne.”

¹⁰⁹ See Roos, this volume; also Julia Roos, “Prostitutes, Civil Society, and the State in Weimar Germany,” in *Paradoxes of Civil Society: New Perspectives on Modern German and British History*, ed. Frank Trentmann (New York, 2000), 263–81.

¹¹⁰ Timm, “The Ambivalent Outsider.”

opt out of the exchange or bargain for its terms. Men and the state could: the state could withhold access to brothels, and men could choose not to visit them.

Understanding this as an exchange between state and men may help us to recognize the grotesque inappropriateness of the word “prostitution” in this context. Christa Paul calls it “forced prostitution” in order to establish a parallel with other types of forced labor during the Nazi period, Christa Schikorra simply calls it “forced labor,” and the collective authors of *Sittengeschichte des Zweiten Weltkrieges* bluntly call it “rape.”¹¹¹ To be sure, women sometimes volunteered for work in the brothels, calculating that brothel work was preferable to death by starvation and overwork in the concentration camps or to hunger and deprivation in occupied Europe. But in civilian settings, women also sometimes decide to submit to rape, favoring it over death or a severe beating. The nature of the exchange in the Nazi setting—between state and man—might require a new analytical framework for understanding the identity and activity of the rapist. Was it the man, who performed the sexual act knowing of the woman’s unfree condition and who had the option not to visit the brothel? Or was it the state, which denied the woman free will to choose whether, when, or with whom to have sex and which established violent conditions for the sexual act? Understanding this type of prostitution as an exchange between men and the state is a profound insight into the “rationalized” uses of male sexuality—and its costs to women.

Sex and the Holocaust

What does it mean to explore sexuality in connection with genocide? There is always a danger that sexual images, rather than helping us understand genocide, might serve a pornographic function of simultaneously disgusting and fascinating the reader, making genocide, in a perverse way, appealing. Omer Bartov has described how even Israeli youth—the literal and figurative children of the survivors—were titillated and not just sobered by images of sexual sadism in the camps.¹¹² Furthermore, survivors’ testimony about sexual shame raises difficult questions about common methods of representing the Holocaust in illustrated books and in the classroom. If appearing naked before members of a shooting squad humiliated the victims, do we demean them yet further if we include in our publications, course materials, and museum exhibits photographs of naked Jews at the killing fields, photographs whose making marked a further moment of dehumanization?¹¹³

¹¹¹ Paul; Christa Schikorra, “Prostitution weiblicher KZ-Häftlinge als Zwangsarbeit,” *Dachauer Hefte* 16 (2000): 112–24; Magnus Hirschfeld, Andreas Gaspar, and F. Aquila, eds., *Sittengeschichte des Zweiten Weltkrieges* (Hanau, 1968), 341.

¹¹² Omer Bartov, “Kitsch and Sadism in Ka-Tzetnik’s Other Planet: Israeli Youth Imagine the Holocaust,” *Jewish Social Studies* 3, no. 2 (1997): 42–76.

¹¹³ Sybil Milton, “The Camera as Weapon: Documentary Photography and the Holocaust,” *Simon Wiesenthal Center Annual* 1 (1984): 45–68; Marianne Hirsch, “Surviving Images: Holocaust Photographs

Problematic modes of representation and reception, however, should not be confused with serious attempts to understand the intersections of sexuality and genocide. The earliest postwar publications on the concentration camps discussed such subjects as the brothels, Kapos who demanded homosexual sex, and moments of sexual humiliation for women such as appearing nude before guards; we know these phenomena existed, and we cannot wish them away. We can only decide whether to investigate them as carefully as we investigate other aspects of the “concentration camp universe.” Failure to investigate evidence that appears time and time again is, in an academic sense, bad scholarship. In a moral sense, it disregards the imperatives both to commemorate past victims and to prevent future atrocities. If we shy away from confronting the impact of sexual torture on a victim of the Nazi genocide, we have diminished that victim’s sufferings. If we shy away from exposing the ways that sex enables people to commit genocide, and if future regimes successfully use sex to motivate their killers, we bear some small part of the responsibility for having willfully refused to learn everything we can from the best-documented genocide in history.

This portion of the essay will examine sex and the Holocaust from two perspectives: the victims’ and the perpetrators’. We cannot review the vast genre of survivors’ memoirs, but because scholars rely so heavily on it in their discussions of sexuality in the camps, it is worth noting some of the themes that emerge.¹¹⁴ Women memoirists recall their sexual humiliation upon being shaved and appearing nude before SS guards. They describe mixed feelings about ceasing to menstruate: they feared becoming infertile, but they also feared that visible menstrual flow could result in torture or selection for the gas chambers. They note the grim situation of pregnant women. They describe camp brothels, lesbian relationships between inmates (though never their own), and exchanges of sex for food or protection (again, not their own). The fact that sexuality is so often connected to sheer survival (sex could be exchanged for food; pregnancy or menstruation could mean death) should alert us to the importance of the subject.¹¹⁵

Accounts of inmates who had lesbian relationships or exchanged sex for food reflect complicated attitudes toward such activities.¹¹⁶ While acknowledging that these women

and the Work of Postmemory,” in *Visual Culture and the Holocaust*, ed. Barbie Zelizer (New Brunswick, 2001), 244 n. 232.

¹¹⁴ Edited collections and teaching materials most often draw on memoir literature to articulate sexual themes of victims of the Holocaust; most usefully, see Carol Ann Rittner and John K. Roth, eds., *Different Voices: Women and the Holocaust*, 1st ed. (New York, 1993).

¹¹⁵ Among the many that explicitly discuss sexuality are Lengyel; Fania Fénelon and Marcelle Routier, *Playing for Time* (New York, 1977). Oral and unpublished written testimonies of survivors are also an important source for sexuality and sexual abuse; see, for example, Felicja Karay, “Women in the Forced-Labor Camps,” in Ofer and Weitzman, eds., 285–309.

¹¹⁶ See Hester Baer and Elizabeth R. Baer’s treatment of this problem in their introduction to and annotations of Nanda Herbermann, Hester Baer, and Elizabeth Roberts Baer, *The Blessed Abyss: Inmate #6582 in Ravensbrück Concentration Camp for Women* (Detroit, 2000). The same is true of interview subjects; see Joan Ringelheim, “Women and the Holocaust: A Reconsideration of Research,” in Rittner and Roth, eds., 373–418.

suffered enormously and feared for their lives, memoirists often express disgust at their actions. Such sexual activities would have warranted condemnation outside the concentration camp, and traditional standards of morality did not disappear when prisoners entered the camp gates.

Historians, like memoirists, display mixed attitudes about discussing female sexuality. Even those researching women often seem more comfortable integrating motherhood than sex into their accounts. Frequently, they let reports of sexual activity stand without further analysis: while no historian can be faulted for citing a primary source, the danger of making inappropriate commentary appears too great to risk.¹¹⁷ For some historians, it is only the victims' and survivors' insistence upon recording sexual stories that legitimizes the effort.¹¹⁸

The literature about the camp brothels reveals this ambivalence. Both Christa Paul and Christa Schikorra note that memoirists who were not brothel inmates often dwell on the fact that such inmates were rarely forced into brothels and that many had been prostitutes or "asocials" before their internment. Speculation about inmates' willingness to perform their duties otherwise arises only in reference to those who, in the eyes of other prisoners, were complicit with the SS administration—such as Kapos.¹¹⁹ In fact, in a life-threatening environment that offered only varieties of compulsion, some inmates were literally forced into the brothels. Others accepted the assignment with the hope that it would offer greater chances of survival than the alternatives.¹²⁰ In making assignments, camp administrators sometimes sought prisoners who had worked as prostitutes before incarceration, but such women were not the only inmates of the brothels, and it would be abhorrent to assume that former prostitutes found work in a camp brothel a "good fit." In any case, unlike Kapos, brothel inmates did not exercise power over other inmates.

What do we know about the experiences of brothel inmates? We know that conditions in the brothels were better than those in much of the rest of the camp. Brothel inmates had more food and shorter working hours than other inmates; they had furnished rooms, clean clothes, and access to washing facilities. Former brothel inmates sometimes report on displays of humanity by their prisoner-visitors, displays that ranged from bringing gifts (to women who had to provide sex anyway) to providing relief from overwork, either by declining sex or by arranging that prisoners under their authority in the camp hierarchy not demand sex. In the end, of course, camp administrators broke such promises as release from imprisonment after six months' brothel service, and the women returned to their former posts physically degraded, sick, and sometimes subject to medical experimentation. The advantages of brothel work did not overcome

¹¹⁷ For example, Ruth Bondy, "Women in Theresienstadt and the Family Camp in Birkenau," in Ofer and Weitzman, eds., 310–26.

¹¹⁸ Dalia Ofer, "Gender Issues in Diaries and Testimonies of the Ghetto: The Case of Warsaw," in *ibid.*, 143–67, esp. 162–63.

¹¹⁹ Paul, 38; Schikorra.

¹²⁰ See also Schulz.

the generally deadly environment, but a decision to accept brothel work could buy an inmate just enough time to survive the war.

For scholars examining sites outside the brothels, the role of sex in preserving life has been an equally difficult theme. In an innovative essay published in *Signs* in 1985 and revised for John Roth and Carol Ritter's 1993 collection, *Different Voices*, philosopher and oral historian Joan Ringelheim openly explored her complicated relationship to this subject. Ringelheim's interviewees told many stories about their sexual lives during the Holocaust. After drafting material that emphasized the role of female support networks in women's survival, Ringelheim became concerned that the resulting work verged on "valorizing [the] oppression" in which these stories of strength emerged at the expense of a full reckoning with the ultimate fate of death that awaited most of Europe's Jews. Turning to the statistical record, Ringelheim found that women were more vulnerable than men to deportation from the ghettos to the death camps—a death sentence against which women's friendships were powerless.¹²¹ Ringelheim thus faced a classic quandary. If, in the end, only death matters, then everything else becomes trivial.¹²² Yet focusing on the statistical record eliminated the route through which stories of the texture of life—and not just the fact of death—emerged. As the work of Ringelheim and others demonstrates, however, the texture of life and the fact of death cannot be fully separated, and sex was sometimes crucial to the connection.

As uncomfortable as it may be, we should consider how sex marked power within victim communities and not just the ways that it marked the German authorities' power over their victims. Jewish female survivors, for example, describe Jewish men's exploitation of powerful positions in the ghettos to reward women who made themselves sexually available and withhold life-saving favors from those who did not.¹²³ We should also consider how sex might have served as an affirmation of life or a source of strength and comfort. Discussions of concentration camps typically proceed from the assumption that life was sex-segregated, but there were exceptions: the Terezin "model camp," the "family camps" in Auschwitz for Gypsies and deportees from Terezin.¹²⁴ The ghettos, of course, were a heterosocial environment.¹²⁵ Marion Kaplan has documented the ways sexual relationships with non-Jewish Germans both secured protection and expressed love for Jewish Germans in hiding; Nechama Tec has noted that sex could be

¹²¹ Ringelheim, "Women and the Holocaust." On women's greater vulnerability to deportation, see also Hilberg, 126–30.

¹²² On this point, see also Judith Tydor Baumel, *Double Jeopardy: Gender and the Holocaust* (London, 1998), 26.

¹²³ Ofer; Ringelheim, "Women and the Holocaust"; Bondy.

¹²⁴ The rare writings on these sexually integrated camps have little or nothing to say about inmates' sexual lives. On the Gypsy camp in Auschwitz, see Guenter Lewy, *The Nazi Persecution of the Gypsies* (New York, 2000), 152–66; on the Terezin family camp in Auschwitz, see Nili Keren, "The Family Camp," in *Anatomy of the Auschwitz Death Camp*, ed. Yisrael Gutman and Michael Berenbaum (Bloomington, 1994); Bondy.

¹²⁵ In addition to works on the ghettos cited elsewhere in this essay, see Raul Hilberg's brief mention of sex in the ghettos in Hilberg, 127.

both exploitative and lifeaffirming in partisan bands.¹²⁶ As Ringelheim's self-criticism indicates, however, analyses of any aspect of life—sexual or otherwise—in the ghettos, camps, or hiding places must integrate the overwhelming presence of death and must grapple with the awesome power that German authorities had over all people marked for annihilation.

Since female witnesses so often refer to pregnancy, menstruation, and sexual humiliation, references to sexuality have helped to argue the need to discuss the uniquely female experiences of the Holocaust. The point is well made, but we should be careful: raising sexuality solely for this purpose can reinforce the equation of women with sex. Women's sexuality did not create uniquely female experiences because sexuality was uniquely female but, rather, because men's sexuality shaped different experiences.

Male inmates did not need to worry about menstruation or pregnancy. They did, however, have to worry about guards and Kapos who demanded sex; they exchanged sex for food and food for sex; they visited the brothels. In addition to reports by memoirists, we now have the scholarship of historians such as Andreas Pretzel and Joachim Müller on homosexual activity—consensual and exploitative—in camps.¹²⁷ We do not have equivalent work on men's brothel visits or exchanges of food for sex, but our knowledge of these phenomena (via consideration of the "sexually marked" women whose sex involved exchange) raises important questions. After all, if brothel inmates were better fed, clothed, and housed than other women, it was not because the camp administration wanted to treat them nicely. Conditions in the brothels were good because clean, well-fed women in private rooms provided greater sexual pleasure for the men who visited them.

Despite postwar assertions that hunger and overwork caused male prisoners to lose their sexual appetites, camp administrators evidently knew otherwise when they calculated that passes to brothels would motivate inmates to good work and obedience.¹²⁸ Men who worked well enough to obtain this privilege and who chose to keep it rather than barter it away were surely a select group among inmates. If sexual desire and competence were characteristics of what Wolfgang Sofsky terms the "prisoner aristocracy," however, we might want to investigate the meanings and uses of sex in men's struggle for survival.¹²⁹ Perhaps sex was not just a perquisite for the "prominents," in the ways Sofsky describes; perhaps instead, as Paul hypothesizes, demonstrated sexual vitality

¹²⁶ Kaplan, esp. 208, 220, 261 n. 215. See also Ofer, 148–54; on sexual exploitation of hidden Jews, see Joan Ringelheim, "The Split between Gender and the Holocaust," in Ofer and Weitzman, eds., 340–50, esp. 342–43; Nechama Tec, "Women among the Forest Partisans," in *ibid.*, 223–33.

¹²⁷ Plant; Heger; Pretzel, "Ich wünsche"; Joachim Müller, "'Wie die Bewegung, so die Verpflegung': Die Strafkompagnie Schuläufner," in Müller and Sternweiler, 181–89.

¹²⁸ Camp administrations also used the brothels in efforts to corrupt political prisoners and to "test" their "reeducation" of homosexuals. See Paul, 23–28; Kogon; Schulz. For a claim that male prisoners lost their sexual appetites, see H. L. Lennard, "Sex in the Concentration Camps," *Sexology* 18, no. 3 (1950): 176–79.

¹²⁹ Wolfgang Sofsky, *Die Ordnung des Terrors: Das Konzentrationslager*, 3rd ed. (Frankfurt am Main, 1993), 145–52.

and not just the ability to gain a pass to the brothel helped to establish hierarchies among male prisoners.¹³⁰ If camp administrators believed potential participants in resistance activity were sexually alive enough for the offer of a brothel pass to be useful in corrupting them, then this suggests another way that male sexual virility may have intersected with camp social structures and even possibilities of resistance.

We can comfortably say that SS men who demanded sex from brothel inmates added sexual abuse to their long list of crimes. Did male inmates who visited the brothels also victimize their sexual partners? Men who obtained brothel passes evidently had a choice about whether or not to require sex; brothel inmates recall visitors who declined it. However, inmate visitors may have feared that they risked punishment if they did not perform: a peephole in the door made brothel visits a spectacle for guards. Camp authorities thus extended the general atmosphere of danger into the brothels. For this reason, although some inmate visitors may have been unkind or even violent to brothel inmates (we simply do not know), historians have proceeded from the assumption that the male inmates were not fundamentally responsible for the sexual exploitation of (and, often, injury to) the women.

While the vast majority of male inmates never visited a brothel, we should not assume that sexuality ceased to be important to them. Surely many men engaged in sex (heterosexual, homosexual, or—most likely—solitary) without material exchange, recalled earlier sexual encounters, experienced inopportune erections, felt sexual desire that found no outlet, faced humiliation as guards examined circumcised penises, feared lost virility, and worried about their sexual futures after liberation.¹³¹ Michael Zimmermann has noted that when camp authorities required inmates to undress, they forced Roma (Gypsy) men to violate their own sexual taboos against being seen naked by their wives and children.¹³² Even losing interest in sex because of starvation or apathy did not erase sexuality from the picture. Rather, it became an event in a man's sexual history, significant enough to attract comment by many memoirists. Oral historians have demonstrated that it is possible to ask female survivors tactfully about their sexual experiences, eliciting evidence that has escaped the written record while respecting the wishes of survivors who prefer not to discuss such matters. As we approach the passing of the last survivors, oral historians interviewing men as well as women should keep in mind that survivors' memories may carry rare evidence of how sexuality created opportunities for material and emotional support and how it contributed to victims' fears and pain.

When we turn our attention from the victims to the perpetrators, we encounter two major questions. Did sex help perpetrators to kill? If so, what kind and with whom?

¹³⁰ Paul, 81–82.

¹³¹ Vera Laska discusses noncommercial and nonpenetrative heterosexual and homosexual sex as well as masturbation in commonsense, if brief, language. See Vera Laska, *Women in the Resistance and in the Holocaust: The Voices of Eyewitnesses* (Westport, 1983), 22–25.

¹³² Michael Zimmermann, *Rassenutopie und Genozid: Die nationalsozialistische "Lösung der Zigeunerfrage"* (Hamburg, 1996), 173–74.

Citing the prohibition against race defilement, many have assumed that the Germans' crimes in the occupied East did not include widespread rape.¹³³ Although such a claim reiterates the depths of Nazi racism, it inadvertently supports a positive image of the German forces as disciplined and professional.¹³⁴

A prohibition against race defilement from above did not guarantee restraint below. Birgit Beck cites wartime documents estimating that 50 to 80 percent of the SS and police forces stationed in Eastern Europe would be in trouble if racial laws were strictly applied to them, and Doris Bergen finds plentiful evidence from National Socialist sources for sexual violence against "non-Aryan" women.¹³⁵ However, much of the existing literature has come from scholars interested in the general phenomenon of rape in wartime, which raises challenging questions about the particular versus the universal.¹³⁶ By bringing to light something the Germans did *not* do in the Second World War, however, the Balkan wars in the 1990s have demonstrated that sexual violence in the context of war and genocide has varied uses. While the Serbs used rape to achieve deracination in their genocidal project against Bosnian Muslims, we have no evidence of such a strategy in the genocide of the Second World War.¹³⁷ Bergen has thus argued for an understanding of sexual violence that takes into account the distinctive aspects of the Nazi racial vision and genocidal project. Although sexual violence against Slavic women could be "a form of torture, mockery, and humiliation," Germans might also seek sexual pleasure in forced relations with Slavs since taboos against sex with Slavs were more permeable than taboos against sex with Jews or Gypsies. In the case of Jews and Gypsies, Bergen suggests, sexual violence was part of the project of complete annihilation.¹³⁸ By utterly degrading its victims, sexual violence

¹³³ Laska, 26. Ringelheim discusses her colleagues' assumptions that there was no rape in Ringelheim, "The Split."

¹³⁴ Recent scholarship has challenged this "clean" image of the Wehrmacht without, however, integrating sexual crimes into a revised history. Hannes Heer and Klaus Naumann, eds., *Vernichtungskrieg: Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941–1944* (Hamburg, 1995); Bartov, *Hitler's Army*. Although she does not adequately explore the different contexts and functions of rape by Germans and Soviets in the Second World War, Helke Sander does challenge the image of a German force too disciplined to rape in her film *BeFreier und Befreite* and the companion book: Helke Sander and Barbara Johr, eds., *BeFreier und Befreite: Krieg, Vergewaltigungen, Kinder* (Munich, 1992).

¹³⁵ Birgit Beck, "Vergewaltigung von Frauen als Kriegsstrategie im Zweiten Weltkrieg?" in *Gewalt im Krieg: Ausübung, Erfahrung und Verweigerung von Gewalt in Kriegen des 20. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Andreas Gestrich, *Jahrbuch für historische Friedensforschung; 4. Jahrg.* (Münster, 1996), 34–50; Bergen, "Gender and Genocide."

¹³⁶ Ruth Seifert, "The Second Front: The Logic of Sexual Violence in Wars," in *Violence and Its Alternatives*, ed. Manfred B. Steger and Nancy S. Lind (New York, 1999), 145–53, 151; Susan Brownmiller, *Against Our Will: Men, Women, and Rape* (New York, 1975).

¹³⁷ On Bosnia, see Alexandra Stiglmayer, ed., *Mass Rape: The War against Women in Bosnia-Herzegovina* (Lincoln, 1994).

¹³⁸ Bergen, "Gender and Genocide." For an attempt to distinguish between genocidal projects that do and do not require complete physical annihilation, see Yehuda Bauer, *Rethinking the Holocaust* (New Haven, 2001).

dehumanized them and allowed perpetrators to overcome deeply internalized taboos against murdering innocent, defenseless *humans* who posed no identifiable threat.

Promoting the fantasy of a “Jewish threat” was another strategy for overcoming qualms that “ordinary Germans” might otherwise have had about annihilating Jews. In this context, claims that Jews constituted a sexual danger—for example, propaganda representing Jewish men as leering seducers of Aryan maidens—could help make “ordinary Germans” less concerned about the passage of anti-Jewish legislation or the disappearance of Jewish neighbors. Could sexual defamation have enabled men to kill? Omer Bartov hypothesizes that commanders’ claims that Russian women were both infected with STDs and largely of Jewish origin may have helped soldiers overcome traditional scruples against killing women and children in the battle against alleged “partisans” in the East.¹³⁹ Since Ingrid Schmidt-Harzbach’s pioneering work, scholars have noted that Nazi depictions of Soviet rapists were intended to spur Germans to continue fighting when all was lost, although these scholars have not ventured claims about the effectiveness of this propaganda.¹⁴⁰

As Bergen notes, the concept of dehumanization is familiar to scholars of genocide. Yet, curiously, Holocaust scholars who employ the concept have resisted the notion that sexual violence might have been part of the process. Instead, assuming a priori dehumanization, they have typically held that, since Jews as subhumans were unthinkable as sexual partners, they were unlikely targets of rape. Such assertions assume that Germans accepted propagandists’ insistence that Jews were unthinkable as sexual partners. Moreover, these claims demonstrate an innocence of analyses of rape that distinguish sex as a tool of violence and domination from sex as an expression of sexual desire.¹⁴¹ The same is true of accounts that explain the supposedly low level of sexual violence by noting the poor physical condition of Jewish women in the ghettos and camps.¹⁴²

This latter argument also overlooks an important site of the Holocaust: the killing fields, where shooting squads massacred 1.5 million Jews driven directly from their villages. Since such Jews were not much worse fed than their non-Jewish neighbors, were not shaven, and wore ordinary clothing, they could have been objects of sexual desire in a conventional sense. If we think about all of occupied Europe and not just the well-demarcated ghettos and camps as the site of the genocide, we can recognize a far broader range of possibilities for sexual violence.

¹³⁹ Bartov, *Hitler’s Army*, 93–94.

¹⁴⁰ Ingrid Schmidt-Harzbach, “Eine Woche im April: Berlin 1945: Vergewaltigung als Massenschicksal,” 1984, repr. in Sander and Johr, eds. An examination of rapes by the victorious allies, like other topics relating to the aftermath of the war, is beyond the scope of this essay; see, however, Atina Grossmann, “A Question of Silence: The Rape of German Women by Occupation Soldiers,” *October*, no. 72 (1995): 43–63; Norman M. Naimark, *The Russians in Germany: A History of the Soviet Zone of Occupation, 1945–1949* (Cambridge, Mass., 1995), 69–140; Heineman, “The Hour of the Woman.”

¹⁴¹ For a reiteration of this analysis in the context of wartime rape, see Ruth Seifert, “War and Rape: A Preliminary Analysis,” in Stiglmayer, ed., esp. 55–56.

¹⁴² Laska, 26.

Finally, should we consider sex between members of the ruling “race” to have been relevant for the genocide? In *Hitler’s Willing Executioners*, Daniel Goldhagen noted that the world of the camp guards was a heterosocial and heterosexually active one. He then offered his readers a vivid but purely imagined scenario of a German couple recounting the thrill of beating Jews as they caught their breath after sex.¹⁴³ In these pages, Goldhagen illuminated both the potential utility and the potential dangers of considering sexuality in the context of perpetratorship. If the outraged reader is supposed to ask, “How *could* they discuss their beatings of Jews right after having sex? That’s *sick!*” (and my anecdotal evidence from lay readers suggests that this is precisely the response elicited), then the only answer can be that we have no evidence to support this scenario. Goldhagen’s less speculative passages, by contrast, simply declare, reasonably, that if sexual affairs contributed to camaraderie and power struggles among camp staff, then we should consider this fact when we examine the camps’ functioning.

There has been no systematic treatment of female German perpetrators in the concentration camp system. Our fleeting images of them focus disproportionately on a handful of women who linked brutality with flamboyant sexuality.¹⁴⁴ Such cases have been more often recounted than analyzed, and attempts to analyze them have employed hopelessly crude psychological frameworks, such as a physician’s diagnosis of Ilse Koch in 1951: “the multiplicity of her loves is explained by a thirst for vengeance because of her resentment at not having been born a man.”¹⁴⁵ More systematic examination, giving due space to less lurid cases, might help us better to understand the world of the camps for female perpetrators. Yet we still lack the basic information on nonsexual matters needed to interpret the interplay of sexuality and other aspects of female staff members’ lives.¹⁴⁶ How often did female guards actively seek their posts, and how often were they assigned? In addition to professional opportunity, did guard duty represent a chance for sexual contacts for young women anxious to escape their parents’ authority? Did taboo-breaking sexual pleasure enhance women’s ability to employ taboo-breaking

¹⁴³ Daniel Jonah Goldhagen, *Hitler’s Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (New York, 1996), 338–39.

¹⁴⁴ See, for example, the frequent evocation of the sexual excesses of Ilse Koch, the wife of the commandant of Buchenwald, and the sadomasochism of Irma Giese, a famously brutal guard. For an example from the scholarly literature, see Kogon, 124, 232; from a best-selling novelist, Hans Habe, *Off Limits: A Novel of Occupied Germany* (London, 1956); from memoirists, Lengyel, and Fénelon and Routier. For analyses of this phenomenon, see Susanna Heschel, “Feminist Theory and the Perpetrators,” paper presented at the conference “Lessons and Legacies,” Chicago, 2000; Alexandra Przyrembel, “Transfixed by an Image: Ilse Koch, the ‘Kommandeuse of Buchenwald,’” *German History* 19, no. 3 (2001): 369–99.

¹⁴⁵ Marc Lanval, “Ilse Koch—Sex Terrorist,” *Sexology* 19, no. 1 (1951): 30–36, 33.

¹⁴⁶ See, however, the three case studies in Claudia Taake, *Angeklagt: SS-Frauen vor Gericht* (Oldenburg, 1998). Gudrun Schwarz is working on the first systematic study of SS women. The first volume, *Eine Frau an seiner Seite*, concerns wives of SS men. Preliminary published results of her research on female camp guards do not address sexuality. See Gudrun Schwarz, “SS-Aufseherinnen in nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslagern (1933–1945),” *Dachauer Hefte* 10, no. 10 (1994): 32–49.

violence (or vice versa)? Did the isolated setting, the absolute authority of the camp administration, and the secretive nature of camp life make female guards sexually vulnerable to SS men? Did romances with male staff make women anxious to please at the workplace in order to avoid transfer? Did prisoners ultimately pay for any exploitation female guards may have suffered at the hands of male staff? How did the imperative to breed intersect with the imperative to do one's job?

Many of the above questions apply to men as well, but since men did almost all of the actual killing, the question becomes especially pertinent. Did sex help them to kill? In *Mothers in the Fatherland*, Claudia Koonz has argued that German women's maintenance of a comfortable "domestic sphere" enabled men to commit atrocities. By returning to the homes and families that women maintained, men could recuperate from their grisly work and assure themselves that they were decent men.¹⁴⁷ Gudrun Schwarz extends Koonz's thesis into the explicitly sexual realm. Sexual access to their wives at the camps, it appears, cured some hesitant SS men of their inability to function, and a wife's death could limit a man's effectiveness by triggering undisciplined sexual relationships with "non-Aryan" women. Discomfort with their duties, however (not all men were "well suited" to camp duty), could also produce impotence.¹⁴⁸ Aware of the importance of sexual contentedness, the SS leadership planned opportunities for nonresident wives or long-term mistresses to provide sexual comfort to its men. While the internal reports Schwarz cites on the sexual lives of SS men in the camps do not appear to discuss the scenario Goldhagen describes (sexual relationships between men and women on the camp staff), elsewhere Schwarz has described SS couples who met at work and later married.¹⁴⁹

In *Ordinary Men*, Christopher Browning has carefully described the ways alcohol first helped men of the shooting squads commit atrocities, then dulled memories of the shootings, making it possible to work another day.¹⁵⁰ Could sex also have served to release tension—a release necessary to the continuing functioning of the genocide? If we wish to propose a link between sex and the performance of nonsexual atrocities, we would do well to broaden our consideration of sexual activities. Men may well have sought sexual release in the brothels, in consensual or forcible contact with indigenous women, with German women (including their wives) in occupied Europe, or during their periods of leave. Still, for many men at the front lines of the genocide, contact with women was the exception rather than the rule. If sex served as an outlet for tensions produced by the job of killing, it might very often have been in the form of

¹⁴⁷ Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland*.

¹⁴⁸ Schwarz, *Eine Frau an seiner Seite*, 109, 120, 128–30, 161–68.

¹⁴⁹ Gudrun Schwarz, "Frauen in der SS: Sippenverband und Frauenkorps," in Heinsohn, ed., 223–44, 227.

¹⁵⁰ Browning.

masturbation or mutual masturbation—both common enough in barracks life of any kind, with no necessary connection to atrocities.¹⁵¹

To write about sexuality and the Holocaust is an intimidating task— and a weighty responsibility. While the use of eroticized images of Nazism in popular culture (whether Hollywood films or pornography) may appear problematic and even deeply offensive, we gain more if we demonstrate the benefits of a nonexploitative approach than if we simply object. The work discussed here shows that discussions of sexuality in connection with the Holocaust can be serious, responsible, and illuminating.

Conclusions

Historians of sexuality can be proud of the impact their work has had on our understanding of the Nazi era. Standard histories of that period now consider the National Socialist efforts to control reproduction as well as persecute homosexuals and such “asocials” as “promiscuous” women. These subjects are also mentioned in college and university classrooms, though in practice they are often bracketed off as women’s or gay history. Scholars and teachers who read carefully, however, can learn from the existing literature that the persecution of sexual minorities and the efforts to control reproduction were not marginal but central to National Socialist racial theory and practice.

While other sexual themes are less frequently included in the general literature on Nazi Germany, newer research links sexuality to many of the burning questions about National Socialism. One question concerns everyday life and popular support for the regime. What aspects of “ordinary Germans’” experience help to explain their support for National Socialism? While historians of sexuality would hardly diminish the importance of such phenomena as the economic recovery of the mid-1930s, their research suggests another part of an answer. The perception or reality of erotic opportunities that were not tainted by the stigma of “degeneracy” or the misery of the Weimar years may have appealed to those Germans not targeted for persecution. A second question concerns perpetrators of the Holocaust. Did sex help the killers to kill, either by helping them to dehumanize their victims or by offering opportunities to release tension that might otherwise have interfered with killing operations? A third concerns the victims. What role did sex play in enabling survivors to survive, and what role did it play in the downward spiral of victims who did not?

Although this essay has focused on sexuality under the Nazi regime, it should be clear that many of the questions and findings are more broadly relevant. Indeed, investigations into these matters in the context of National Socialism have stretched the

¹⁵¹ See, for example, Waite, “Teenage Sexuality,” 458, 461; Hermand and Dembo, *passim*; Giles, “The Institutionalization of Homosexual Panic”; for popular references to ubiquitous masturbation in the U.S. military context, see Joan Smith, *Misogynies: Reflections on Myths and Malice*, 1st American ed. (New York, 1991), 141–56.

common boundaries of sexuality studies. How should we define heterosexual acts, and how inevitably are such acts tied to reproduction? Scholars of Nazi Germany have discovered that nonpenetrative practices were important even in settings where the connection between sex and reproduction should have been most central: in noncommercial relationships between adult partners of different sexes in a state obsessed with eugenics. Where do sex and violence intersect? The Holocaust reveals that sexual violence may not be the whole story, that nonviolent sex may have enabled nonsexual violence. What happens to sex and violence when we add commerce to the picture? Research into Nazi-era brothels challenges our use of the model of “prostitution” (which forefronts exchange) to describe acts that might better be described as “rape” (which forefronts violence) without forgetting that it was the commercial, not the coercive, description that shaped contemporaries’ interpretation of the “prostitutes” activities. How should we understand the relationship between gender, sexuality, and state power? The delicate distinctions between male comradeship, male homoeroticism, and male homosexuality in Nazi Germany may help us to understand other political structures.

The works discussed here mark only a beginning; we still have much to learn. Yet historians of National Socialism are using old sources to answer new questions, discovering (and, in the case of oral history, creating) new sources, and becoming methodologically and theoretically bolder than they have been in the past. In the next few years we should not be surprised if histories of sexuality in Nazi Germany bring dramatic new insights into the functioning of National Socialism and the uses of human sexuality.

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