

5-2014

Sex for Survival: Intimacy in Nazi Concentration Camps and its Post-Liberation Affect on Survivors

Gabrielle Hawth

Follow this and additional works at: https://repository.lsu.edu/honors_etd



Part of the [History Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Hawth, Gabrielle, "Sex for Survival: Intimacy in Nazi Concentration Camps and its Post-Liberation Affect on Survivors" (2014). *Honors Theses*. 730.

https://repository.lsu.edu/honors_etd/730

This Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Ogden Honors College at LSU Scholarly Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Theses by an authorized administrator of LSU Scholarly Repository. For more information, please contact ir@lsu.edu.

Sex for Survival:
Intimacy in Nazi Concentration Camps and its Post-Liberation Affect on Survivors

by

Gabrielle Hawth

Undergraduate honors thesis under the direction of

Dr. Suzanne Marchand

Department of History

Submitted to the LSU Honors College in partial fulfillment of
the Upper Division Honors Program.

[May, 2014]

Louisiana State University
& Agricultural and Mechanical College
Baton Rouge, Louisiana

Introduction

The creation of a gendered history of the Holocaust has been a subject of much debate among scholars and survivors alike. For many years, historians concentrated on political events, or on the experiences of individuals or groups, treating all as equal sufferers, and ignoring the differences between male and female, and straight and gay victims. Many historians still believe that focusing on gender will “make the Holocaust secondary to feminism” or trivialize the atrocities of the Holocaust.¹ Many, too, believe that the subject of intimacy in the camps is one either too embarrassing, or too painful, to treat in detail. Yet studying sexuality in the Holocaust can tell us a great deal about adaptation and survival, and lead to a better understanding of common Holocaust experiences. The aim of this thesis is to focus on intimacy in the Nazi camps, not to make the collective experience less important, but to better understand individual experience.

Sexual activity in concentration camps was common; however, there were distinct realms of sexuality perpetuated by the Nazis in the camp environment. When I first began this project, I thought that to study sexuality in the concentration camps was simply to study sexual abuse. Over time, my research began to focus closely on the ways in which sexuality could present a prisoner’s miniscule (but existent) degree of autonomy as well as the precise forms oppression took in the camps. I wanted to understand these aspects, not in any way to belittle the pain of men and women who were forced to endure sexual suffering, but to shed light on the limited set of choices individuals faced in the camps. It is wrong to generalize the decisions of concentration camp prisoners as free choices considering the oppressive circumstances of their imprisonment.

¹ Dalia Ofer and Lenore J. Weitzman, eds., *Women in the Holocaust* (New Haven : Yale University Press, 1998), 1.

However, prisoners did make survival decisions and employ survival strategies while under Nazi imprisonment. Whether a prisoner engaged in in-camp sexuality or not was an individual decision that significantly affected his or her life inside the camp as well as his or her future after liberation. It is not my intention here to judge the motivations behind decisions such as these, but to understand the factors that led to sex becoming the means to an end. By examining how prisoners used sexuality in the camp environment, we see how intimacy became a major survival strategy within the specific society that Nazis created in concentration camps.

Historiography

Some historians, as well as survivors, believe that creating a gendered history of the Holocaust that differentiates the male and female experience is disrespectful as it diminishes the overall cruelty and suffering. However, many historians (a majority of them female) since the 1980s have begun asking the question: In what ways did gender shape (and often exacerbate) the forms of individual suffering? From this time on, scholarship about the feminine experience especially has grown and with it, a more complete understanding of the Holocaust has been created.

Sexual experiences of Holocaust victims were often alluded to in early post-war memoirs, many describe sexual solicitation that took place between camp prisoners. However, these explicit mentions of camp sexuality were not discussed in the secondary literature until the 1980s. Sybil Milton recognized in 1984 that women in the Holocaust received no regular coverage; secondary literature was not sex specific and therefore limited any available analysis.²

² Sybil Milton, "Women and the Holocaust: The Case for German and German-Jewish Women" in *When Biology Became Destiny: Women in Weimar and Nazi Germany*, New Feminist Library (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1984).

Her pioneering scholarship was followed by the work of Joan Ringelheim, who wrote one of the first major gender histories of the concentration camps.³ In it, she portrayed women as especially vulnerable to the cruelty of Nazi persecution, though women's particular form of psychological resistance was also highlighted.⁴ In recent years, the field has expanded and thus focus on the gendered experience of the Holocaust has changed. Recent scholarship centers more on women's agency in survival rather than emphasizing that their socialization gave them the skills to survive. The conversation has widened to include a male Holocaust experience as well as female. Historian Elizabeth Heinemann, for example, asserts that discussion about sexuality in the Holocaust does not mean that sexual experiences were uniquely female; rather, men and women had different sexual experiences based on gender.⁵ These developments complement wider trends in gender history generally, in which historians acknowledge the importance yet distinctions of both female and male identities and experiences.

It is thanks to this expansive work concerning gendered experiences that I am able to prod a bit further into this history. The work of Holocaust historians since the 1990s has greatly influenced the path in which the history of sexuality during the era of the Holocaust now proceeds. Dagmar Herzog's edited volumes *Sexuality in Europe* and *Brutality and Desire* give detailed insight into European sexuality, especially in times of war. In *Mothers in the Fatherland*, Claudia Koonz discusses women's survival in Nazi Germany. Koonz's book details the collaboration of "normal" German women with the Nazi regime, and thus offers an important

³ Joan Ringelheim, "Women and the Holocaust: A Reconsideration of Research," *Signs* 10, no. 4 (July 1, 1985): 741–61.

⁴ In 1985, Ringelheim amended her initial study, claiming it was too wholly shaped by ideas of cultural feminism. She clarified that glorifying the behavior of former female prisoners does not adequately reflect their oppression, making them seem less like victims.

⁵ Elizabeth D. Heineman, "Sexuality and Nazism: The Doubly Unspeakable?," *Journal of the History of Sexuality*, no. 1/2 (2002): 22.

contrast to the feminine experience in Nazi-run concentration camps. Christa Paul's interviews with former concentration camp brothel workers resulted in one of the first works to focus on women's experience in camp brothels. Robert Sommer's *Das KZ Bordell* goes even further by offering an in-depth logistical analysis of the brothel system. His work is exceptional in that it does not only focus on the women's perspective but also delves into men's motivations for visiting the brothel and engaging in sexual activity while incarcerated. This perspective, and his heretofore-unexamined analysis of the connection between social status and sexual life, has changed the scholarly conversation on camp sexuality and allowed me to pursue further this line of inquiry.

In the formative years of analysis about sexuality inside concentration camps, historians viewed sexual barter used by incarcerated men and women as sexual abuse.⁶ The classification of such experiences is always a delicate matter because the distinct camp environment must be taken into account. In more recent scholarship, sexual barter and voluntary prostitution that occurred within the camps has been classified as coerced, not consensual.⁷ Yet, choices such as these cannot be analyzed so systematically. Interpretations of camp sexuality continue to evolve through extensive scholarship. Classifying sexual behavior within the camp does little to expand Holocaust understanding. Rather, comprehending the factors that affected sexual behavior does indeed create a more detailed understanding of the oppression that was perpetrated in this environment.

Prisoners did not survive by intimacy alone, but by adapting their sexuality to fit the needs of the camp environment. It is true that this argument has been supported by many recent

⁶ Ringelheim, "Women and the Holocaust: A Reconsideration of Research."

⁷ See, for example, Na'ama Shik, "Sexual Abuse of Jewish Women in Aushwitz-Birkenau" in Dagmar Herzog, *Brutality and Desire: War and Sexuality in Europe's Twentieth Century* (Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009).

scholars and their work, perhaps most recently in the 2011 doctoral dissertation of Jessica R. Anderson Hughes. However, by examining the different realms of sexuality that existed within the camp, my project delves more deeply into how prisoners themselves understood these actions and the immediate and long-term affects of this behavior. It is only recently that histories of the Holocaust have begun exploring Holocaust sexuality, and while many discuss sexual violence or exploitation, we can more acutely understand the everyday workings of the concentration camp and its prisoners by discussing what purposeful behavior was utilized inside a heavily controlled camp and how this affected a prisoner's survival. In order to grasp a man or woman's choice to engage in sexual activity during incarceration, we must understand the environment and conditions that motivated such behavior. While this thesis examines the post-war affects of these decisions, this is not to pass judgment on these decisions but to understand the cost of using sex to survive. The goal of this work is to understand how and why intimacy became a necessity for concentration camp prisoners and examine some forms this intimacy took in a camp environment.

Primary Source Material

The research for this project began in Germany; for that reason, much of the primary source material is in the German language. All German sources without specific citation of another translator are texts that I have translated. Some information came from my own visits to Ravensbrück, Buchenwald, and Auschwitz (both the main camp and Birkenau). All housed or were recruiting grounds for concentration camp brothels and also locations of informal sexual encounters. I focused mainly on the camp of Ravensbrück because it was, for the majority of its existence, a strictly female concentration camp, and therefore still contains a variety of sources

concerning women's and gender studies in the Holocaust. From the archive and library at the Mahn- und Gedenkstätte Ravensbrück I gathered both firsthand interviews taken shortly after liberation and literature about the goings-on at the camp.

The bulk of primary sources used in this thesis are memoirs published after the war. Because of the post-war perception of brothel women as Nazi collaborators, the majority of firsthand information on camp brothels comes from interviews conducted by scholars (many of these the work of historians like Christa Paul and Robert Sommer). Accounts of sexuality and intimacy within the general camp population have been published since liberation. Many illuminating works published between 1945-1950 have been of great use in this thesis. Gisella Perl's *I was a Doctor in Auschwitz*, Olga Lengyel's *Five Chimneys*, Primo Levi's *Survival in Auschwitz*, and the initial manuscript for Krystyna Zywulska's *Tanz, Mädchen* are among these early works. These are perhaps the most reliable of primary sources because of their very early publication dates. Later reports (originally published between 1959 and 1986) that also relate to sexuality in camps include Tadeusz Borowski's popular Polish work *This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen*, Liana Millu's *Smoke Over Birkenau*, and Fania Fénelon's *Playing for Time*. These later accounts are perhaps not as reliable because of post-war survivor socialization affecting memory. As there are not many retrospective accounts that delve deeply into the subject of sexuality, I have chosen to use their memories but also critically examine the probability of each explained scenario before presenting it here as evidence. The majority of factual evidence included in this thesis has been corroborated by other sources (primary or secondary) to create a more complete and reliable picture of camp sexuality.

Methodology

As mentioned above, some Holocaust memoirs are more reliable, for the historian's purposes, than are others. Na'ama Shik calls the testimonies published between 1945 and 1950 the "first wave" of Holocaust autobiography. She asserts that these early publications are far more direct and realistic when compared to later writings, which are more literary; thus accounts from this "first wave" have a greater claim to be authentic testimony. These texts often describe, without shame, sexual abuse or sexual barter.⁸ It is for this reason that the majority of my primary material is from this "first-wave."

Testimony about camp sexuality, but more specifically sex for survival, has been missing from survivor recollections since the 1960s. The fact that the decision to engage in sexual activity was voluntary accounts for scathing post-war reactions that affected the survivor's willingness to testify to it.⁹ We do have a few first-hand retrospectives from men who engaged in sex for survival. But, even in early publications, there is no first- person testimony from women who used instrumental sex.¹⁰ Women's motivations can, therefore, only be deduced by way of third party reportage, which is, of course, sometimes unreliable. In any event, the testimony written in later post-war stages must be critically considered before becoming part of the historical record. Pascale Rachel Bos claims that normalization is part of reconstructing experiences. This allows survivors to "smooth corners" of what they find difficult to confront or

⁸ Ibid., 224.

⁹ Ibid., 237, 239.

¹⁰ Anna Hájková, "Sexual Barter in Times of Genocide: Negotiating the Sexual Economy of the Theresienstadt Ghetto," *Signs* 38, no. 3 (March 1, 2013): 507.

convey to others.¹¹ This is a rational explanation for the more censored accounts following the “first wave” of survivor testimony.

The judgments that post-war society imposed on Holocaust survivors also affect the reliability of survivor testimony. Anna Hájková states that when society is returning to normalcy (in this case Germany in 1945-1950), society exerts a social corrective by making a negative example of inappropriate gender behavior. By viewing wartime behavior negatively, the post-war general public demonstrates that the state of exception (war-time sexuality) is over.

¹² This civilian social corrective that judged wartime behavior surely contributed to the silence concerning concentration camp sexuality that is seen after the “first-wave” of survivor testimony. By the 1970s, however, testimony from survivors who relocated to North America began to change, once again as a result of societal influence. Survivor autobiographies published in North America in the 1970s included accounts of sexuality, reflecting the new mainstream feminism that gained popularity at that time.¹³ For these men and women, the feminine experience could be highlighted; but their accounts favored women’s methods of survival. Thus a survivor’s post-war socialization must be taken into account when evaluating the reliability of their memory.

Sex for Survival

In order to understand intimate behavior within the confines of a concentration camp, we must first comprehend the sexual environment of Europe in the 1920s and 1930s. Chapter One, “Intimacy Under Hitler: Civilian Sexuality versus Camp Sexuality” outlines the sexual

¹¹ Pascale Rachel Bos “Women and the Holocaust: Analyzing Gender Difference” in Elizabeth Roberts Baer and Myrna Goldenberg, eds., *Experience and Expression : Women, the Nazis, and the Holocaust* (Detroit : Wayne State University Press, 2003), 31.

¹² Hájková, “Sexual Barter in Times of Genocide: Negotiating the Sexual Economy of the Theresienstadt Ghetto,” 525.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 527.

environment of Europe from World War I to the Nazi takeover in 1933. The sexual freedom brought about by the Great War had major influence on sexuality throughout Europe and began an era of sexual experimentation. It is important to note that Hitler was not the only national leader who enforced strict legislation on sexual behavior; all major European governments took measures to support population growth, and did so before 1933. It is by looking at European sexual policy that I delineate the contrast between Nazi civilian sexuality of the era and the sexual behavior in concentration camps. Before delving into the ways in which sex was used as a survival strategy in the camps, I examine the factors important to sexual behavior in an oppressive environment. The latter part of the chapter answers the questions of whether inmates remained sexual beings, what their motivation for sexual behavior was, and what affect camp society had on sexuality.

Two main methods of engaging in sexual relations within the camps are highlighted in this work. The second chapter, "Prisoner Brothels" discusses the formal institution created for prisoners to actualize their sexual desires. First, I discuss Heinrich Himmler's motivations for creating prisoner brothels, which on the surface seemed only a reward for productive labor. Next, I look into the particular motivations of those involved in the brothel. I explain why women volunteered to work in the brothel and why men were so highly motivated to visit it. Though the aforementioned aspects of the brothel are highly dependent on SS oversight and oppression, this chapter also examines the relationships that were created between brothel workers and visitors that exhibited some independent motivations of the prisoner. Though intimacy was not the goal, some prisoners were able to transform the mechanical manipulations of sex into a more intimate encounter while achieving significant survival goals such as physical and emotional sustenance.

Chapter Three, “Informal Sexual Encounters”, surveys sexual behavior outside of the formal prisoner brothel institution. This chapter is split into two perspectives, the heterosexual experience and the homosexual experience. The adaptation of sexual values to the camp environment is highlighted in both of these relationships. In this chapter, we see similar prisoner motivations between both manifestations of sexuality such as human intimacy and the will to survive. However, the contrast in sexual behavior outside of formal institutions is clear. Whereas the brothel institution perpetuated forms of sexuality that Nazis would deem healthy, sexuality in the camp at large was fundamentally detached from the bourgeois norms of sexuality in civilized society or in the camp brothel.

Connecting all major parts of this project is the simple fact that intimacy was extremely significant in a prisoner’s survival, whether that meant refusing sexual advances or taking part in them and conforming to conventional sexual norms or creating new sexual behavior. In the epilogue, I focus on how this decision affected the survivor after liberation. While my examination focuses on how adaptation to camp sexuality affected survival, readapting to civilian life was also a turning point in a survivor’s post-war life. Therefore, in this section I briefly explain some of the emotional, physical, and sexual affects of the sexual decisions that were made inside the camp.

Though the logistics were vastly different, prisoner motivations for sexual behavior remained similar and each form of intimacy can be seen as an effort to survive the deprivations and horrors of the camp system. Highly motivated prisoners who used their sexuality made conscious decisions based on their individual needs and goals. This decision affected a prisoner’s life while interned in the camp as well as his or her life as a survivor. The sexual suffering of concentration camp prisoners and the ways in which they resisted extreme desexualization in

order to survive does not ennoble them, for such suffering cannot and should not be ennobled, but it does create a deeper understanding of the significance of intimacy to survival.

Chapter One

Intimacy Under Hitler: Civilian Sexuality versus Camp Sexuality

In March of 1939, SS Lieutenant-Colonel and the first head of Ravensbrück concentration camp Max Koegel sent a letter to the Inspector of Concentration Camps requesting solitary confinement cells to be built in his camp. He writes, “It is impossible to maintain order if the defiance and stubbornness of these hysterical females cannot be broken by strict confinement.”¹⁴ Not only does this show that Nazis viewed female inmates as defiant and stubborn, but solitary confinement as a form of punishment attests to the importance of emotional bonds for concentration camp prisoners. Whether the bonds were created between large female communities or more intimately between two women, the relationships that resulted had a great affect on a prisoner’s camp life. The question remains why was intimacy so important in the midst of Nazi incarceration?

Before discussing concentration camp intimacy, it is important for us to understand the inter-war sexuality that led to the civilian sexual environment of the 1930s and 40s. Nazi sexual policy was in large part initiated to “clean-up” the degenerate sexuality of the Weimar era. Hitler used conservative sexual values to garner support for his government takeover and only afterwards set up his own sexual policies. Nazi doctrine did not oppose sex in general, but promoted a healthy sexual life only for Aryan Germans. All other forms of sexual behavior, such as prostitution or homosexual sex, were under Nazi fire. This type of behavior could send a German citizen to a concentration camp, and though incarceration was meant to punish sexuality, sexual degradations were in fact perpetuated by the camp system.

¹⁴ Sybil Milton, “The Case of German and German-Jewish Women” in Bridenthal, Grossmann, and Kaplan, *When Biology Became Destiny*, 306.

Intimacy, which was for many a reason for imprisonment, became a survival tactic as well. Intimacy was used as an act of rebellion against Nazi oppression. In an environment where all prisoners were immediately dehumanized and therefore desexualized, maintaining sexuality or sexual desire became an important sign of physical life. By understanding Nazi policies concerning sex, we can clearly see a distinction between the sexual behavior prescribed in Hitler's Germany and that which was maintained in the concentration camp environment. This chapter examines this connection by looking at how intimacy was denied or preserved in both settings.

Nazi Sexual Politics

World War I significantly affected sexuality in Europe as there had not been such a large-scale war sustained over many years in nearly a century. For the first time in 100 years, the values of European society were lost to the all-encompassing Great War—this includes sexual customs. In some cases, such as that of the military brothel, sex became depersonalized. Though military brothels had always been a common phenomenon, the scope and length of World War I saw a major increase in the number of military brothels. While military brothels created new sexual opportunities for soldiers, international ties during war also created new sexual opportunities as citizens of different nations, races, and classes were drawn into war and thus came into contact with each other. Increased sexual mobility triggered the spread of venereal diseases, and governments realized that their policies lacked the means to exert serious control over STD transmittance.¹⁵ As a result, post- World War I governments became adamant about sexual regulation. Considering the population decrease from war casualties, it became

¹⁵ Dagmar Herzog, *Sexuality in Europe: A Twentieth-Century History*, New Approaches to European History (Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 47,49.

more important to protect the health of a country's remaining citizens using strict legislation of sexual behavior.

Though formally this would mean reverting to traditional sexuality, the government could not change the sexual freedom that war engendered. Sexual experimentation increased in the inter-war years of the 1920s and 1930s as wartime necessities lifted many sexual restrictions in terms of gender equality. War had changed not only the male population of European countries, but also altered the female demographic. Male casualties increased the number of single and widowed women in the job market. This generated conflict as new societal norms were created. After 1916, the German government had recruited women for vital war work, and many of these female laborers did not want to return to dependence after the war was over.¹⁶ As happened in most countries affected by World War I, men re-entered the jobs that had been given to their counterparts after they returned from the front. Many women who were no longer able to experience professional independence turned to sexual liberation.

Perhaps the most influential impetus towards sexual freedom in the 1920s was the Bolshevik movement. The Bolsheviks decriminalized abortion and homosexuality after their victory in the Russian Revolution.¹⁷ During the inter-war years, the Bolsheviks' sexually liberal culture became an example for Europe's major cities, including Berlin. Berlin's sexual culture centered on unconventional preferences: homosexuality, transgender identification, sadomasochism, and pornography. Over 36 sex-counseling clinics were located in Berlin, as was one of the leading condom factories.¹⁸ The fact that the capital of Germany was a center for this

¹⁶ Claudia Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland: Women, the Family, and Nazi Politics* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987), 25.

¹⁷ Herzog, *Sexuality in Europe*, 49.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 57,60.

sexual independence affected Europeans' view of the sexual behavior tolerated by the Weimar Republic.

While Bolshevik legislation was progressive for the 1920s, many other countries, as well as churches, opposed the movement and took legal measures against communist influence in their respective governments. The European regimes instead used their power during these years to combat the depopulation of their particular countries as a result of extreme war losses. Many nations criminalized acts that hindered conception such as contraceptives, abortions, and even homosexuality. Mussolini's Italy banned the sale of contraceptives in 1926 and allowed the imprisonment of those who assisted or performed abortions in the Rocco Code of 1930-1931. Similarly, Franco's Spain outlawed the sale of contraceptives as well as abortions, but not until 1941.¹⁹ Eventually, preventing conception became criminalized throughout Europe as nations attempted to make up for the losses of World War I.

The restructuring of sexual politics throughout Europe in the interwar years was extreme. Nevertheless, historian Dagmar Herzog asserts that no regime has intervened in the sexual affairs of its people so aggressively while also promising such intense sexual pleasure as Nazi Germany.²⁰ While many historians have described the ways in which Nazism stifled German sexuality, as Herzog contends, the party prescribed a healthy amount of sexual pleasure. The Nazis allowed more discussion focusing on the best way to enhance the female orgasm than any negotiations initiated in the 1950s. Nazism did not deny sexuality; it only advised a distinctly Aryan sexuality used to promote the master race.²¹ Nazi regulation of sexuality was a way to increase the healthy German population while decreasing the amount of "unwanted" births.

¹⁹ Ibid., 64-65.

²⁰ Ibid., 66.

²¹ Ibid., 67,72.

Those not deemed fit for German life and reproduction could be racially impure or political opponents of Nazism. However, some ethnically pure Germans were also targeted. Nazis considered prostitutes, beggars, and others who exhibited “social feeble minded-ness” as asocial. In their book, *The Racial State: Germany 1933-1945*, authors Michael Burleigh and Wolfgang Wippermann cite a telling explanation from the circular of the Reich and Prussian Minister of the Interior from 1937:

Those to be considered asocial are persons who demonstrate through behavior towards their community, which may not in itself be criminal, that they will not adapt themselves to the community. The following are examples of the asocial:

a) Persons who through minor, but repeated, infractions of the law demonstrate that they will not adapt themselves to the natural discipline of the National Socialist state, e.g. beggars, tramps, (Gypsies), whores, alcoholics with contagious diseases, particularly sexually-transmitted diseases, who evade the measures taken by the public health authorities.²²

For many, their only crime was deviating from the established nature of the German people. Nazis believed that asocial and criminal behavior was inheritable, and thus asocial men and women did not fit into the eugenic ideology of Nazi Germany in which one’s bloodline decided their place in society. According to the Nazi eugenics, they could be lawfully sterilized.²³ This is only one example of how the Third Reich used eugenics in extreme ways, and how control of reproduction was at the center of the Nazi cause. Whereas the Weimar protocol for “dangerous” members of society was rehabilitation, Nazis believed “unfit” Germans were inherently

²² ‘Grundlegender Erlass über die vorbeugende Verbrechensbekämpfung durch die Polizei des Reichs- und Preussischen Ministers des Innern vom 14.12.1937’, Reichssicherheitshauptamt-Amt V (ed.), *Vorbeugende Verbrechensbekämpfung* (Berlin, 1942), 42 quoted in M. Burleigh and W. Wippermann, *The Racial State: Germany 1933-1945* (Cambridge University Press, 1991), 172.

²³ M. Burleigh and W. Wippermann, *The Racial State: Germany 1933-1945*, 167.

threatening to the sanctity of the Reich.²⁴ Because they were intrinsically flawed, Nazis believed they could not be rehabilitated and thus should not reproduce, as their children would also be inherently “unfit.”

At the end of the Weimar era, the Nazis spread malevolent reports about Jewish sexuality to promote their own racist views. The Nazis asserted that the majority of prostitutes’ clients were Jewish and Marxist, and therefore were to be blamed for the spread of venereal disease and the decline of the German people.²⁵ It aided their assertion that many sex reformers in the country happened to be Jews who had fought against the criminalization of abortion and homosexuality. One such reformer was Magnus Hirschfield, a distinguished doctor who created the Institute for Sexual Science. Hirschfield also led the World League for Sexual Reform with 190,000 members fighting throughout the world for gender equality, divorce rights, and safe birth control.²⁶ Even women, such as Helene Stöcker, instilled fear into Nazi leaders with their promotion of the sex reform movement, which called for less regulation of abortion, contraception, and homosexual behavior. Stöcker’s League for the Protection of Motherhood, which upheld many of the same values as Hirschfield and his followers, was one of the only women’s associations outlawed in 1933 after Hitler’s Third Reich began.²⁷ Increased public intervention into national sexual politics, like that of Hirschfield and Stöcker, affected the sexual regulations enforced by subsequent fascist governments throughout Europe.

²⁴ Annette F. Timm, “Sex with a Purpose: Prostitution, Venereal Disease, and Militarized Masculinity in the Third Reich,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 11, no. 1/2 (January 1, 2002): 245.

²⁵ Julia Roos, “Backlash against Prostitutes’ Rights: Origins and Dynamics of Nazi Prostitution Policies,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 11, no. 1 (2002): 79.

²⁶ Herzog, *Sexuality in Europe*, 52,54,67.

²⁷ Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland*, 36.

Hitler used sexual politics, like many other Nazi policies, to strengthen support for his leadership. For Hitler, the Weimar Republic's acceptance of a hyper-sexualized culture had led to the decline of the German people. In *Mein Kampf*, he states,

Public life must be freed from the stifling perfume of our modern eroticism, just as it must be freed from all unmanly, prudish hypocrisy. In all these things the goal and the road must be determined by our concern for the preservation of the health of our people in body and soul. The right of personal freedom recedes before the duty to preserve the race.²⁸

Though Hitler made his values clear from the beginning, his strategies often followed his political or military goals. According to historian Jessica R. Anderson Hughes, Nazi prostitution policy changed as a direct result of state needs at the time. In order to gain recognition in the early years of his rise to power, Hitler made the political decision to support conservative views on prostitution.²⁹ Conservative German constituents called for stricter legislation to combat immorality that had become the trademark of the Weimar Republic.³⁰ Hitler's direct support for this position won him the favor of conservative German citizens that he needed to legitimate his leadership. National backlash against the Weimar Republic's 1927 prostitution reform gave Nazis the ability to challenge Weimar political decisions, and Hitler's opposition of the reform helped him gain support from the conservative Center Party for the Enabling Act of 1933 that gave him unprecedented power.³¹

A few years after Hitler's power was solidified, Christians began to criticize the Nazi government for reverting to a more liberal sexual culture. Pro-sex Nazi commentators retorted,

²⁸ Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, trans. Ralph Manheim (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1971), 255.

²⁹ Jessica R Anderson Hughes, "Forced Prostitution: The Competing and Contested Uses of the Concentration Camp Brothel," 2011, 24.

³⁰ Roos, "Backlash Against Prostitutes' Rights: Origins and Dynamics of Nazi Prostitution Policies", 78.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 79,81.

”sexual activity is not sinful, it is sacred.”³² Once Hitler had been given free rein in the German government, he no longer needed support from conservatives and could enact his own sexual policies. Though in *Mein Kampf* he passionately opposes prostitution, during the war he would continue the German tradition of using military brothels in order to further his larger military goals. With war on the horizon, the Wehrmacht declared brothels necessary for controlling venereal disease in soldiers.³³ Nazis were concerned that sexual violence might affect military discipline and also argued that military brothels served to diminish the “need” for rape.³⁴ One major supporter of the military brothels, and the reason for much of the prostitution regulation enacted by Nazis, was Heinrich Himmler, who was appointed head of the *Schutzstaffel* (SS) in 1929 and set up concentration, labor, and extermination camps throughout Nazi controlled Europe. With the start of the war in 1939, regulated prostitution to sustain soldier morale and prevent the spread of STDs became more important to the Reich than curing the immorality of the nation. While state supervised brothels were approved, they were strictly regulated to comply with Nazi racial laws.³⁵ Put simply, the goal of state-regulated brothels was to prepare German men for war by maintaining both their physical and mental health. Like other aspects of German civilian life, Nazis ruled under the assumption that sexual activity was healthy and useful if it was performed as the state dictated.

³² Alfred Zeplin, *Sexualpädagogik als Grundlage des Familienglücks und des Volkswohls* (Rostock: Carl Hinstorffs, 1938), 24 quoted in Herzog, *Sexuality in Europe*, 72.

³³ Jessica R. Anderson Hughes, “Forced Prostitution: The Competing and Contested Uses of the Concentration Camp Brothel,” 35,38.

³⁴ Herzog, *Sexuality in Europe*, 87.

³⁵ Roos, “Backlash Against Prostitutes’ Rights: Origins and Dynamics of Nazi Prostitution Policies,” 87-88.

Preservation or Destruction of Sexual Identity

The civilian sexuality prescribed by Nazi leadership aimed at reproduction of healthy families, and military sexuality was used to keep these men healthy. It is not a surprise, then, that Nazis attempted to stifle the sexuality of “unhealthy” and “unfit” concentration camp prisoners through dehumanization. Because of the extremity of conditions, prisoners chose what values were most important. Humanity remained significant for both sexes.³⁶ The maintenance of humanity was especially important in light of the extreme dehumanization imposed by Nazis during camp registration and throughout internment. There were many ways in which prisoners attempted to maintain their human dignity; most involved using innate human instincts that the Nazis could not take away. Sexuality was one of these inherent instincts that did not require any external possessions. Intimate relations were a way for prisoners to exert their own limited autonomy. In a setting in which many physical indications of humanity had been removed, maintaining sexual identity became one of the simplest forms of prisoner protest.

Upon entering the camp system, SS officials led new prisoners through a registration procedure that most survivors call the “sauna.” In this phase, internees were continually humiliated and dehumanized; they were stripped, shaved, examined, and recorded. One woman who pleaded to keep her bra in the sauna said, “I don’t care, I’m a woman, not a cow.”³⁷ Gisella Perl explains that the SS men showed an abnormal sexual excitement in what she ironically refers to as the “beauty parlor.”³⁸ This reaction is not surprising when one considers the elements of registration. Those passing through the sauna experienced unprofessional physical

³⁶ Pawełczyńska, *Values and Violence in Auschwitz: A Sociological Analysis; Translated and with an Introduction by Catherine S. Leach*, 139-140.

³⁷ Ruth Nebel, “The Story of Ruth” in Bridenthal, Grossmann, and Kaplan, *When Biology Became Destiny*, 340.

³⁸ Gisella. Perl, *I Was a Doctor in Auschwitz*. (New York: International Universities Press, 1948), 41–43.

examinations. A Jewish woman noted that they “check what is in this hole and what in the other hole, everything.”³⁹ Rumors spread through the prisoner population that SS men had taken statistics of how many Slavic women were virgins by poking them with rods in the sauna.⁴⁰ It is this sexual torture that presupposed the changed sexual values between the civilian life from which prisoners had come and the camp life to which they were being initiated.

Physical dehumanization did not end with sexual examinations in the sauna. Nazis forced established prisoners to shave all hair from the bodies of incoming internees, whether male or female, young or old. This was not a passing instance but a constant reminder that they were no longer considered human. Hair is not only a physical attribute, but also an aspect of sexual identity. Gisella Perl describes this affront as shaving the “crown of our female beauty.”⁴¹ One man who saw a new transport of women later recalled that they looked like men. He tried to find female beauty in an attempt to restore his own masculine identity but could not find it. Corroborating the male sentiment, a woman explained that in the camp, she felt sex-less, no longer a woman.⁴² Breasts, usually a symbol of femininity, became a symbol of good physical condition.⁴³ The goal of Nazis in this registration process was to turn “unfit” humans into mere laborers who were judged only by their ability to work for the regime. Thus, the desexualization of individuals was also experienced as part of their dehumanization.

Women were not only affected by physical desexualization, but also biological desexualization. The inadequate conditions in the camps caused widespread amenorrhea, the

³⁹ Na’ama Shik, “Sexual Abuse of Jewish Women in Auschwitz-Birkenau” in Herzog, *Brutality and Desire: War and Sexuality in Europe’s Twentieth Century* (Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 231.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Perl, *I Was a Doctor in Auschwitz*, 41–43.

⁴² Robert Sommer, *Das KZ-Bordell: Sexuelle Zwangsarbeit in Nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslagern* (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2009), 195.

⁴³ Ibid., 194.

absence of menstruation in women. Some natural causes of amenorrhea include anorexia nervosa, psychosocial stressors, excessive exercise, and excessive weight loss or malnutrition.⁴⁴ These causes were prevalent in the camp setting as a result of extreme manual labor, insufficient food rations, and severe psychosocial instability. The loss of menstruation affected a woman's femininity in the most biological sense—procreation. If a woman no longer had the ability to mother a child, her identification as a woman would be compromised. Concentration camp survivor Gerda Klein explained that she would endure any hardship as long as she could maintain hope of having a child. For her, the fear of sterilization and amenorrhea was profoundly psychological.⁴⁵ The biological indicators of femininity had as much impact on physical health as they did on emotional stamina.

While natural causes brought about amenorrhea in the female population, bromides also caused menstrual stoppage. Survivor Olga Lengyel claims that a chemical powder stopped menstruation and dulled sexual reactions. Kitchen workers confirmed that SS officials themselves mixed this chemical substance into all prisoner food. High-ranking prisoners, such as camp or block leaders, ate different food and did not experience any menstrual disturbances.⁴⁶ The fact that SS officials, who had no part in food preparation, added a chemical powder to prisoners' rations instead of ordering the kitchen staff to do so demonstrates the significance of this action. Nazis were very aware of the sexual experiences occurring within the camp, whether it was individual or between partners. By knowingly decreasing the sexual libido of prisoners with bromides, the SS most likely believed they would become more efficient workers. Though

⁴⁴ Tarannum Master-Hunter and Diana L. Heiman, "Amenorrhea: Evaluation and Treatment," *American Family Physician* 73, no. 8 (April 15, 2006): 1380.

⁴⁵ Myrna Goldenberg, "Lessons Learned from Gentle Heroism: Women's Holocaust Narratives," *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 548 (November 1, 1996): 82.

⁴⁶ Lengyel, *Five Chimneys: The Story of Auschwitz* (New York: Howard Fertig, c 1947, 1983), 83–84.

ostensibly an economic motivation, this tactic eradicated an important aspect of human nature, and therefore was also part of Nazi dehumanization. SS officials stripped women of their biological femininity and purposefully controlled their entire reproductive system. Though most women were unaware that they were being drugged, the psychological toll caused by bromides was as harmful as natural amenorrhea.

Though most women desired menstruation to continue as a sign of their femininity and humanity, it could be dangerous to show signs of menstruation in the camp. A woman interned in the extermination camp Treblinka explains that there were no sanitary napkins so the girls used large leaves to protect themselves. However, if the SS officials saw blood from menstruation on the dress of a female inmate, it could mean immediate death.⁴⁷ The desire for menstruation and the corresponding danger of menstruating were, therefore, a major cause for concern in the female population. If a woman menstruated, she could be killed, but if she did not she became less of a woman. In this way, both physical and emotional survival was connected to the biological reproductive system.

In addition to the devious use of chemical powders, desexualization also occurred in formal camp institutions. In extreme situations, SS doctors imposed painful sterilization experiments on some male and female inmates. These experiments were exceptionally degrading. Sterilization experiments were routinely interrupted to test whether subjects still had the ability to copulate. In August 1944, Nazi doctors sterilized 1,000 13-16 year old boys and then forced them to masturbate to test whether sterilization affected sexual performance.⁴⁸ Though most of the boys from this especially humiliating experiment were killed thereafter,

⁴⁷ Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland*, 406.

⁴⁸ Lengyel, *Five Chimneys: The Story of Auschwitz*, 178.

some prisoners who were sterilized by SS doctors were released back into the general camp population.

If sterilization victims survived, the experience undoubtedly affected their immediate and future sexuality and self-perception. Mutilation was the most severe and invasive form of desexualization, so it is no surprise that the victims of this form of torture experienced acute psychological trauma. In Birkenau, Georgette was sterilized by SS doctors and thereafter did not identify herself as a woman. She was so ashamed to see her “fiancé” (from a rational relationship that began within the camp) that the prisoner doctors told him that Georgette was dead. When she found out shortly afterwards that her fiancé had set his sights on another woman, she committed suicide.⁴⁹ By curtailing the biological sexuality of prisoners, occasionally with such cruel methods as sterilization, SS officials succeeded in their goal of dehumanizing victims. What camp officials did not expect were the effective re-sexualization and re-humanization methods of prisoners.

After prisoners were admitted into the camp system, sexual urges became an indication of physical humanity.⁵⁰ With the extreme dehumanization perpetrated by SS officials, maintaining sexuality and sexual identity became extremely important to maintaining even a small degree of humanity. For many prisoners, sexual experiences became ways to prove that they were still alive. Some survivors claim that sexual needs were not primary needs, and in such extreme circumstances sexuality was not given the same priority as it was in peacetime.⁵¹ Though not a main concern, it was still extremely important. For example, waning sexual desire

⁴⁹ Ibid., 180.

⁵⁰ Sommer, *Das KZ-Bordell*, 194.

⁵¹ Pawełczyńska, *Values and Violence in Auschwitz : A Sociological Analysis*, 98.

could have meant waning fertility.⁵² As discussed earlier in the case of menstruation, this could cause major psychological trauma for inmates. Using sexuality as an instrument and indicator of survival attests to the changed values in the concentration camp system.

Since 1945, there have been numerous claims about sexual desire in Nazi camp populations. For instance, in 1971, German psychiatrist Paul Matussek interviewed concentration camp survivors for his study on the psychological effects of confinement. He corroborated the fact that sexual desire did exist in the camp prisoner population. One man claimed that he had sexual dreams and masturbated while in the camp. In addition, German sexologists Giza and Morasiewicz published results of a study on the sexuality of inmates in Auschwitz Stammlager. They found that masturbation did not happen often, perhaps once every few months, but it was an important means by which male prisoners tested themselves to see whether they were still alive.⁵³ Sexual desire was also prevalent in the female population: 45% of women who participated in the study testified to having masturbated while in the camps.⁵⁴ Jessica R. Anderson Hughes states that men were not as worried about fertility after the camp because there was no biological indicator in men such as menstruation in women.⁵⁵ However, masturbation could have been a way that men showed they were still sexually viable. Historian Robert Sommer states that the motivation for masturbation was fear of losing sexuality or reproductive ability.⁵⁶ This may have been true of both men and women who used masturbation

⁵² Anderson Hughes, "Forced Prostitution: The Competing and Contested Uses of the Concentration Camp Brothel," 238.

⁵³ Herzog, *Brutality and Desire: War and Sexuality in Europe's Twentieth Century*, 181, 184.

⁵⁴ Sommer, *Das KZ-Bordell*, 197.

⁵⁵ Anderson Hughes, "Forced Prostitution: The Competing and Contested Uses of the Concentration Camp Brothel," 240.

⁵⁶ Sommer, *Das KZ-Bordell*, 197.

to preserve their reproductive abilities. In any event, masturbation suggests that sexuality should be seen as an essential aspect of a prisoner's survival.

The Affect of Social Status on Sexuality

The degree to which prisoners were able to perform sexual activities, whether it was to assert humanity or fulfill desire, depended on their social status. Robert Sommer has found that some internees experienced diminished sexual desires while for others, sexuality was very important. He asserts that a prisoner's sexual life depended heavily on his or her social position within the camp.⁵⁷ The first requirement was, of course, food, but those whose physiological needs were ensured satisfied sexual desire. Thus, sexual desire was a privilege dependent on a prisoner's social status. The prisoners that could afford this privilege sold physical commodities for sex in informal sexual relationships within the camp, and also, if male, visited the prisoner brothel. A visit to the brothel, which was much more overt than the clandestine meeting of prisoners for sexual barter, became a signal of one's high rank in the camp hierarchy.

The uppermost level of the camp hierarchy, the aristocracy, was made up of camp leaders (Lagerälteste), high ranking prisoner supervisors (*Kapos*) who had authority in an office or over a work detail, prisoners working in either the SS or prisoner kitchen, and those responsible for the camp hospital. Position within this level was flexible; there were some exceptions in which the leader of a specific block (Blockälteste) could win extreme favor and become part of the aristocracy and other instances where prisoners were severely demoted. This top rank of prisoners was almost entirely Reichsdeutsche men. Within their ranks there was a continual fight

⁵⁷ Ibid., 180-182.

for SS favor, especially between the “Greens”, or criminal prisoners, and the “Reds”, the political prisoners.

Next in the hierarchy was the middle class of prisoners. This echelon was mainly made up of prisoner functionaries: room leaders (Blockälteste), lower-level clerks, foreman, and nurses. These prisoners often had specific advantages based on their work, whether it was in the kitchen or in the storage areas.⁵⁸ This top half of the camp hierarchy was better equipped for physical survival and therefore more inclined to act on their sexual desires. These prisoners maintained a certain amount of cooperation with the SS officials in their quest to survive.

Though a great number of prisoners remained in the middle rank, a majority belonged to what survivor Benedikt Kautsky refers to as the “Great Mass.” This was the lower echelon of prisoner society, and thus those with fewer privileges in the camp system. Work included manual labor and brought few to no advantages.⁵⁹ This class of prisoners was focused mainly on physiological needs rather than sexual needs. Though the survival chance of these prisoners was very low, an even poorer class of prisoners existed in the camps, the “*Muselmann*.” A “*Muselmann*” was a man or woman barely surviving between life and death. In fact, other prisoners treated them as if they were already dead. In his 1971 study, Stanislaw Sterkowics noted that the state of a “*Muselmann*” was the last phase of starvation disease.⁶⁰ The “Great Mass” could conceivably have thought of sex, though they would barely have the energy to act on the desire. A “*Muselmann*,” on the other hand, thought of little other than food. In

⁵⁸ “Benedikt Kautsky’s Description of the Concentration Camp Hierarchy (Retrospective Account, 1961)” in *Nazi Germany (1933-1945)*, edited by Richard Breitman, volume 7, *German History in Documents and Images*, German Historical Institute, Washington, DC (www.germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org), 1-2.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 3-4

⁶⁰ Zdzislaw Ryn, “Between Life and Death: Experiences of Concentration Camp Mussulmen during the Holocaust,” *Genetic, Social & General Psychology Monographs* 116, no. 1 (February 1990): 7.

light of this social model, the higher stratum of prisoner society was motivated to intimacy by sexual desire while the lower echelon was motivated by survival, or the commodities they would receive from the sexual exchange.

Emotional Intimacy

Before describing how sexuality was perpetuated in concentration camps and how it led to physical survival, it is important for us to understand the role of emotional intimacy. The ability to form emotional connections with other inmates can be viewed as a form of adaptation; however, primary source material reveals that women utilized emotional intimacy more often than men. That is not to say that men were not emotionally connected to other women, but that they lacked emotional intimacy with other men. In this way, emotional connections were more descriptive of the women's experience while physical intimacies were maintained by a large number of women as well as men. Emotional intimacy, like physical intimacy, depended on a prisoner's distinct pre-war socialization and affected their in-camp survival.

Emotional connections in concentration camps were most often seen in friendships between women because of strict gender segregation of the camp at large. However, there are some instances, though admittedly rare, in which emotional connections between men and women were sustained. These relationships had particular survival benefits. In Krystyna Zywulska's memoir *Tanz, Mädchen*, she relates her ongoing relationship with Andrzej, a prisoner in the men's camp. The two met coincidentally while working outside the camp gates,

and though they never shared more physical contact than a mere kiss, the enduring relationship gave both of them a reason to withstand various hardships.⁶¹

The couple found ways to exchange letters, and they shared the contents of their correspondence with others in their living quarters, some of whom admitted to living vicariously through Krystyna and Andrzej's love life. Krystyna wrote poems to ease the harsh life of manual labor, and she shared these poems with the men and women around her. In one letter from Andrzej, he pleads, "Please send me one of your poems. We have nothing to read. Write to me," attesting to the shared benefit the correspondence provided.⁶² Polish sociologist and Auschwitz-Birkenau survivor Anna Pawełczyńska states that love in concentration camps was kept hidden by loyal friends.⁶³ It seems that the relationship of two people within the camp was contingent on others but advantageous to them at the same time. Thus, camp relationships significantly affected the survival of groups of people, not only the main participants.

Krystyna explains that Andrzej's letters made her life more bearable and he, though aware of the fact that there was no chance for them to meet in person, urged her to keep living.⁶⁴ Both were realistic about the dynamics of their relationship; they knew that the bond helped them both to sustain an emotional will to live but that they could not hope to fulfill intimate physical desires. Camp relationships such as this were extremely atypical but show the individuality of each case of camp intimacy. It was uncommon that men and women formed emotional relationships with each other because of the scarce presence of the opposite sex in

⁶¹ Krystyna Zywułska, *Tanz, Mädchen... : vom Warschauer Getto nach Auschwitz : ein Überlebensbericht*. (München: Dt. Taschenbuch-Verl., 1988), 204.

⁶² "Schicke mir bitte eines Deiner Gedichte. Wir haben nichts zu lesen. Schreibe mir." in *Ibid.*, 317.

⁶³ Pawełczyńska, *Values and Violence in Auschwitz : A Sociological Analysis*, 97.

⁶⁴ Zywułska, *Tanz, Mädchen ... : vom Warschauer Getto nach Auschwitz : ein Überlebensbericht*, 292.

gender-segregated camps. Not only was it difficult to meet each other, but even harder to maintain contact. The great lengths to which Andrzej and Krystyna went to maintain their relationship attests to the importance of even the smallest intimacy.

Male Friendships versus Female Friendships

Though some men, such as Andrzej, experienced an emotional connection, most male prisoners did not. The stark contrast between emotional intimacies in the retrospectives of males versus females is striking. Female memoirs contain many mentions and examples of friendships; male memoirs, such as that of Primo Levi, narrate self-dependence. Levi claims that in the camp, no one was helpful, and therefore everyone had to survive alone.⁶⁵ Women, on the other hand, utilized pre-imprisonment roles as housewives and mothers, which greatly affected their survival chances.

Historian Sybil Milton asserts that women were more resilient than men both physically and psychologically. For women in particular, the loss or maintenance of pre-imprisonment roles became very important for emotional stability. According to Milton, the female survival strategy in camps was housework, which became a form of therapy in that it gave women control over space.⁶⁶ Evidence shows that the pre-imprisonment domestic roles of women in camps such as Ravensbrück and Birkenau helped them to combat many inhumane conditions. Women often cleaned their barracks, which could lower the spread of disease and decrease mortality. SS officials did not command women to perform housework; it was merely a coping mechanism for

⁶⁵ Primo Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz : The Nazi Assault on Humanity/ Including "A Conversation with Primo Levi by Philip Roth."* Translated by Stuart Woolf (New York : Collier Books ; Toronto : Maxwell Macmillan Canada ; New York : Maxwell Macmillan International, 1993.), 88.

⁶⁶ Sybil Milton, "Women and the Holocaust", in Bridenthal, Grossmann, and Kaplan, *When Biology Became Destiny*, 311.

the harsh living conditions women experienced. Compared to mortality statistics of men's barracks in Ravensbrück in August 1943, there was a lower death rate in women's accommodations in the same camp at the same time. In addition, women exhibited community-minded qualities in keeping with pre-internment roles as wives and mothers. Many women gradually formed family units with other inmates that functioned as a form of protection and resource organization.⁶⁷

Perhaps the most common form of community bonds and emotional intimacy within the camp was that of these surrogate families. Historian Joan Ringelheim highlights the relationship between two female prisoners, Rose and Rollie. When they met, Rollie was considering suicide because the biological sister with whom she had entered the camp had died. Rose later explained:

If it wasn't for me, she wouldn't be alive. We helped each other. We had to cling...you had to have somebody... She considers me her best friend, her mother, her father, everything...I considered her as my daughter (Rose was then twenty-four and Rollie was eighteen). This I felt for her. I was sheltering her.⁶⁸

Though Rose acted as a protector for Rollie, Rollie also gave Rose a reason to survive. In a camp setting where forced laborers were easily replaced, a feeling of necessity spurred by emotional ties could greatly affect one's will to live. Family units became significant motivation for living, giving women the emotional stamina to endure tragedy.

Female friendships became so important to the psychological stamina of women that many claimed the bonds were a major reason for their survival in the camp. One survivor explains, "If you are sisterless, you do not have the pressure, the absolute responsibility to end the day alive."⁶⁹ Similarly, prisoner doctor Gisella Perl explains in her memoir how she and her friend Olga Schwartz decided to stick together. She writes, "from then on our friendship became

⁶⁷ Ibid., 313-314.

⁶⁸ Joan Ringelheim, "Women and the Holocaust: A Reconsideration of Research," 748.

⁶⁹ Goldenberg, "Lessons Learned from Gentle Heroism: Women's Holocaust Narratives," 79.

our constant source of strength and endurance during all those infernal months in Auschwitz,” and says that the friendship of women like Olga is still her “proudest possession” in her post-war life.⁷⁰ She writes of her camp friends as though they are saints among the Nazi sinners, with such poetic descriptions that it is easy to understand how much their bond affected her psychological stamina. She describes Doctor Rose as a colleague whose “laughter was a constant source of joy to all of us and her contempt for those who lost faith kept us often from giving way to despair.” With similar sentiment, she portrays Doctor Charlotte as a “symbol of motherly love” who protected her three sisters with the “fierceness of a tiger.”⁷¹ Though there is no way of knowing whether Gisella Perl could have survived without her comrades, it is quite obvious that her connection with and adulation of them inspired her to live.

Women who were able to use their nurturing habits in the camps had better chances than men who lost their protector role when they were separated from their families. These men were less able to transform the habit of protecting their biological family to protecting other men.⁷² One female internee revealed that men put their arms around themselves instead of each other for warmth.⁷³ This is very telling of the emotional distinction between male and female inmates. Rose, the guardian of Rollie, explained why it was women who were better able to adapt to camp conditions:

Woman friendship is different than man friendship you see... We have these motherly instincts, friend instincts more. If two or three women are friends they can be closer than two or three men. [Men] can be nice to each other, talk to each other, have a beer with each other... But that's as far as it goes, you know? But that's what was holding the women together because everybody had to have somebody to lean on, to depend on. The men, no... the men didn't do that. Men were friends there too. They talked to each other

⁷⁰ Gisella. Perl, *I Was a Doctor in Auschwitz*, 87-88.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 90.

⁷² Joan Ringelheim, “Women and the Holocaust: A Reconsideration of Research,” 747.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 749.

but they didn't, wouldn't, sell their bread for an apple for the other guy. They wouldn't sacrifice nothing. See, that was the difference.⁷⁴

Thus, men who lost their pre-imprisonment roles also lost a good chance at survival while women who maintained nurturing tendencies were better equipped emotionally to handle harsh camp conditions.

Male memoirs and testimony also highlight this contrasting belief about emotional stability. Primo Levi writes that friendships were only made based on what someone could do for the other.⁷⁵ Similarly, survivor Benedikt Kautsky explains in his retrospective account that, "If I give to the weak then I will be keeping them alive for a bit longer, but in the end I can't save him."⁷⁶ It is not hard to believe that men, who were praised for their physical abilities in pre-war society, mainly focused on physical survival. Thus, the gender roles in a prisoner's life before his or her internment in the camp, especially the emotional habits of men versus women, had an important bearing on their survival within the camp.

Conclusion

Nazi policies promoted healthy sexual behavior exclusively for Aryans. In the camps, we can see the extent to which they attempted to destroy the sexuality of those not part of their racial plan. In camp initiation, Nazis attempted to eradicate all sexual markers from each prisoner, creating an androgynous mass of laborers. The camp environment further perpetuated this distinction through starvation and unhygienic conditions. A prisoner's intimate behavior became

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz*, 89.

⁷⁶ "Benedikt Kautsky's Description of the Concentration Camp Hierarchy (Retrospective Account, 1961)" in *Nazi Germany (1933-1945)*, edited by Richard Breitman, volume 7, *German History in Documents and Images*, German Historical Institute, Washington, DC (www.germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org), 4.

an intrinsic method of resistance against widespread dehumanization efforts. In contrast with civilian society, the extent to which a prisoner was able to actualize his or her sexuality depended predominantly on his or her status in the prisoner hierarchy of the camp. Sexuality and the manifestation of gender that some prisoners maintained became physical and emotional signs of humanity.

As sudden as their incarceration had been, prisoners were forced to recognize that sexual behavior had completely different uses inside the camp than it had in the civilian society from which they had been taken. While civilian sexuality during the *Nazizeit* was driven either by desire or by the aim of reproduction, camp sexuality had more dire motivations such as the preservation of prisoners' remaining humanity. As we will soon see, survival was also a driving force for camp sexuality. Maintaining sexuality in the camp often generated an emotional will to survive; however, the ways in which prisoners physically actualized this will were extremely difficult in the controlled camp environment.

Chapter Two

Prisoner Brothels

Auschwitz's Block 24 is located directly behind the fence with the infamous "*Arbeit Macht Frei*" motto of the concentration camps, yet the former function of this building, whose picture is printed in history textbooks throughout the world, is still widely unknown. Former Buchenwald prisoner and vice president of the International Committee of Buchenwald-Dora, Walter Bartelt, says they avoid openly discussing the brothel today because it isn't of any public interest to start.⁷⁷ The Buchenwald memorial itself contains a small plaque where the brothel once stood which succinctly states the function of the prisoner *Bordell* (brothel). In Auschwitz, the barrack in which brothel women lived and worked still stands and holds the archives and digital repository of the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum. On my own visit to Auschwitz with a group of students interested in Holocaust history, I asked our expert tour-guide about the camp brothel. She did not elaborate but only corroborated that it was indeed in Block 24. It is clear that Holocaust memorial sites do not attempt to conceal this aspect of camp life, but also do not discuss it in detail.

The prisoner brothels within concentration camps were institutions set up by Nazi leaders to reward Aryan prisoners for productive labor. While SS officials went to great lengths to desexualize prisoners and even curb their sexual desires, they also used sex as a major motivator for prisoner labor. This chapter will start with the formal reasoning behind the creation of brothels for prisoners, highlighting the connection between Nazi sexual policy in the Wehrmacht and in the concentration camp. Next, I will give profiles of the necessary participants: the women who Nazis made "prostitutes" and the men who became their patrons. While the men

⁷⁷ Robert Sommer, *Das KZ-Bordell: Sexuelle Zwangsarbeit in Nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslagern*, 16-17.

were often independently motivated to use sexual privileges, the women's participation depended largely on the SS officers who ran the sex institutions and oversaw their activities. The final section of this chapter shows how the male and female prisoners involved in the *Bordell* found ways to rebel against SS oversight by creating relationships with each other. The sexual behavior of both male and female prisoners in the highly regulated brothel institution shows the small but existent amount of individual sexuality that prisoners were able to exert under the Nazis' constant supervision.

Creation of Camp Brothel Institutions

Given the Nazis' belief in the practicality of prostitution in wartime, it is no wonder that Himmler decided to use it as motivation for concentration camp prisoners performing labor for the state. Prisoner labor in concentration camps was initially a form of punishment. Nazis valued "productivism", which accepted that one can become culturally pure through productivity. For this reason, they wanted to give "productive" jobs to unemployed German workers. The German unemployment rate remained very high in the early 1930s at the inception of Nazi concentration camps. As unemployment rates plummeted from war mobilization and new Nazi building plans were finalized, Nazis began using prisoners as free labor.⁷⁸ Hitler had plans to reconstruct the major cities of Germany, and needed material from quarries around the country; this task was given to prisoners.⁷⁹ The intricate building plans and short deadlines for

⁷⁸ Anderson Hughes, "Forced Prostitution: The Competing and Contested Uses of the Concentration Camp Brothel," 48-51.

⁷⁹ Robert Sommer, "Camp Brothels: Forced Sex Labor in Nazi Concentration Camps" in Dagmar Herzog, *Brutality and Desire: War and Sexuality in Europe's Twentieth Century*, 169.

completion affected views on prisoner productivity, which was severely low because of inhuman living conditions.⁸⁰

In order to increase prisoner productivity, Himmler decided in 1941 that prisoners could be rewarded for good work by offering them access to brothels. However, he failed to recognize that compensating a prisoner with sexual rewards would not be beneficial if the camp continually failed to meet the prisoner's basic physiological needs such as adequate food and water.

American psychologist Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs explains that if basic physiological needs are not met, other needs become nonexistent or are no longer important.⁸¹ Instead of considering basic human behavior, Himmler viewed the situation through a military lens; he concluded that German soldiers drew their strength from sex.⁸² Keeping with this line of thought, sex became an important motivation for prisoner labor. In Himmler's mind, not only could prisoners be mentally motivated to do better work, but perhaps they could also be physically strengthened by sex to be more productive in their labor.

In October 1941, Himmler ordered the construction of brothels in Mauthausen and Gusen after a visit to those camps by himself and chief of the SS Wirtschafts- und Verwaltungshauptamt (Economic and Administrative Main Office), Oswald Pohl. It had come to Himmler's attention that the efficiency of forced laborers from concentration camps was only

⁸⁰ Robert Sommer, "Sexual Exploitation of Women in Nazi Concentration Camp Brothels" in S.M. Hedgepeth and R.G. Sidel, *Sexual Violence Against Jewish Women During the Holocaust*, HBI Series on Jewish Women (Brandeis University Press, 2010), 47.

⁸¹ A. H. Maslow, "A Theory of Human Motivation," *Psychological Review* 50, no. 4 (July 1943): 373.

⁸² Annette F. Timm, "Sex with a Purpose: Prostitution, Venereal Disease, and Militarized Masculinity in the Third Reich," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 11, no. 1/2 (January 1, 2002): 227.

fifty percent that of civilian workers.⁸³ In a letter to Oswald Pohl in March 1943, he states, “If I can use nature as an incentive for higher performance, then I think we have to take advantage of this incentive.”⁸⁴ Other bonuses were instituted throughout the entire camp system in 1943 in the form of an *Akkordsystem* or piecemeal wage system. Apart from a brothel visit, a prisoner could also be awarded with haircuts, vouchers for cigarettes, or extra food rations. The WVHA official order instituting this *Akkordsystem* cited the necessity of these measures for a satisfactory outcome of war; however, German historian Robert Sommer asserts that neither the SS nor the companies involved believed it to be an effective system. He rightly asserts that a more effective solution would have been better living conditions.⁸⁵ Not surprisingly, better living conditions were one of the major motivations for women who “volunteered” to work in what prisoners slangily referred to as the *Puffkommando* (“*Puff*” meaning “brothel” and “*commando*” meaning “work detail”). Soon, prisoner brothels became so important to the SS, that Buchenwald suspended other building projects in order to build a *Bordell* barrack.⁸⁶

The camp *Bordell* was a form of reward, but also a form of punishment. Though the main motivation for creating prisoner brothels in concentration camps was to promote prisoner productivity, Nazis may also have used sexual incentives to subdue political fervor as many prisoners incarcerated in the early years of concentration camps were political prisoners. Survivor Krystyna Zywulska’s memoir describes political prisoners who volunteered for work in the *Puffkommando* because they would receive better food and be able to wear civilian clothes.

⁸³ Robert Sommer, “Camp Brothels: Forced Sex Labor in Nazi Concentration Camps” in Herzog, *Brutality and Desire: War and Sexuality in Europe’s Twentieth Century*, 168–169.

⁸⁴ Reichsführer! Briefe and und von Himmler, ed Helmut Heiber (Stuttgart, 1968), 194-96, quoted in Roos, “Backlash against Prostitutes’ Rights: Origins and Dynamics of Nazi Prostitution Policies,” 94.

⁸⁵ Robert Sommer, “Camp Brothels: Forced Sex Labor in Nazi Concentration Camps” in Herzog, *Brutality and Desire: War and Sexuality in Europe’s Twentieth Century*, 170-172.

⁸⁶ Sommer, *Das KZ-Bordell*, 124.

She explains that later, the female inmates heard that these brothels were meant to keep political prisoners from conspiring against camp authority.⁸⁷ Though there is, of course, no proof of this from the surviving Nazi records; appeasement of political prisoners may have been one of the many reasons they limited their recruitment demographic to German political and asocial prisoners. Not only was it possible for political women be confined in the brothel with little interaction with those outside, but the *Bordell* also functioned to divert the attention of male visitors who had been imprisoned for political activity. The target visitors of the Buchenwald *Bordell*, communists and social democrats, are further proof of this theory.⁸⁸ If male inmates were given the privilege of sexual relations, Himmler and the SS hoped that these encounters would distract them from political organization within the camp. In a way, brothels were used to ameliorate the political passions of prisoners by inciting sexual passion.

Himmler, who initiated the creation of prisoner brothels, was a staunch opponent of homosexuality. Therefore, it is not surprising that the prisoner *Bordell* was also used as punishment for homosexual prisoners. Himmler believed that homosexuals could be cured of their deviancy through methods such as forced heterosexual sex.⁸⁹ Prisoner brothels were, for Himmler, an ideal institution in which to perform this forced resexualization. Homosexuals were forced to pass by the Sachsenhausen *Bordell* women who were told to tempt them; if they succumbed to the temptation they were considered cured and could return to the men's camp.⁹⁰ One homosexual prisoner from Sachsenhausen noted:

⁸⁷ Krystyna Zywulska, *Tanz, Mädchen ... : vom Warschauer Getto nach Auschwitz : ein Überlebensbericht*, 214.

⁸⁸ Sommer, *Das KZ-Bordell*, 126.

⁸⁹ Anderson Hughes, "Forced Prostitution: The Competing and Contested Uses of the Concentration Camp Brothel," 63.

⁹⁰ Sommer, *Das KZ-Bordell*, 204.

We were obliged to show up there [the brothel] once a week, in order to “learn” the joys of the other sex...What pleasure was I supposed to get, when the poor girl lifted her legs and called, “Hurry up, then, hurry up!” so that she could be finished as soon as possible with a situation that was certainly just as painful for her? On top of which, I knew that some SS man would be spying on me through the hole.⁹¹

Another prisoner remarked that homosexuality was the primary or secondary reason for forcing a prisoner to visit the camp *Bordell*.⁹² Survivor statements that show forced visitation suggest that the prisoner brothel was not only a result of Nazi economic needs, but also an institution in which they could promote their sexual and political values.

Motivations of Male Clients

Sexuality, in general, was a symbol of physical strength within the camp. The upper echelon of the prisoner population was allowed all forms of entertainment such as high-stakes gambling and sports contests. For these men, a brothel visit showed that they were different from the rest of the male population because they could afford to waste energy with sex. Robert Sommer equates a visit to the *Bordell* with the willful squandering of food in front of starving prisoners—the surplus of energy being flaunted before prisoners who were dying of physical fatigue. Those in the prisoner aristocracy were the prisoners who visited the *Bordell* regularly, nineteen of them visiting the Mauthausen brothel up to twice per week.⁹³

A visit with a *Bordell* woman marked men as part of the camp aristocracy and established a group identity. Towards the end of the war, Spanish prisoner functionaries who had once been

⁹¹ Heger, Heinz. *The Men with the Pink Triangle: The True Life and Death Story of Homosexuals in the Nazi Death Camps*. Translated by David Fernbach (Boston, Mass.: Alyson Publications, 1980), 64, quoted in Anderson Hughes, “Forced Prostitution: The Competing and Contested Uses of the Concentration Camp Brothel,” 64.

⁹² Sommer, *Das KZ-Bordell*, 204.

⁹³ Robert Sommer, “Forced Sex Labor in Nazi Concentration Camps” in Herzog, *Brutality and Desire: War and Sexuality in Europe’s Twentieth Century*, 183-184.

forbidden to visit prisoner brothels were given the “privilege.” German *Kapos* and prominent prisoners opposed this and asked the German *Puffkommando* women to refuse them.⁹⁴ As mentioned above, a social hierarchy existed among concentration camp prisoners. Male prisoners wishing to assert their status in the prisoner hierarchy may then have been motivated to display their sexuality by visiting the camp brothel. According to Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, safety needs become the focus after physiological needs have been met.⁹⁵ Safety needs could include group identity or a secure position within camp society. Seen in this light, camp status was very important among prisoners and could have been a major motivation for intimacy.

Brothel clients from the middle class of prisoners had different motives. For those who thought that they would not survive the camp, sexual experience became a last wish—Robert Sommer refers to it as the “near death motive.”⁹⁶ Many young men who had no hope for survival wanted to experience being with a woman because they had never had sexual relations with females before incarceration. For some of these young men who were engaged in mutually beneficial barter relationships with older male prisoners, as will be described in detail later, the motivation for a brothel visit was to test their sexual preference. One Czech boy who had not been sexually active prior to imprisonment was involved in a sexual relationship with a higher-ranking male prisoner for food and protection. He paid a visit to the *Bordell* in order to see whether he was homosexual or not.⁹⁷ While it was common that young men who were celibate before their internment wanted to experience sex for the first time before they died, it was also common motivation that prisoners who had been sexually active wanted one more sexual

⁹⁴ Sommer, *Das KZ-Bordell*, 245.

⁹⁵ Maslow, “A Theory of Human Motivation.”

⁹⁶ Sommer, *Das KZ-Bordell*, 245.

⁹⁷ Robert Sommer, “Forced Sex Labor in Nazi Concentration Camps” in Herzog, *Brutality and Desire: War and Sexuality in Europe’s Twentieth Century*, 184–185.

encounter before death.⁹⁸ The near-death motive was not a survival technique but the opposite, a last resort.

A third motivation for a brothel visit outlined by Robert Sommer was contact with a woman.⁹⁹ It is likely that those who visited for a brief emotional connection were within the middle class of prisoners because they would not have as much physical energy to exert as the upper class. Perhaps this was a way for some men to forge emotional intimacies that they did not receive in friendships with other men, such as those women often experienced. Ryszard Dacko, a political prisoner, explained that he visited the *Bordell* merely to cuddle with a woman because he had not had any female contact in his years of imprisonment.¹⁰⁰ This demonstrates that some men did seek emotional connections, though it was not with other men.

Female Recruitment

Starting in 1942 with the creation of prisoner brothels, the primary camp for recruiting and selecting women for the *Puffkommando* was Ravensbrück concentration camp near Berlin. Later, the women's camp at Auschwitz-Birkenau was also used.¹⁰¹ In Mauthausen, which contained the first prisoner *Bordell*, one woman was recruited for every 300-500 prisoners, meaning that the brothel housed approximately 10 women, and about 550 men visited each woman in the entire duration of her work in the *Puffkommando*.¹⁰² Perhaps to assuage their own guilt, camp authorities initially imposed a system of voluntary action, but maintained certain criteria of those deemed acceptable. According to a Ravensbrück physician, the women had to

⁹⁸ Sommer, *Das KZ-Bordell*, 251.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 246.

¹⁰⁰ Anderson Hughes, "Forced Prostitution: The Competing and Contested Uses of the Concentration Camp Brothel," 218.

¹⁰¹ Sommer, *Das KZ-Bordell*, 107.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*, 116.

be of age, experienced, good looking, and without venereal disease.¹⁰³ The SS exclusively employed Aryan women in prisoner brothels because only Aryan men were given the privilege of a *Bordell* visit.¹⁰⁴ Most of the women solicited to volunteer were asocial prisoners who had been arrested for prostitution in Germany. Himmler, in justification, noted that they were experienced and already “fallen” and therefore had no chance at rehabilitation.¹⁰⁵ Though racially deficient to the Nazis, these asocials were *Reichsdeutsche*, ethnically German, and thus could be used for sexual slavery. Of the 183 sex laborers in concentration camp brothels, 114 were *Reichsdeutsche* and 85% of those *Resichdeutsche* were asocial.¹⁰⁶

Because women living in better conditions within the camp were not likely to volunteer to work in a *Bordell*, the Nazis asked for volunteers from places with the worst living conditions—usually the prostitutes’ barracks and the camp prison.¹⁰⁷ Historian Jessica R. Anderson Hughes contends that the three main reasons for volunteering for a *Puffkommando* were the lack of space in camps, uncertainty of future, and the unhygienic conditions of the camp at large.¹⁰⁸ Helen Ernst, a Ravensbrück survivor, perhaps put it most simply by saying that the women who volunteered did not have any help or advice; they were separated from their families and feared the hunger and the catastrophic conditions in the camp. They saw this as their only way to improve their fate.¹⁰⁹ One woman’s justification for volunteering was, “Winter is coming

¹⁰³ Anderson Hughes, “Forced Prostitution: The Competing and Contested Uses of the Concentration Camp Brothel,” 125.

¹⁰⁴ Sommer, *Das KZ-Bordell*, 139.

¹⁰⁵ Anderson Hughes, “Forced Prostitution: The Competing and Contested Uses of the Concentration Camp Brothel,” 119.

¹⁰⁶ Sommer, *Das KZ-Bordell*, 224.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 98.

¹⁰⁸ Anderson Hughes, “Forced Prostitution: The Competing and Contested Uses of the Concentration Camp Brothel,” 95.

¹⁰⁹ Aussage Helen Ernst, verfasst am 22. Mai 1945 (Kopie der Abschrift)
Archiv der Mahn- und Gedenkstätte Ravensbrück, Slg. Bd. 40/931

and I work in the fields!”¹¹⁰ Kommandant Höß of Auschwitz asked one woman why she volunteered for the *Bordell* to which she replied that she had never been with a man and saw no other way of leaving the camp alive.¹¹¹ For most, there was no other way to survive. Different SS recruiters used different methods of enticement. Some women were told that they were volunteering for a brothel, while others were not told the nature of their work: “Who wants to go to Auschwitz, in the city, to a men’s camp? There is light work, civilian clothing, and good food there.”¹¹² Though the consequences of the work were often not discussed, the motivations for volunteering remained the same—survival.

For most women who volunteered to work in a *Puffkommando*, the choice decided their fate: survival or death. In this regard, the choice to enlist or remain among the faceless mass of prisoners was one of the most important decisions they would make in their entire camp existence. Though no decision in the camp was made without duress, the ability to volunteer as a prostitute was one important way that female inmates showed their capacity as actors in a camp society where they were typically given no choice. The decision to use their sexuality to survive, however, also had significant psychological consequences, as well as a profound effect on their post-war sexuality. Those who made the decision to survive in the *Puffkommando* faced disapproval from other inmates, both during wartime and after, who believed that the choice to collaborate with Nazis and survive was worse than the decision to refrain and die. To them, these volunteers were no longer victims, and many were vocally scorned by other female inmates

¹¹⁰ Aussage Dubitzki quoted in Sommer, *Das KZ Bordell*, 101.

¹¹¹ Christa Paul, *Zwangsprostitution: Staatlich Errichtete Bordelle Im Nationalsozialismus*, 1. Aufl, Reihe Deutsche Vergangenheit, Bd. 115 (Berlin: Edition Hentrich, 1994), 36.

¹¹²“*Wer will nach Auschwitz, in die Stadt, in Männerlager, gehen? Dort gibt es leichte Arbeit, Zivilkleider, und gutes Essen,*” in Krystina Zywulska: *Wo vorher Birken waren. Überlebensbericht einer Jungen Frau aus Auschwitz-Birkenau*. Darmstadt 1980, 58f, quoted in Sommer, *Das KZ-Bordell*, 100.

after volunteering.¹¹³ According to Birkenau survivor Liana Millu, women were upset because honorable women would die and dishonorable women would be freed.¹¹⁴ One woman, Lotti, was proclaimed dead by her sister after joining the brothel commando. Other women who knew of Lotti's decision spoke of her spitefully, "Her sister may go up in smoke, but whores have all the luck."¹¹⁵

To ensure survival in the camp, some amount of collaboration was required because camp society was hierarchical. The women who knew this and used this strategy to survive had better chances of living, though they faced the disdain of others. Lotti understood that her decision came from accepting the terrible reality, whereas her sister was not so pragmatic. It is clear that Lotti's decision to join the *Puffkommando* was a survival strategy. It is equally clear that many women were in denial of their situation, those women who accepted the reality were better able to make strategic decisions aimed at survival. Some volunteers realized that volunteering for the *Puffkommando* was not only a means to ensure life, but also the only way to endure in which others were not hurt. By choosing to work in the brothels, a female inmate hurt no one but herself in her quest to survive.¹¹⁶

Though there was more emotional intimacy between women outside of camp brothels, female inmates often turned against one another when goods were at stake. Women often stole clothes and food from each other. Olga Lengyel reports that honest mothers often became remorseless thieves.¹¹⁷ Lotti, who understood the reality of camp survival, smuggled goods, such as cigarettes, out of the brothel for her sister even though her sister was so ashamed of her

¹¹³ Anderson Hughes, "Forced Prostitution: The Competing and Contested Uses of the Concentration Camp Brothel," 181, 183.

¹¹⁴ Liana. Millu, *Smoke over Birkenau* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991), 182.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 153.

¹¹⁶ Anderson Hughes, "Forced Prostitution," 186.

¹¹⁷ Olga Lengyel, *Five Chimneys : the Story of Auschwitz*, 45.

that she did not accept them.¹¹⁸ Though volunteering for the *Puffkommando* was a significant decision considering a prisoner's pre-war socialization, survival was very limited for those who attempted to maintain all pre-imprisonment values. Deciding to volunteer for brothel work shows sexual adaptability that was beneficial in the oppressive camp environment. No survival strategy employed within the camp was without consequences.

During the early phase of recruitment in 1943, women were given a promise of release after six months of work as a "prostitute". This guarantee was never fulfilled. Himmler eventually intervened and ordered that SS recruiters rescind this false contract.¹¹⁹ Nevertheless, those to whom this promise was offered cited it as the major inducement for volunteering. Survivor Hanka Houskova said that the motivation for many of the women in the *Strafblock*, or punishment block, to volunteer was the assurance of freedom.¹²⁰ Considering this obvious bribe, one can classify the method of recruitment not as voluntary but coercive. While some women did volunteer without this inducement because they would be spending the duration of their imprisonment in better conditions, the ploy of freedom was an appealing ruse.

After volunteering, women were put through another selection in which they were examined for appearance, some Nazis even noting that the food would help their bodies.¹²¹ Though the SS went to great lengths to suppress the femininity of female inmates, selection for a *Puffkommando* depended on the physical and sexual appeal of the prisoner. Therefore, if a woman could retain her femininity in spite of the Nazi efforts at dehumanization, she had a better chance of survival by working in the Bordell. Women who exhibited physical ailments, such as

¹¹⁸ Millu, *Smoke over Birkenau*, 153.

¹¹⁹ Sommer, *Das KZ-Bordell*, 89.

¹²⁰ Christa Paul. *Zwangsprostitution: Staatlich Errichtete Bordelle Im Nationalsozialismus*. 1. Aufl. Reihe Deutsche Vergangenheit, Bd. 115. (Berlin: Edition Hentrich, 1994), 39.

¹²¹ Sommer, *Das KZ-Bordell*, 93.

small pimples or boils, were not selected for work in a *Puffkommando*. One brothel worker, Brunhilde, had her pimples cleared before being transported to the men's camp.¹²² In addition to recruiting *Reichsdeutsche* women who were already experienced prostitutes, the SS limited recruit age to 25.¹²³ This requirement almost surely was intended to satisfy desires of physical attractiveness most often associated with younger women. Though selecting women for men who were imprisoned, the SS took great pains to select desirable women. Motivating prisoner labor was of great importance to the SS, and therefore they took selections very seriously.

The volunteer method of recruitment was used throughout the war in the extermination camp of Birkenau, where the chances of survival were very slim.¹²⁴ In Ravensbrück, the SS eventually abandoned the voluntary recruitment method and began making selections. Other inmates began to take notice that the women who had been sent back from camp brothels had contracted venereal diseases and were physically and emotionally worn out, thus affecting the way Ravensbrück inmates viewed *Bordell* work.¹²⁵ While it is true that women who volunteered risked being sent back to Ravensbrück for having contracted an STD, the rumored negative affects of the work allowed other female inmates to overlook the positive survival aspects of the *Puffkommando*. Women who were selected by the SS had the same chance of survival as those who volunteered, but had this chance forced on them instead of deciding their own fate. While not physically important, the decision could play a significant role in the amount of guilt a woman experienced.

Forced prostitution and “voluntary” prostitution could have very different effects on a woman's post-liberation life and sexuality. No matter whether it was forced or voluntary, the

¹²² Ibid., 104,127.

¹²³ Ibid., 94.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 108.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 99.

reaction from other female prisoners seems the same one of opposition. Little was known about the realities of life in the *Bordell*. Though some women knew the brothels existed, there were common misconceptions. Often women were only informed that they had been chosen for a *Sonderkommando* or “special unit” and not told the nature of their work. Historian Christa Paul interviewed “Frau B” who says that her number was chosen in 1945 and she was assigned to a *Sonderkommando* but had no idea that it was a brothel.¹²⁶ Another interviewee, “Frau W”, was selected from the Ravensbrück punishment block in 1943. She was worried that she was being assigned to a *Bordell* for the SS or Yugoslavian workers, but was not aware of prisoner brothels. “Frau W” and the women with her were not informed that they were chosen to work in a *Puffkommando* until they arrived in the brothel barrack and were informed by an SS woman.¹²⁷

SS selection methods were not regulated, and therefore depended on the SS officer making the selection. Some women, like “Frau W”, were selected from the same unhygienic locations within the camp as volunteers had come from. This could have lessened the degree of guilt an SS official felt in making selections. Other selections were more underhanded. A female SS guard in Birkenau, Traudi Schneider, selected her former comrade, who had committed treason and become imprisoned in Birkenau, for the *Sonderkommando* because the woman had spit in her face.¹²⁸ Overt selections also took place as SS officers walked through rows of female inmates and selected women from the line.¹²⁹ The care with which selections and recruitment were handled deteriorated as the years waned and the SS became less concerned with mitigating their own guilt.

¹²⁶ Paul, *Zwangsprostitution*, 45.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 49.

¹²⁸ Anderson Hughes, “Forced Prostitution: The Competing and Contested Uses of the Concentration Camp Brothel,” 111.

¹²⁹ Robert Sommer, “Sexual Exploitation of Women in Nazi Concentration Camp Brothels” in Hedgepeth and Saidel, *Sexual Violence Against Jewish Women During the Holocaust*, 49.

After selection, either from voluntary recruitment or SS selection, women were given time and resources to regain their feminine appearance before being sent to work. As mentioned above, the dehumanization methods perpetrated by Nazis left men and women essentially genderless. In order to be selected for the *Puffkommando*, a woman had to retain some femininity, but even this was not enough for immediate initiation into brothel work. Selected women were exempt from roll call, and were given better food to make their figures healthy.¹³⁰ They were encouraged to sit in the sun to refresh their complexion.¹³¹ However, by the time of their initiation to *Bordell* work, many women had still not regained their pre-imprisonment feminine identity.

It may be at this point that some women were sterilized, though survivor testimony on this aspect of *Puffkommando* preparation is lacking. Robert Sommer asserts that the women recruited for the Auschwitz Stammlager brothel from Birkenau were first put into quarantine where they were probably sterilized.¹³² There is also a description of forced sterilization in preparation for *Bordell* work in the fictional work by Ka-tzetnik, *House of Dolls*.¹³³ Though the author tells the story of his sister and probably did not fully understand (or honestly describe) her experiences, it is not unlikely that the SS employed this method to ensure that the *Sonderkommando* women did not become pregnant. Sterilization was not rare in concentration camps: many Nazi doctors subjected imprisoned men and women to sterilization experiments.¹³⁴ However, sterilization as contraception was often unnecessary because most women experienced

¹³⁰ Sommer, *Das KZ-Bordell*, 94–95.

¹³¹ Anderson Hughes, “Forced Prostitution: The Competing and Contested Uses of the Concentration Camp Brothel,” 129.

¹³² Sommer, *Das KZ-Bordell*, 132.

¹³³ Ka-tzetnik 135633, *House of Dolls* (New York: Simon and Schuster, Inc, 1955), 168–170.

¹³⁴ Examples of these experiment are explained in Lengyel, *Five Chimneys : the Story of Auschwitz*, 177–180.

amenorrhea after arriving in the camp. Though the SS gave sex laborers time to recuperate before beginning their work, their periods and thus their ability to reproduce may not have returned even after this time.¹³⁵ Yet, this could prove helpful for the women as a type of involuntary contraceptive method. The women who became pregnant were in greater danger of losing the survival chance they had been given. There was no comprehensive policy for sex laborers who became pregnant. Most were given an abortion and returned to the brothel or to Ravensbrück.¹³⁶ In one case, a *Puffkommando* woman attempted to hide her pregnancy from the Lagerführer and he was so infuriated that she was later executed.¹³⁷ Pregnancy and venereal disease were a known consequence of this line of work, and the SS took this into consideration.

Covert Relationships between Brothel Women and their Patrons

The conditions in the brothel were vastly superior to those in either the Ravensbrück or Birkenau camps. The *Bordell* barrack in Neuengamme, where some recruits from Ravensbrück were sent to work, was equipped with modern sinks and bidets with warm water; for the first time since entering the camp, women had the ability to wash. In addition, they received ample food from the SS kitchen.¹³⁸ One woman, Eugenie, even gained weight during her work in the *Puffkommando*.¹³⁹ However, there were some who were unhappy with *Bordell* conditions.

Karola Groß said the Sachsenhausen brothel was like a “basement mortuary” and she preferred

¹³⁵ Anderson Hughes, “Forced Prostitution: The Competing and Contested Uses of the Concentration Camp Brothel,” 162.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, 163.

¹³⁷ Sommer, *Das KZ-Bordell*, 154.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 105, 147, 150.

¹³⁹ Anderson Hughes, “Forced Prostitution: The Competing and Contested Uses of the Concentration Camp Brothel,” 141.

the conditions at Ravensbrück.¹⁴⁰ Though women were allowed to wear civilian clothes and read books from the camp library, they waited in terror each day for the two hours in which they were continuously sexually exploited.¹⁴¹

Many historians choose the analogy of an assembly line to convey the impersonal and robotic experiences of both the *Puffkommando* women and their male visitors. Like all other parts of camp life, every aspect of a man's visit to the prisoner brothel was regulated and observed. Only Aryan prisoners were allowed to visit a prisoner *Bordell* in order to uphold Nazi race defilement laws; no Jewish or Russian prisoners were allowed this privilege. Ethnic segregation was strictly enforced within the brothel; therefore a German prisoner could only be served by a German woman.¹⁴² Though camp society was vastly different than that in the Nazi empire, race defilement laws still applied to *Reichsdeutsche* in all formal camp settings.

Physical strength was necessary for visiting the camp brothel; therefore, only thirty-three percent of the population of Auschwitz Stammlager ever used the *Bordell* institution. In perspective, this was an extremely small number of prisoners; thirty-three percent of the camp included about one hundred men.¹⁴³ Some men believed that having sex with a prisoner in the brothel would only make them an accomplice to the sexual exploitation of the women. In other words, they would become rapists, and no better than the Nazi perpetrators.¹⁴⁴ Just as many women refused to volunteer for the *Puffkommando* for ethical reasons, men also refused to visit for ethical reasons. Still, access to the *Bordell* was considered by many to be a privilege;

¹⁴⁰ Sommer, *Das KZ-Bordell*, 155.

¹⁴¹ Robert Sommer, "Sexual Exploitation of Women in Nazi Concentration Camp Brothels" in Hedgepeth and Sidel, *Sexual Violence Against Jewish Women During the Holocaust*, 50.

¹⁴² Sommer, *Das KZ-Bordell*, 113.

¹⁴³ Robert Sommer, "Camp Brothels" in Herzog, *Brutality and Desire: War and Sexuality in Europe's Twentieth Century*, 182-183.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid*, 186.

therefore, men needed a *Bordellschein* (brothel pass) before they could even apply for entrance to the brothel. After receiving permission, they were usually called to the *Bordell* that afternoon or the next day. Before seeing the woman, the prisoner would be checked by a doctor for venereal diseases and then given a specific room number to enter. Visitors were forced to remove their shoes and each visitor was given between ten to twenty minutes strictly in missionary position. The SS regulated the entire process through spyholes in each brothel room door that were often also used for their own voyeurism.¹⁴⁵ The SS controlled who used the *Bordell*, when they visited, and to which woman they were assigned.

Julia Roos argues that, “the concentration camp brothels came closest to representing a laboratory where human sexuality was transformed into a mere animal function devoid of spontaneity, individuality, and eroticism.”¹⁴⁶ While “volunteering” for a *Puffkommando* was one survival strategy employed by women, there was also a strategy used within the brothel to make their time there more bearable. The work in the *Puffkommando* supplied female prisoners with food and additional physical survival necessities, but relationships forged within the *Bordell* setting with male visitors afforded them emotional stability and a certain amount of protection. As the hierarchy of needs dictates, when all physiological needs are met, one looks for emotional intimacy and protection.¹⁴⁷ Though difficult in the regulated setting, the SS gave prisoners multiple opportunities to form intimate relationships.

Corruption of the SS was rampant throughout the camp and the camp brothel was no exception. This was especially true after December 1943 when female prisoner cashiers (*Puffmutter*) replaced SS overseers, which allowed for less SS observation but more trouble with

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 113,177.

¹⁴⁶ Roos, “Backlash against Prostitutes’ Rights: Origins and Dynamics of Nazi Prostitution Policies,” 94.

¹⁴⁷ Maslow, “A Theory of Human Motivation.”

exploitation of the women.¹⁴⁸ This exploitation could be beneficial to some women while harming others. Not only did the women have the chance to experience emotional intimacy, but if a woman developed a close relationship with one man, she might have fewer men to serve.¹⁴⁹ “Frau B” claims that she was lucky because she maintained a friendship with the *Lagerälteste*, who did not assign many men to her.¹⁵⁰ Under some circumstances, men could also request a specific woman to visit. During a period of eight days, one *Sonderkommando* woman was forced to serve twelve men in one day, whereas another woman only had one man.¹⁵¹ To compensate for one woman serving fewer men, other women had to serve more than the usual number. In this way, relationships with male visitors did not foster solidarity between women in the brothel.

Nevertheless, the decline of SS oversight with the installment of the *Puffmutter* gave women the opportunity to nurture relationships. For example, if it was a slow day in the brothel, the fifteen-minute time limit was usually extended, giving men and women more time for intimacy. In another instance, a male visitor created a friendship with a *Puffkommando* woman, and the visitor’s wife would send her husband money to pay for a *Bordellschein*.¹⁵² Sexual relations as well as emotional intimacy proved to male visitors their own humanity. In return, many men would give gifts to women to prove their masculinity.¹⁵³ Magdalena Walter says that the perks given to her by two political prisoners was her salvation.¹⁵⁴ Male brothel visitors became so attached to the women who served them that they would sometimes bribe other men

¹⁴⁸ Sommer, *Das KZ-Bordell*, 126.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 235.

¹⁵⁰ Paul, *Zwangsprostitution*, 46.

¹⁵¹ Anderson Hughes, “Forced Prostitution: The Competing and Contested Uses of the Concentration Camp Brothel,” 150.

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 221.

¹⁵³ *Ibid.*, 224.

¹⁵⁴ Sommer, *Das KZ-Bordell*, 219.

not to have sex with that particular woman. The SS would attempt to stop this personal attachment by continually changing the rooms in which women worked.¹⁵⁵ They also walked through the *Sonderbau* (brothel barrack) at night to make sure that no male prisoner had snuck in to see his lover.¹⁵⁶

Even with these measures by the SS, it was not impossible for the men to see specific women, the assurance of which would probably include a bribe to the SS or *Puffmutter*. The SS were so threatened by these relationships that they began exchanging the women in the *Bordell* between other camp brothels or returning them to Ravensbrück.¹⁵⁷ Records showing multiple recruiting phases for women in the Auschwitz Stammlager *Puffkommando* further corroborate the problem of intimacy in the prisoner brothel. The SS selected women for this *Sonderkommando* in November/December 1943, March/April 1944, and June 1944. The SS also transferred twelve more women to the brothel in January 1945, shortly before the evacuation of the camp.¹⁵⁸ Evidently, the relationships between prisoners and women in the *Puffkommando* must have become a major problem in the men's camp. As a whole, men in the camp gave what protection they could to the women in the brothels. While fellow female prisoners often disapproved of the *Puffkommando*, the men in the camps where they worked were more accepting. Most of the prisoner brothels were located in strictly male camps, so the *Sonderkommando* was the only group of women. Men found someone to protect after they lost other dependents in their lives. The force of these feelings was exemplified when the concentration camp Mittelbau-Dora was about to be bombed—the prisoners revolted, freed the

¹⁵⁵ Robert Sommer, "Sexual Exploitation of Women in Nazi Concentration Camp Brothels" in Hedgepeth and Sidel, *Sexual Violence Against Jewish Women During the Holocaust*, 51.

¹⁵⁶ Sommer, *Das KZ-Bordell*, 148.

¹⁵⁷ Robert Sommer, "Sexual Exploitation of Women in Nazi Concentration Camp Brothels" in Hedgepeth and Sidel, *Sexual Violence Against Jewish Women During the Holocaust*, 51.

¹⁵⁸ Sommer, *Das KZ-Bordell*, 102.

Bordell women from their barrack, and cooked for them. Linda Bachmann, former brothel worker, surmises that the men were attempting to protect them from the SS.¹⁵⁹

Women and men's thoughts about how the SS viewed *Puffkommando* women differed. Oftentimes because women could benefit from a connection (even a friendship) with an SS man, they did not see the association as harmful. Former brothel workers Karola Groß and Angelika Leuchter testified after the war that the SS were decent and even friendly.¹⁶⁰ Some women even had relationships with SS members from within the confines of the heavily-regulated *Bordell*. Believing the importance of Nazi race-defilement laws, former brothel worker Linda Bachmann says that the SS did not see the *Sonderkommando* women as sexual beings.¹⁶¹ This may be true for the 'upstanding' SS officers who lived by the Nazi racial ideal; however, there were also many instances in which SS men defied contamination laws and engaged in sexual relationships with women in the prisoner *Bordell*. After all, brothel regulations forced the SS to watch the sexual exploitation from holes in the door, so it is not surprising that some became more than objective observers. Magdalena Walter received coffee, cigarettes, a novel, and even another mattress from an SS man.¹⁶² Despite Nazi racial segregation laws and the presence of nearby brothels for SS men, SS working in the camps often had orgies in the camp's prisoner *Bordell* or frequented the brothel when they were drunk to take part or observe.¹⁶³ Just as some prisoners would attach themselves to a certain woman, so would the SS. However, because of the stark power imbalance between an SS and a prisoner, these were not mutually beneficial and therefore

¹⁵⁹ Ibid., 160.

¹⁶⁰ Ibid., 223.

¹⁶¹ Ibid., 222.

¹⁶² Ibid.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

cannot be categorized as rational relationships. Only relations in which there is a balance of power can be truly consensual, and encounters between an SS officer and a prisoner were not so.

Connections, with male prisoners or SS officials, were instrumental in the duration of a brothel worker's camp existence. Though some women were promised freedom from the entire camp system after six months of service, according to former prisoners, most were returned to Ravensbrück after only a few months.¹⁶⁴ While some were returned for venereal disease or pregnancy, others were returned after new recruits entered the *Bordell*. After returning to camp life, the survival of a woman, which had once been assured, was again uncertain. Sometimes, women who had maintained a high position in the prisoner hierarchy before their time in the *Puffkommando* could return to the position with a job of the same rank. Minna Möller worked as a barracks orderly, a good assignment, before being transferred to the Sachsenhausen brothel, and once she returned to Ravensbrück was given a position in the camp police force.¹⁶⁵ According to other prisoners, camp officials treated the camp police force favorably, giving them ample food and water.¹⁶⁶ Though survival chances in the *Bordell* were high, survival rate fell for those transferred out of the *Sonderkommando*. Some unfortunate women died performing manual labor in external commandos after they were relocated out of the brothel. Though their strength was usually greater than others because of the increased rations and clean conditions they had experienced within the *Bordell*, it was often not enough to sustain them. In some cases, it was the relationships a woman maintained in the brothel that helped her survive once she returned to the camp. Male lovers in a high rank within the camp could organize for a woman to

¹⁶⁴ Paul, *Zwangsprostitution*, 41.

¹⁶⁵ Sommer, *Das KZ-Bordell*, 228.

¹⁶⁶ Aussage Helen Ernst, verfasst am 22. Mai 1945 (Kopie der Abschrift)
Archiv der Mahn- und Gedenkstätte Ravensbrück, Slg. Bd. 40/931

be assigned to a good work commando. Robert Sommer asserts that this “social capital” accumulated in the *Puffkommando* was useful outside of the brothel as well.¹⁶⁷

Conclusion

The prisoner *Bordell* is distinct in that it was a formal institution, run by SS officials, with the aim of promoting and organizing sexual activity between prisoners. Though the brothel’s intended function was to reward prisoners for labor and thereby increase prisoner productivity, Himmler also used the *Bordell* for sexual persecution of homosexuals and distraction of political prisoners. For this reason, it was the only location within the camp that both rewarded and punished prisoners with sex.

Because the brothel was an institution created and overseen by SS officials, it would seem that the *Bordell* completely took away a prisoner’s control over his or her sexuality. However, we have seen the way in which prisoners exhibited small degrees of autonomy from within the walls of the *Sonderbau*. Not only was work in or patronage of the brothel often (though not always) voluntary, but prisoners experienced a certain amount of autonomy even in regulated *Bordell* operations. Survivors attest to this phenomenon when describing extra-curricular relationships maintained by *Puffkommando* women and patrons. This autonomy does not detract from the oppression experienced by both parties, which was often extreme. The risks of maintaining these relationships were great; however, the intimacy experienced seems to have had a significant affect on a prisoner’s physical and emotional survival.

¹⁶⁷ Sommer, *Das KZ-Bordell*, 228.

Chapter Three

Informal Sexual Encounters

Though the brothel was the only formal institution that sponsored sex for prisoners, prisoner sexual activity in the camp was not limited to this arena. As mentioned above, sexual desire existed in prisoners, especially those of high rank in the prisoner hierarchy, despite the Nazis' best efforts to diminish this human craving. This chapter examines to what extent sexual activity was experienced in the camp. As previously discussed, the camps were gender-segregated, and this was a significant factor in a prisoner's decision to engage in sexual activity as well as their choice of partner. Whether heterosexual or homosexual, informal sexual encounters were motivated by and fulfilled the same desires as those of the formal institution of the camp brothels.

These relationships were mutually beneficial and oftentimes occurred as an exchange of sex for food. Historian Anna Hájková presents a case for the terminology of these relations. She explains that prostitution is an exchange of coitus for food, which does not include long-term dependency. Camp relationships in which sex was repeatedly exchanged for goods can technically be termed prostitution; however, historians should refrain from using this term for practical reasons. Hájková instead describes this phenomenon as “instrumental sex” or “sexual barter.”¹⁶⁸ As will be discussed later, the terminology is very important, especially for survivors who have been stigmatized as prostitutes.

Sexual barter was used when a high-ranking prisoner desired sex and a low-ranking prisoner received food or goods in exchange. This system of trade was made possible by the

¹⁶⁸ Anna Hájková, “Sexual Barter in Times of Genocide: Negotiating the Sexual Economy of the Theresienstadt Ghetto,” 505.

social stratification of the camp. While a high-ranking prisoner with commodities could extend an offer to their choice of partner, the participant selling sex for goods usually had no choice in their partner. Often, there was such desperation that it only mattered what goods they could receive in exchange. In barter relationships such as these, the race, ethnicity, political affiliation, sexual preference, and religion of a prisoner that were so important in Nazi persecution became insignificant. Sex became a commodity just as useful as money. All cash had been taken from prisoners before or during their registration; even so, money would have no value in the camp environment. Though sexuality in the camp differed, the logistics of sexual barter were largely related in cases of homosexuality and heterosexuality. Gender segregation merely made homosexual barter more manageable.

When discussing intimacy, it is important to understand the power dynamics at play in these relationships. Not only was there a hierarchy of violence among the Nazis who controlled and oversaw camp activity, but also a leadership structure among the inmates. These hierarchies made barter relationships possible, and also rendered the dynamics of those relationships constantly shaped by power. Thus, some prisoners had more opportunity, while others were less fortunate. The SS hierarchy and the prisoner hierarchy cannot be logically compared, but this hierarchy within a hierarchy created a complex social structure that affected prisoner relationships.

Heterosexual Relationships

Nazi-regulated gender divisions created an increase in homosexual encounters and a paucity of heterosexual liaisons within the camp. Because meetings between men and women were harder to facilitate, most heterosexual exploits had to have been highly motivated and must

have offered specific advantages for each participant. While homosexual encounters could be motivated by a basic human desire for intimacy, informal heterosexual exploits almost always occurred for want of food or sex. Thus, most intimate heterosexual encounters were sexual barter relationships.

One female survivor explains that at one time, the commander of the small camp where she was imprisoned (near Lublin and Maidanek) opened the gates between the men's and women's camp. She remembers that the first thing the men wanted was sex, running into the camp like wild animals. This was one of her worst memories of her entire Holocaust experience.¹⁶⁹ Her experience shows the erratic behavior that resulted when genders were once again able to associate with each other after adapting to a single gender environment. By the final months of 1944, sex segregation in camps broke down because death marches and evacuations caused prisoners of both sexes to be temporarily put in one place.¹⁷⁰ During this time, heterosexual relations would likely have been more common, or at least easier than they had been in prior years.

In the camps, at least those in the east, lovers were referred to with Polish terminology. “*Kochana*”, “*kochany*”, and “*kochanita*” all refer to the lover in sexual barter relationships. Translated literally, they mean “darling” or “dear.” In some accounts, the lovers are called “*kuzyn*” (male) or “*kuznyka*” (female) which translate to “cousin.” Through the common use of these terms in survivor literature, it is clear that these relations were widespread throughout the camp. The slang terms also appear in jingles sang by prisoners inside the camp. These were based on popular Polish and Yiddish folksongs and melodies but transformed in the camp to

¹⁶⁹ Ringelheim, “Women and the Holocaust: A Reconsideration of Research,” 745.

¹⁷⁰ Sybil Milton, “Women and the Holocaust: The Case of German and German-Jewish Women” in Bridenthal, Grossmann, and Kaplan, *When Biology Became Destiny*, 310.

describe the “cousin” relationship. One such song describes that sex was most often used to acquire food:

For soup, for soup
For a piece of bread
Girls will spread their...
Just between you and me,
They’ll do it even
When there’s no need.¹⁷¹

Yet another folk song describes the power that men held in the relationship:

Come, I have a secret to tell
The “cousin” here don’t go so well!
They dance on two fronts in their life
They have a “cousin” and a wife!¹⁷²

Male survivor, Tadeusz Borowski explains that “Since time began, never has there been such an easy market for female flesh.”¹⁷³ These sexual encounters were perhaps so prevalent because they not only fulfilled a physical need but also a physical desire, depending on the social rank of the prisoner. Sexual barter encounters were mutually beneficial, and many sought them out.

We could say that heterosexual barter occurred in two forms: rational relationships and instrumental sex. Rational relationships were long-term sexual relationships that involved an ongoing understanding between two prisoners; one prisoner would provide the other with food and security in exchange for sex. Anna Hájková claims that rational relationships combined social, sexual, and romantic desires.¹⁷⁴ However, it is important to note that many developed rational relationships as a survival strategy, to meet emotional needs. Though long term, the

¹⁷¹ Felicja Karay “Women in Forced-Labor Camps” in Dalia Ofer and Lenore J. Weitzman, eds., *Women in the Holocaust*, 296.

¹⁷² *Ibid.*, 297.

¹⁷³ Tadeusz Borowski, *This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen/ Introduction by Jan Kott ; Introduction Translated by Michael Kandel*. Translated by Barbara Vedder. Penguin Twentieth-Century Classics (New York : Penguin Books, c1976., 1976), 93.

¹⁷⁴ Hájková, “Sexual Barter in Times of Genocide: Negotiating the Sexual Economy of the Theresienstadt Ghetto,” 505–506.

relationship was motivated by what one could do for the other. There were also instances in which sex was exchanged for a certain food or commodity without a long-term relationship between the prisoners involved. Hájková refers to this as instrumental sex. It was a periodic or one-time occurrence in which there was no affection or trust.¹⁷⁵ These two classifications of sexual barter relationships resulted from different logic, but both were used as survival strategies by the lower-ranking prisoner who, in heterosexual relationships, was most often a woman.

The participants in heterosexual interactions were most often a male prisoner in a high level of camp society and a female prisoner of lower rank. Naturally, there were some exceptions. Gisella Perl describes some women who worked near the crematories and had the ability to “organize” extra goods, meaning they had the ability to steal or acquire commodities from the Nazis or the camp itself and not from other prisoners. They then sold them on the black market or if the buyers were men, for “love.”¹⁷⁶ However, because the camp aristocracy was mainly made up of men, they were better able to solicit sexual favors. Some male prisoners were given the job of laborers in the women’s camp and these were the men who were able to maintain contact with women. For example, sinks were being installed in the women’s camp of Birkenau and the construction workers were mostly “organizers” (men with commodities) who would take the opportunity to visit a lover.¹⁷⁷ “Organizers” used connections in the camp to make heterosexual liaisons for themselves possible.

Gisella Perl describes the male prisoners who sought out sexual encounters as “trusted old prisoners who knew everything there was to know about camp life, had connections in the crematories and were masters at ‘organizing.’ Their pockets made them the Don Juans of Camp

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Perl, *I Was a Doctor in Auschwitz.*, 74–75.

¹⁷⁷ Millu, *Smoke over Birkenau*, 195.

C.”¹⁷⁸ Their characterization as “Don Juans” alludes to the power dynamic of these relationships. Obviously, the men were dominant. Some of the men boasted of their conquests to their comrades.¹⁷⁹ Thus, just as a visit to the camp brothel marked male prisoners as camp aristocrats, informal sexual liaisons also became a sign of prominence among men.

Because male “organizers” often worked in the women’s camp and provided sought-after commodities, they had their pick of many women who could benefit from their offerings. Sexual solicitation was almost entirely dependent on a woman’s physical appearance. As mentioned above, sexual appearance such as breasts was a sign of physical stamina. When men propositioned a woman for sex in exchange for goods, it was most often the woman who showed the most physical signs of health and therefore femininity. Men, even camp prisoners, were repelled by bony bodies and desired the fullest figure.¹⁸⁰ Therefore, women who retained some feminine appearance had much better survival chances. Choice of partner depended on ability to pay.¹⁸¹ Men paid with goods and women paid with their sexuality; their femininity gave them an advantage over their competitors.

As many of the male work-details in the women’s camp worked in the latrine, it became the location of the majority of heterosexual camp activity. The latrine was an ideal location for underhanded dealings because here the prisoners were afforded a small amount of privacy. No doubt the SS officials were not eager to enter the prisoner latrine. Gisella Perl describes it as the center of social activities, such as the black market. However, it was also a “love-nest.”¹⁸² The men who worked in construction in the women’s camp would go there during the hour they were

¹⁷⁸ Perl, *I Was a Doctor in Auschwitz.*, 78–79.

¹⁷⁹ Sommer, *Das KZ-Bordell*, 199.

¹⁸⁰ Lengyel, *Five Chimneys : The Story of Auschwitz*, 183.

¹⁸¹ Pawełczyńska, *Values and Violence in Auschwitz : A Sociological Analysis*, 99.

¹⁸² Perl, *I Was a Doctor in Auschwitz.*, 76.

allowed rest to meet their women. Some men were posted at the entrance to watch for the SS, because it was forbidden for women and men to be in the same place. Olga Lengyel describes: “The place was crowded. Men and women huddled together in every corner of the room. Couples pressed against one another, talking. Others sat against the walls in close embrace. A few were engaged in black market transactions.”¹⁸³ Even when men entered the women’s camp, strict SS oversight could be avoided and clandestine encounters protected.

In most cases of heterosexual action, it was the elite male prisoner who propositioned the female with “gifts”, but often, the female was not initially aware of the implications of accepting the gift. Gisella Perl once asked a Polish man working in the women’s camp latrine for a length of string in exchange for her bread ration. She recalls the scene:

He looked me over from head to foot, carefully, then grabbed me by the shoulder and hissed in my ear: ‘I don’t want your bread... You can keep your bread... I will give you a piece of string but first I want you... you...’ For a second I didn’t understand what he meant... ‘Hurry up... hurry up’ he said hoarsely. His hand, filthy with the human excrement he was working in, reached out for my womanhood, rudely, insistently.¹⁸⁴

Thus many women who expected civilized transactions suffered rude awakenings.

In a similar situation, Olga Lengyel met a man, Tadek, while he was repairing the beds in her barrack. The two became friends; and for a while they merely talked while he was working. She says, “His was the only human-sounding voice I had heard in the camp.” Then Tadek gave her a potato and a shawl, explaining that he would share his food with her every day and perhaps also “organize” some clothes, too, before he began fondling her. Lengyel was appalled and remembers, “I wanted to be friends with the human being in him, not with his lust. I learned

¹⁸³ Lengyel, *Five Chimneys: The Story of Auschwitz*, 51.

¹⁸⁴ Perl, *I Was a Doctor in Auschwitz.*, 56–57.

afterwards that his was the finest style of love-making in Auschwitz. The ordinary approach was much more crude and to the point.”¹⁸⁵

She refused his advances and he said he would wait, “In the meantime,” he insisted, “we can talk but you get no food! I haven’t much, and with the little I do have, I must get my women. In this misery and excitement we need them more than in normal life.” Every day he offered food to her but even as she grew thin and fainted frequently, she did not give in.¹⁸⁶ As she had not yet fully adapted to camp life, human interaction became more important to her than her own physical survival. The last time that Tadek saw Lengyel, he explained how shameful he was about who he had become in the camp: “You cannot hate me any more than I hate and abominate myself.”¹⁸⁷ Thus even those who adapted to camp realities were not free from the guilt that it produced.

While Gisella Perl did not adapt to the changed sexual values of camp life, many other women chose to forgo pre-war ideals of sex in order to increase their chances at survival. Two women who would sneak away with prominent male prisoners in a neighboring commando would come back with vast amounts of food. Proving the rarity and significance of such gifts, one of their comrades describes the payment quite sumptuously: “bowls heaped with Polish-style mashed potatoes, dripping with margarine and smelling of onions.”¹⁸⁸ Those in camps, especially in Auschwitz and Birkenau, referred to these women as “prostitutes.” Though sexual barter shows women’s agency, it also highlights their dependence on men.¹⁸⁹ Olga Lengyel asserts that “prostitution” was an ordinary phenomenon, but the responsibility rested with the

¹⁸⁵ Lengyel, *Five Chimneys: The Story of Auschwitz*, 49–50.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 50.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 125.

¹⁸⁸ Millu, *Smoke over Birkenau*, 180.

¹⁸⁹ Hájková, “Sexual Barter in Times of Genocide: Negotiating the Sexual Economy of the Theresienstadt Ghetto,” 523.

camp administration—condemning the women would be heartless.¹⁹⁰ For those who took part in “prostitution”, many believed it was their best chance at survival.

From Liana Millu’s account, we can see details of a rational relationship between her friend Lili and a “*kochany*.” When Liana first sees Lili in the camp, she is already in this rational relationship. Liana describes Lili in more human ways than she describes the other prisoners, possibly because her physical appearance is aided by the gifts of her lover: her first observation is that Lili is “well groomed.”¹⁹¹ Women involved in long-term barter relationships were often very well off; they could receive almost anything from their lovers. These women obtained clothes, such as new pairs of stockings, not just food.¹⁹² Though both rational relationships and instrumental sex provided necessities, a long-term rational relationship created more security for the lower-ranking prisoner and therefore was a more beneficial strategy for survival when it could be attained.

Though rational relationships afforded prisoners security, individuals were also forced to deal with the possessive or jealous nature of their lovers, which could have detrimental consequences for themselves or others. Both Lili and Liana were part of an outside work detail that was overseen by a female *Kapo*, Mia. Mia also had a “*kochany*”, who was a male *Kapo*. The relationship between the two *Kapos* had a great effect on the work detail. When the male *Kapo* passed with his work detail, the two would go into a small shack and essentially “play house”, eating the treats that he brought her and being intimate. This would give prisoners under their care a small respite from observation. However, if the male *Kapo* was absent or late, Mia became violent and often took out this aggression on the members of her commando. Lili bore

¹⁹⁰ Lengyel, *Five Chimneys : The Story of Auschwitz*, 182.

¹⁹¹ Millu, *Smoke over Birkenau*, 16,20.

¹⁹² Sommer, *Das KZ-Bordell*, 199.

the brunt of these attacks because the male *Kapo* took special interest in her. Once when the male *Kapo* drunkenly kissed Lili and asked her to be his “*kochany*”, Mia attacked Lili in retribution.¹⁹³ Obviously, though these encounters were informal and included a form of prostitution, there was also a certain degree of possession involved. The SS, though the most powerful, were also possessive of their lovers. One officer would set dogs on anyone he caught with his “*kochany*.”¹⁹⁴ It is important to note that these are not emotional relationships with a sexual component because the relationship was initiated as a trade of commodities and not motivated by a need for emotional stability. However, the relationships could become controlling if one of the participants experienced jealousy.

Prisoners, male and female, who led relatively normal pre-imprisonment lives naturally felt a certain amount of shame if they decided to become camp “prostitutes.” Sybil Milton argues that traditional apprehensions and guilt about sex did not apply to the camps because of the total terror experienced.¹⁹⁵ However, survivor testimony shows that this is not the case. Gisella Perl openly refers to these relationships as prostitution, though she excused the women involved when she saw that it saved their lives.

At first I was deeply shocked at these practices. My pride, my integrity as a woman revolted against the very idea. I begged and preached and, when I had my first cases of venereal disease, I even threatened to refuse treatment if they didn't stop prostitution. But later, when I saw that the pieces of bread thus earned saved lives, when I met a young girl whom a pair of shoes, earned in a week of prostitution, saved from being thrown in the crematory, I began to understand—and to forgive.¹⁹⁶

Though third party onlookers could be repulsed, even those involved in sexual barter did not celebrate their conquests. When another prisoner informed Liana that Lili had a “*kochany*”, Lili

¹⁹³ Millu, *Smoke over Birkenau*, 21–23, 39–40.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 137.

¹⁹⁵ Sybil Milton, “Women and the Holocaust: The Case of German and German-Jewish Women” in Bridenthal, Grossmann, and Kaplan, *When Biology Became Destiny*, 316.

¹⁹⁶ Perl, *I Was a Doctor in Auschwitz.*, 77.

was upset, as if a shameful secret had been revealed.¹⁹⁷ Informal sexual encounters such as this were not celebrated—even by the women selling sexual favors. The reality of their desperation did not make the “prostitution” any easier to perform.

For many women, thoughts of their loved ones greatly affected the decision-making process in terms of whether to barter their sexuality or remain chaste. One female prisoner, Lise, was propositioned by a male foreman but explained that she was married. Afterwards, she was plagued by the question of whether she should stay alive by betraying her husband or die being faithful. Though described as a very faithful partner, always thinking of and talking about her husband, Lise eventually decided to stay alive for her husband by being unfaithful.¹⁹⁸ Another woman was separated from her husband in a labor camp and the man became very ill. To obtain food and money to save her husband, she sold sexual favors. Her husband, aware of this, refused to accept the fruits of her labor and was unable to forgive her for a long while.¹⁹⁹ Participating in a sexual barter relationship was not just a survival decision, but seemed to most as a moral decision of some kind. The extent that morality played in a man or woman’s decision to engage in sex clearly influenced the amount of guilt he or she faced after the war.

Homosexual Relationships

Though heterosexual encounters did occur, the gender-separation strategy enacted by SS officials severely limited the opportunity for heterosexual associations. Strict gender segregation in concentration camps caused significant social change from the civilized world to a camp environment. This change often required prisoners to adapt to unusual sexual behavior for a

¹⁹⁷ Millu, *Smoke over Birkenau*, 17.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 189, 190, 197.

¹⁹⁹ Felicja Karay, “Women in the Forced Labor Camps” in Ofer and Weitzman, *Women in the Holocaust*, 298.

better chance at survival. Adapting to a strictly male or female environment relaxed the firm gender roles of civilized society and created flexible behavioral and value norms. Some men and women chose to adapt using homosexual relationships in spite of their pre-imprisonment heterosexual identity. Prisoners maintained differing opinions about homosexual acts, some believing they were necessary and others admittedly repelled by them. Homosexual relationships existed, nevertheless, and even those who did not approve of them attest to it.

The amount of homosexual sex that occurred in camps is, and will remain, inconclusive. Testimony from prisoners who observed homosexuality is more common than individuals that admit to homosexual behavior. Survivor Fania Fénelon claims that ninety percent of women in Auschwitz exhibited homosexual behavior during incarceration.²⁰⁰ While this percentage is not proven, the fact that a former prisoner believed that a substantial majority of incarcerated women took on homosexual tendencies attests to the significance of the phenomenon. However, when women were asked about their own sexual experiences during incarceration, a much smaller number of camp homosexuals is shown. The Giza/Morasiewics study of Holocaust behavior found that thirty percent of the participating women had been involved in a homosexual relationship in the camp.²⁰¹ This does not corroborate Fénelon's claim of extensive homosexuality; nevertheless, it proves that the behavior was instigated in a camp setting. Considering that the SS had a term for "Lesbian love"—"L.L."—it is highly likely that homosexual relations were quite prevalent.²⁰² As the creation of distinct camp terminology highlights aspects of camp life that were significant, we can assume that lesbian love was one of them.

²⁰⁰ Fania Fénelon, *Mädchenorchester in Auschwitz* in Ulrike Janz, "Zeugnisse überlebender Frauen," *Frauenzeitung* 9, no. Sommer 2/1994: 48.

²⁰¹ Sommer, *Das KZ-Bordell*, 203.

²⁰² Janz, "Zeugnisse überlebender Frauen." *Frauenzeitung* 9, no. Sommer 2/1994, 21.

Gender divisions that obstructed many heterosexual bonds did not negatively affect those who had been homosexual before their incarceration. Women incarcerated for asocial behavior were responsible for much of the “lesbian love” that developed within the camp. Survivor Anja Lundholm describes a lesbian pair who had been incarcerated together and was part of her surrogate family while in the camp: Claire and Cilly. Because Cilly was not in the best health, Claire tried to do the work for both of them, often moving as many bricks as possible in order to lessen Cilly’s load. Nevertheless, Cilly eventually collapsed on the job and died after the SS overseer ordered dogs to attack her. After Cilly’s death, Claire stopped speaking and only crouched next to her body. Though physically strong, the loss of her life partner caused Claire to commit suicide by running into an electric fence.²⁰³ This is a profound example of one kind of homosexual relationship maintained in the camp. The lack of male presence was in no way detrimental to Claire and Cilly’s ability to maintain their intimate relationship. Though they were better able to maintain intimacy with each other, the relationship in itself could not ensure survival for either of them.

Though Claire and Cilly were partners before incarceration, many lesbian relationships, even among established homosexuals, can be classified as informal because they did not stem from attraction, but from a human desire for intimacy. One woman explained that sexual preference was not an issue; what mattered was that a prisoner could get care and affection. Auschwitz survivor Susan states that women needed affection “for warmth, for feeling of someone caring...it kept you warm if you were cuddled. Yes, we were affectionate.”²⁰⁴ Likewise, many interned women had been separated from their husbands and relied on each

²⁰³ Anja Lundholm, *Das Höllentor*, 41-45, quoted in Ulrike Janz, “Zeugnisse überlebender Frauen (Teil II),” *Frauenzeitung* 10, no. Herbst/Winter 3/1994: 20–22.

²⁰⁴ Ringelheim, “Women and the Holocaust: A Reconsideration of Research,” 745, 750.

other for bodily comfort. Survivor Ruth Elias explains that some women attempted to soothe each other through caressing and physical nearness.²⁰⁵ Though unclear to what sexual extent this homosexuality developed, it is apparent that the gestures contained a great amount of intimacy.

Clearly, emotional and physical intimacy were linked and perpetuated by the same-sex environment. Survivors' accounts show that the emotional bonds formed between women were extremely strong and created a psychological will to live. Because of the gender segregation in camps, women often used established emotional connections to fulfill intimate desires. Women who felt strongly for another woman in the emotional sense could develop sexual feelings towards her, especially when one considers the absence of any male presence. Some even became attached to their camp partners without an initial emotional connection. One female physics professor whose husband had been killed and children taken away was given special attention by another woman, a prisoner functionary. Though unenthusiastic at first, the professor started a rational relationship with the woman out of necessity—she would be spared from hunger. Soon afterwards, she developed a deep attachment for her “friend” and said she could not live without her.²⁰⁶ These feelings did not necessarily stem from the desire for erotic pleasure, but could also have been used to fulfill the more emotional desire for intimate contact with other human beings.

Many survivors attest to the fact that gender divisions caused women to experiment with homosexuality for their duration in the camp.²⁰⁷ Camp homosexuality often functioned differently than civilian homosexuality because for many the behavior was temporary. Because of this transitory nature, camp homosexuality often simulated heterosexual relations; some

²⁰⁵ Ulrike Janz, “Zeugnisse überlebender Frauen,” 22.

²⁰⁶ Olga Lengyel, *Five Chimneys: The Story of Auschwitz*, 183–184.

²⁰⁷ Joan Ringelheim, “Women and the Holocaust: A Reconsideration of Research,” *Signs* 10, no. 4 (July 1, 1985): 745.

female prisoners dressed and acted as men to imitate a heterogeneous environment. Robert Sommer claims that both genders of prisoners engaged in playing out heterosexual fantasies in homosexual relationships. In other words, a woman would purposefully take on the role of the man. In the camps, prisoners occasionally termed this “*Ersatz-Homosexualität*” or “replacement homosexuality.” One male survivor claims that it was easy to know which prisoners were “*Ersatz-Homosexuelle*”: a man would try to find a young, feminine-looking man, while a woman would attempt to find another woman with a masculine name or role.²⁰⁸ This may have appealed many prisoners who found it difficult to fully adapt to their new environment, or to those plagued by guilt about their pre-imprisonment sexual preferences.

Isa Vermehren writes that the punishment block was the breeding ground of lesbian love in the camp. She explains that many younger women who were incarcerated in this prison block lapsed into the “*Laster*” or “guilty pleasure” of homosexuality. Some even took on male characteristics:

They donned short hair, which they stroked with the typical boys movement of the whole flat hand and far protruding elbows over the head again and again. They stood together like young men in markedly casual posture, one leg placed forward and the hands buried into the pockets deeply, laughed briefly and roughly and used a rather astonishing vocabulary of the stupidest formulas and cheapest commonplaces in conversation with each other.²⁰⁹

Isa explains that hardly any of them wore the pink triangle that would designate them as homosexual prisoners. Therefore, she concludes that these women began their lesbian

²⁰⁸ Sommer, *Das KZ-Bordell*, 201.

²⁰⁹ “*Sie trugen kurzgeschnittene Haare, die sie mit der typischen Jungens-bewegung der ganzen flachen Hand und weitausladenden Ellenbogen sich immer wieder über den Kopf strichen. Sie standen zusammen wie junge Männer in betont lässiger Haltung, ein Bein vorgestellt und die Hände tief in die Taschen vergraben, lachten kurz und rauh und verwandten in der Unterhaltung miteinander ein ganz erstaunliches Vokabular blödester Formeln und billigster Gemeinplätze.*”

tendencies in the camp.²¹⁰ Fania Fénelon explains that in their quest to resemble men, some women forced their voices down to sound more masculine or disguised their womanly curves.²¹¹ It is not hard to imagine that in a completely androgynous environment, some women would take on masculine characteristics to mirror the civilized society from which they came. This is another example of how camp internees attempted to maintain some connection to normal life in an effort to realize their humanity.

To perpetuate the fantasy, some women dressed as men in prisoner orgies that took place in the women's camp. Inmates threw these "parties" or "dance soireés" to parody their pre-imprisonment lives. A guitar and a harmonica from the camp orchestra often played at these events where pairs of women danced and cavorted together. Survivor Olga Lengyel points out that some women dressed as men to give an air of reality.²¹² Fania Fénelon, who once played in the orchestra at a "soirée," describes one of these events that she claims turned into an orgy. She explains that the "party" took place in the asocial barrack in which a dance floor had been cleared. Gender roles in the room were clearly discernable; the "men" wore pajamas and the women wore flowing nightgowns. While the night started formally, with the "men" asking the women to dance, the crudity of the affair progressed as the night wore on. Eventually, women undressed and started kissing each other or performing more salacious homosexual acts.²¹³ Fénelon's account gives readers no doubt of the extent of lesbian love in a camp setting.

Political prisoners claim that relations between political women were strictly platonic friendships and only asocials and criminals experienced lesbian sexual relationships. However,

²¹⁰ Isa Vermehren, *Reise Durch den letzten Akt*, 48-51 quoted in Janz, "Zeugnisse überlebender Frauen," 23.

²¹¹ Fania Fénelon and Marcelle Routier, *Playing for Time*, trans. Judith Landry (New York : Atheneum, 1977), 217,219.

²¹² Olga Lengyel, *Five Chimneys : The Story of Auschwitz*, 184-185.

²¹³ Fénelon and Routier, *Playing for Time*, 217-220.

“*Ersatz*” relationships among female political prisoners did exist. Former political prisoner Georgia Tanewa does not regard these as homosexual relationships; she believes they cannot be seen through modern eyes. One female political prisoner she knew in the camp was named Gertrud but took up male characteristics and was known in the camp as Peter. Tanewa is not sure whether Peter was homosexual outside of the camp, but within the camp there was an ongoing game that Peter was in love with her.²¹⁴ The shifted norms and values in the camp muddles certain sexual classifications, making it difficult to acquire clear, comprehensive information about lesbian relationships; it is quite clear, however, that they occurred throughout the female population and not only among the asocial group.

Many individual “*Ersatz*” relationships (not orgies) were used in the context of sexual barter. In contrast with some female homosexual relationships that were, at least initially, based on emotional connection, these homosexual relationships occurred from a purely sexual or survival motivation. Although sexual barter is discussed more often in heterosexual relations, there are survivor accounts of homosexual bartering, some of which were also “*Ersatz*” encounters. Irma Trsak claims that many of these “prostitutes” worked at the Siemens factory and she befriended many of them. They explained to her that they were homosexuals outside of the camp and fostered lesbian relationships within the camp as well.²¹⁵ Women who worked at the factory probably had the ability to procure more commodities that they could then exchange for sexual favors. One masculine woman, who was called Gert instead of Gerda, was often paid for sexual favors with other female prisoners’ margarine or sausage rations.²¹⁶ Thus, sexual

²¹⁴ Aussage von Georgia Tanewa in Janz, “Zeugnisse überlebender Frauen (Teil II),” 22–23.

²¹⁵ Irma Trsak, *Ich gebe dir einen Mantel, daß du ihn noch in Freiheit tragen kannst*, 122 in Janz, “Zeugnisse überlebender Frauen,” 50.

²¹⁶ Margarete Buber-Neumann, *Milena, Kafkas Freundin*, 47-48, in Janz, “Zeugnisse überlebender Frauen (Teil II),” 23.

barter was not restricted to heterosexual encounters; it only depended on what each participant, male or female, had to offer.

Many women who paid other female prisoners for sexual favors were *Kapos* in the women's camp; these individuals had access to certain commodities such as increased rations. Survivor Krystyna Zywulska explains that many women were confused when these women accosted them. One such female prisoner was approached by a female *Kapo* who gave her a potato. At first, the prisoner was unsure what the gift meant, but after seeing the *Kapo*'s "*buhlerischen Gesten*" ("seductive gestures") she immediately left the barrack.²¹⁷ Another survivor, Antonia R., maintained a relationship with a female *Kapo* in order to receive extra food for herself and her sister. She explains that the *Kapo* would come to her at night and hold her hand, telling her that she loved her. Antonia says she was so naïve that she actually believed the *Kapo*'s claims of love.²¹⁸ For many young girls, this was their first time in company with homosexual women, so their attentions could have been misleading.

A common form of homosexual barter within the men's camp that also functioned as an "*Ersatz*" relationship was exemplified by the "*Pipel*." A young male prisoner who received food and protection from an established male prisoner was known as a "*Pipel*." Boys younger than 16 were most often sent directly to their death and did not become a part of the camp society. However, in some cases, boys ages 12-16 entered the camp as prisoners because they appeared older or lied about their age. According to male survivors, these are the boys who were targeted. The established prisoners who sought out "*Pipels*" were often non-Jewish, political, or

²¹⁷ Krystyna Zywulska, *Tanz, Mädchen ... : vom Warschauer Getto nach Auschwitz : ein Überlebensbericht*. (München: Dt. Taschenbuch-Verl., 1988), 252.

²¹⁸ Doris Fürstenberg, Interview mit Antonia R. in *Jeden Moment war dieser Tod*, 25, in Ulrike Janz, "Zeugnisse überlebender Frauen (Teil III)," *Frauenzeitung* 11, no. Frühjahr 1/1995: 48.

criminal.²¹⁹ This description coincides with the men in the camp aristocracy. A former camp leader said that almost every room leader or work foreman had a “*Pipel*.” Although the phenomenon was widespread, former prisoners speak of it negatively.²²⁰

Though sexually exploited, these young boys were given protection from their male partners as well as food and goods. One former “*Pipel*”, Keith Random, appreciated the fact that these exchanges gave him better chances at survival: “If this is the price of life, let it be.” It was his first sexual experience; however, he claims that it was “tolerable.”²²¹ Heinz Heger also credits his survival to homosexual intimacy in the men’s camp.²²² It seems that those involved in “*Pipel*” relationships had a clear understanding of the reality of their situation.

Many of the male and female homosexual exploits of prisoners, even those in which sexual barter was the motivation, can be considered voluntary. In his book, survivor Thomas Geva describes a scene in which an older male prisoner tells Geva that he cannot help him anymore without receiving something in return. Geva explains that he did not give in, and the older prisoner did not force him. Though some scholars believe sexual barter to be coerced, many have determined that this phenomenon was usually voluntary.²²³ The same goes for lesbian sexual barter. In one instance, a *Kapo* proposed a sexual exchange with a female

²¹⁹ Na’Ama Shik, “Sexual Abuse of Jewish Women in Auschwitz-Birkenau” in Dagmar Herzog, *Brutality and Desire : War and Sexuality in Europe’s Twentieth Century* (Basingstoke, Hampshire; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 235.

²²⁰ Sommer, *Das KZ-Bordell*, 202.

²²¹ *Ibid.*, 202,208.

²²² Anderson Hughes, “Forced Prostitution: The Competing and Contested Uses of the Concentration Camp Brothel,” 257.

²²³ *Ibid.*

prisoner, Halina Birenbaum, who was only 13 at the time and turned down the offer.²²⁴ Thus, it is reasonable to conclude that these relationships were also often voluntary.

While more prominent prisoners or SS officers could have forced a sexual encounter, it may have been more appealing to engage in sex with a mutual understanding. The prisoners who had commodities to give had their choice of less fortunate prisoners who wanted what they had to offer, and so the amount of willing partners was never lacking. High-ranking prisoners who solicited sexual favors were often civilians before their incarceration and did not want to deal with the guilt of a forced sexual encounter. This could not have always been the case, but consensual relations were desired more often than forced encounters. Because high-ranking prisoners often collaborated to some degree with the SS who ran the camps, it is unlikely that any punishment would be given to them from a low-ranking prisoner who accused them of solicitation. In contrast, it could be dangerous for a prisoner in a lower class of camp society to accuse someone with more connections within the camp.

SS officials often knew of the sexual relations occurring within the camp. Heterosexual relationships often went unpunished, while same-sex relations had more dangerous consequences because of the Nazi aversion to homosexuality. However, as previously discussed, the social status of the prisoner and his or her connections within the camp also affected the punishment, or lack thereof. In Ravensbrück, a female overseer brutally beat one woman after she saw her arm and arm with another female prisoner—this behavior was forbidden.²²⁵ Another SS woman made an example of a female prisoner by forcing her to display her body, covered with hickeys,

²²⁴ Na’Ama Shik, “Sexual Abuse of Jewish Women in Auschwitz-Birkenau” in Herzog *Brutality and Desire: War and Sexuality in Europe’s Twentieth Century*, 231.

²²⁵ Erinnerung von Dagmar Hakova in Janz, “Zeugnisse überlebender Frauen,” 49.

on the camp's main street.²²⁶ Homosexuality was not only a reason for incarceration—it was actually exacerbated by the prison system; and then, in turn, the camps imposed extra punishment for this form of “deviance.” Though the smallest degree of homosexual intimacy between prisoners was punishable, there is no record of an SS official being penalized for their sexual exploits with prisoners, even homosexual relations.

Nonetheless, homosexual relations between female guards were forbidden. A female camp overseer, Anna Fest, was transferred from Allendorf's concentration camp to Sömmerda because she became close friends with another female guard. Another SS woman reported them to Allendorf's commanding camp, Buchenwald, for lesbian behavior and it was resolved that Frau Fest had to be transferred. At Sömmerda, the commander of the camp was given instructions to watch over her and make sure it did not happen again. Her former boss at Allendorf even advised her to make friends with some men instead.²²⁷ When considering views toward homosexuality in civilian relationships, like that of two SS officials, and the relaxed homosexual tendencies in the camp, the contrast between sexual norms in both environments becomes clear.

Conclusion

Informal relationships within the confines of the concentration camp are significant in that they show the extent of sexuality in the camps. There is no doubt that Nazis oppressed prisoner sexuality among all other aspects of their human nature; however, prisoners found ways to maintain sexuality whether it was to sate desires, create an emotional connection, or aid physical survival. Informal sexual relations between prisoners were mutually beneficial and

²²⁶ Margarete Buber-Neumann, *Milena, Kafkas Freundin*, 47-48, in Janz, “Zeugnisse überlebender Frauen (Teil II),” 23.

²²⁷ Anna Fest, “A Job in Its Own Category” in *Frauen: German Women Recall the Third Reich* (New Brunswick, New Jersey, and London: Rutgers University Press, 2007), 328–329.

most often involved the exchange of sexual favors for food. Though it may seem unlikely that these types of relationships persisted under the watchful eye of SS officials, the camp environment actually increased sexual barter. For many, it was the only way to obtain what they wanted or needed to survive. The social stratification within the prisoner population along with the power dynamics of prisoner society made these relations possible.

Unlike in a civilian environment or even the camp brothel, heterosexual encounters in the general camp population were rare and thus many men and women engaged in uncharacteristic sexuality for their duration in the camp. This “*Ersatz-Homosexualität*” attests to the changed sexual values that some prisoners adapted to as well as the significant degree to which they were forced to re-adjust to civilian society and its conventional sexual norms. In the general camp population, just as in the camp brothel, a prisoner’s pre-imprisonment sexual standards were difficult to uphold. However, we should not apply the standards of the free to those struggling to survive. Inside the camp, choosing to engage in sexual behavior could have been the deciding factor between life and death.

Epilogue

The Affects of Intimacy on Post-War Life

As described in the chapters above, many inmates passed judgments on themselves and others in spite of the circumstances in which sexual behavior took place. Women who chose to barter sexual favors for goods as well as those who worked in the camp brothel were stigmatized as prostitutes. There is little record on the stigmatization of men for similar actions. As evidenced by the male survivors who attest to having been camp brothel patrons as well as the men who admit to engaging in “*Pipel*” relationships, male memoirs include more first-hand claim to sexual activity than female accounts. In any case, it seems that post-war society remained understanding of men who chose to survive through sexual behavior, but not women. Izabela Michalek, a former brothel worker, regularly attended meetings of the Auschwitz survivors, but eventually she was compelled to leave the group because she was continually stigmatized for her role in the camp.²²⁸ Judgments on female prisoners did not cease after liberation as the general public began to support derogatory views reinforced by fellow survivors.

The struggle for all survivors was that of adapting back into civilian society after they had successfully acclimated to the camp environment. In terms of sexuality, the way in which a survivor adjusted deeply affected his or her post-liberation quality of life. Of course, there were some effects from camp life that permeated civilian life in a way that survivors could not control, but attitudes toward sexual behavior almost always required refining. For many, adapting to the camp environment had saved their lives on both emotional and physical levels. The return to civilian society was just as sudden and drastic as initiation into the camps had been. Adjusting to

²²⁸ Sommer, *Das KZ-Bordell*, 232.

normalcy proved to be difficult for survivors, particularly those who had used their sexuality to survive. Experiencing a sex life in complete contrast with civilian sexual behavior brought about an equally challenging struggle after liberation. Survivor Charlotte Delbo eloquently reflects on this idea of re-adaptation in one of her poems.

I have returned
From a world beyond knowledge
And now must unlearn
For otherwise I clearly see
I can no longer live.²²⁹

Stigmatization

The post-war public has broadcast some tremendously scathing comments about former female prisoners who used their sexuality to survive. Other high-ranking prisoners, who no doubt were in some form of collaboration with SS officials, or prisoners who stole from fellow prisoners, were not so generally slandered. The post-war perception of the general public, and even some male survivors, was that if women survived they must have “slept their way to liberation.”²³⁰ Former Buchenwald prisoner and author Jorge Semprun is perhaps the most outspoken critic who calls these women outright “sluts” in his book detailing his own camp experience.²³¹ For this reason, former male survivors are also wary of maintaining contact with a known “prostitute.” One man who had a rational relationship with brothel worker Magdalena Walter during incarceration did not want to remain in contact with her after the war because he

²²⁹ Charlotte Delbo, *Auschwitz and After; with Introduction by Lawrence A. Langer.*, trans. Rosette C. Lamont (New Haven : Yale University Press, 1995., 1995), 230.

²³⁰ Hájková, “Sexual Barter in Times of Genocide: Negotiating the Sexual Economy of the Theresienstadt Ghetto,” 526.

²³¹ Jorge Semprún, *What a Beautiful Sunday!*, trans. Alan Sheridan, A Helen and Kurt Wolff Book (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982), 361.

did not want to be associated with a stigmatized former sex worker.²³² Another survivor, Stanislaw Hantz, saw a woman he recognized as a former brothel worker shortly after liberation and she was horrified that he might tell her secret and she would become a social outcast. He promised her that he would not tell anyone that she had worked in the brothel.²³³ Many women did not talk about their experiences after they were liberated because they would have been considered to be working with the Germans and their victim-status would be questioned.²³⁴ This view was also supported by Allied troops in camps immediately after liberation.

After the war, women, especially those who formerly worked in the brothels, were thought to be collaborators because they worked with the SS in a formal camp institution. The United States soldiers liberating Buchenwald had survivors fill out questionnaires to determine if anyone was in collaboration with the National Socialist party. At first, the victim-status of those who had worked in the camp brothels was questioned because they were considered volunteers that worked in the brothel of their own free will. Later, the United States understood these victims to have been forced.²³⁵ Even with this eventual change in perception, the damage of the initial stigmatization did not end.

For these misunderstood women, legal restitution became difficult. Frau W, who was chosen from the *Strafblock* to work in the prisoner brothel, applied for recognition as a politically persecuted victim, but the application was rejected because in the camp records, she was classified as an asocial prisoner and not a political prisoner. In 1963, she filed a lawsuit against the rejection but did not state that she had worked in the Buchenwald brothel for fear of being

²³² Sommer, *Das KZ-Bordell*, 231–232.

²³³ *Ibid.*, 233.

²³⁴ *Ibid.*, 237.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*, 231.

discriminated against.²³⁶ This sort of discrimination was propagated by the public, other survivors, and Allied liberators, and resulted in the silencing of former prisoners who had utilized their sexuality to survive. However, survivors suffered not only from public ostracism, but also personal setbacks.

Health Affects

Intimacy within the camp could affect the life of a woman or man after liberation in more ways than one. Survivors often experienced physical, mental, emotional, and sexual forms of torment. One former brothel worker made a request for restitution after liberation for spiritual suffering; she had experienced nervous breakdowns and severe depression as a result of the sexual exploitation she endured in the prisoner brothel.²³⁷ Another woman, Elenora Franke, had been sent to a camp as a Polish asocial prisoner because she refused to work. She then joined the *Sonderkommando* under the false promise that she would be released in six-months time. In 1966, she applied for compensation from Bremen's Regional Office for Redress (Landesamtes für Wiedergutmachung Bremen) and named the forced sexual labor as the main reason for her "shame of body and health" that accounted for twenty-five percent of the deterioration of her capacity to work. Her application was denied on the grounds that she would have had to have made the claim by 1958, which she did not.²³⁸

Franke not only suffered from shame, but also the physical effects of camp sexuality. When Elenora Franke finally was freed, she remained in bad health because the sterilization

²³⁶ Paul, *Zwangsprostitution*, 57.

²³⁷ Sommer, *Das KZ-Bordell*, 237.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, 123,233.

wounds from her preparation for brothel work had not yet healed.²³⁹ These kinds of physical effects of camp sexuality can be seen in all parts of a survivor's health, but are most often reproduction problems. Similar to Franke, Anni Kramer also suffered reproductive consequences. After her liberation, she did not tell anyone that she had worked in the camp brothel. She was not able to have biological children, but did have step-children whom she kept in the dark about her experience.²⁴⁰ The reproductive ability of female survivors was fifty percent less than the average citizen.²⁴¹ Nevertheless, survivors stress the ability to reproduce as one of their greatest achievements.²⁴² For many, it was a form of revenge against the Nazis who had done everything in their power to limit the reproduction of "inferior" beings.

Behavioral Extremes

Though it is quite possible that men and women who experienced unusual intimate values within the camp were able to re-adapt to bourgeois sexual norms, there are two behavioral extremes that occurred in those unable to adapt. Sexual reactivity and sexual regression were possible ways that survivors dealt with their adjustment back to civilian life. There is little proof of this theory because of the lack of testimony about first-hand sexual experiences during incarceration; nevertheless there are probable effects of such adaptation. Survivor Gisella Perl asserts that many sought "love" after liberation to feel human or prove that they were still alive.²⁴³ Thus, post-war sexuality sometimes had the same motivations as camp intimacies did.

²³⁹ Ibid., 123.

²⁴⁰ Ibid., 231.

²⁴¹ Ibid., 197.

²⁴² Rochelle G Saidel, *The Jewish Women of Ravensbruck Concentration Camp* (Madison, Wis.; London: University of Wisconsin Press ; Eurospan [distributor], 2006), 210.

²⁴³ Perl, *I Was a Doctor in Auschwitz.*, 171.

The difference, however, is that the sexual values and norms in peacetime were different from those in the camp.

Anthropologist Carol Kidron claims that the body reacts to present distress by reenacting Holocaust related survival strategies.²⁴⁴ Those who used sexuality to survive, whether in camp brothels or in informal sexual encounters, could therefore regress into this behavior in the civilian world as well. Rudolph Roden, perhaps giving too much weight to one experience, claims that some survivors experienced a gross promiscuity or unrealistic pursuit of lost youth that was not necessarily their own. By generalizing from one man's experience, he asserts that survivors searched for intense sexual experiences with those who were the age that they had been when incarcerated or the age of a lost loved one. Roden's own friend, who was also a survivor, never slept with anyone over the age of 23 (though he was 60 years old) but claims that it is because his sister was murdered in the Holocaust at age 16 or 17.²⁴⁵ This behavior seems unnatural, and if this did occur, it is likely that other Holocaust survivors did not experience sexual reactivity to this extent. However, Roden also describes a more realistic survivor attitude of "carpe diem sex" that was sometimes retained after liberation.²⁴⁶ This seems like a more realistic sexual response and result of re-adaptation.

Many women experienced puberty and the resulting sexual education in the camp, and this seems to have shaped their post-war life in various, difficult to document ways. Those who had already been sexually active and sexually educated before incarceration knew the distinction between camp intimacy and civilian intimacy. For the young women who first experienced

²⁴⁴ Carol A. Kidron, "Toward an Ethnography of Silence: The Lived Presence of the Past in the Everyday Life of Holocaust Trauma Survivors and Their Descendants in Israel," *Current Anthropology* 50, no. 1 (February 1, 2009): 13.

²⁴⁵ Rudolph G. Roden, "Sexuality and the Holocaust Survivor," *Israel Journal of Psychiatry and Related Sciences* 22, no. 3 (1985): 218.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 214.

sexuality during incarceration, there was no need to adapt to new sexual norms. However, because their sexual socialization in the camp had been so severely in contrast with civilian sexual socialization, the resulting post-war sexual values could remain skewed. These women could possibly spend their post-liberation lives believing that camp sexuality was the norm and thus have problems creating healthy sexual connections in civilian life.

Sexual repression was more likely experienced by those who had less choice in their camp intimacies, such as those women who were selected for brothel work. There is, however, a sharp contrast between this trauma and the trauma of sexual violence. In the model ghetto of Theresienstadt, Inge F. was raped by a German officer and afterwards never married. At the age of 70, she claimed she could still never consider going to bed with a man.²⁴⁷ It should be noted that this was a result of sexual violence and not sex as a survival strategy. However, intimate experiences in the camp did sometimes create extreme feelings of guilt that could be manifested in sexual repression of this kind. Robert Sommer concludes that for some women, successful resexualization was not possible. For these women, the effects of camp intimacy lasted long after liberation.²⁴⁸ Historian Rochelle Saidel claims that many women, but Orthodox Jewish women especially, grew up to be modest because the camp traumatized them.²⁴⁹ The experiences of the Nazi period and the war might well have had such an effect on any female survivor, but it seems that this was particularly true for young women who had been incarcerated. When intimacy has been made a survival strategy, as it was in the camps, this seems to make the transition to healthy intimate relationships afterwards difficult. Perhaps it is

²⁴⁷ Jonathan Friedman, "Togetherness and Isolation: Holocaust Survivor Memories of Intimacy and Sexuality in the Ghettos," *The Oral History Review* 28, no. 1 (January 1, 2001): 12.

²⁴⁸ Sommer, *Das KZ-Bordell*, 208.

²⁴⁹ Saidel, *The Jewish Women of Ravensbruck Concentration Camp*, 207.

hard for those who have only known sex as an act of violation or, at best, a necessary evil, to learn to experience it as a form of intimacy based purely on love or pleasure.

Survivors' Relationships with Others

As mentioned above, survivor relationships with others after liberation were not always healthy. Many did not talk of their intimate experiences with their post-war partner. Those whose partners did find out how they survived sometimes faced physical or emotional abuse. “Frau B”, who as earlier stated was assigned to a brothel commando not of her free will, was married for 20 years after the war. Once her husband found out about her incarceration, he beat her and told her that the Nazis were right to put her in a concentration camp.²⁵⁰ Similarly, Linda Bachmann, another former brothel worker, was beaten by a post-war husband who was 19 years her senior after she told him of her experiences. He said, “You concentration camp pig, if I had been in the concentration camp, I would have killed you.”²⁵¹ After the death of her husband in 1969, she lived alone and told no one her experience.²⁵² Thus, the post-war public perception of camp “prostitutes” also permeated a woman’s personal life and her relationship with her significant other.

Post-war relationships between survivors often involved a mutual understanding of life in the camp; however, this empathy could hurt or benefit a prisoner’s interpersonal relations. For some couples, understanding what his or her partner had experienced in incarceration was hard for them to face. A doctor and his fiancé had been transported to Auschwitz together but were not able to marry once they were reunited because they would not ask each other of that part of

²⁵⁰ Paul, *Zwangsprostitution*, 45,48.

²⁵¹ “*Du KZ-Schwein, wenn ich im KZ gewesen ware, ich hätte dich umgebracht*”

²⁵² Sommer, *Das KZ-Bordell*, 232.

their lives (sex) while in the camp.²⁵³ In this way, they were acknowledging that the decisions that had been the method by which they survived the camp were too difficult to face directly; the truth, they feared, might completely destroy their relationship. However, other relationships benefitted from a mutual understanding of concentration camp realities, even those in which sex was used for survival. Partners who understood that adaptation within the camp was necessary had a healthier post-war relationship. Whereas the silence between the doctor and his fiancé created an interpersonal barrier to their relationship, other couples which had experienced Holocaust atrocities could be empathetically supportive. There is evidence that two Jewish female survivors who were friends married two male survivors.²⁵⁴ Similarly, a former brothel worker is claimed to have later married her former customer and had a family.²⁵⁵ For these couples, there was less pressure to hide such traumatic experiences, which could have psychological effects on a survivor's well being.

Even if both parties were not former prisoners, a mutual understanding sometimes did sustain a healthy relationship. One former brothel worker became engaged to a Polish captain and said that things that happened in Auschwitz remained confidential for them.²⁵⁶ The post-war marriage between one female *Kapo* and a former SS man is especially telling. The *Kapo*, who had maintained a rational relationship with the SS officer during her incarceration, later explained to a former prisoner who had worked under her that she “didn’t think of the future then” and claimed “whatever I did was my way of surviving.” She says she later married him

²⁵³ Anderson Hughes, “Forced Prostitution: The Competing and Contested Uses of the Concentration Camp Brothel,” 248.

²⁵⁴ Saidel, *The Jewish Women of Ravensbruck Concentration Camp*, 191.

²⁵⁵ Anderson Hughes, “Forced Prostitution: The Competing and Contested Uses of the Concentration Camp Brothel,” 266.

²⁵⁶ Sommer, *Das KZ-Bordell*, 233.

partly because they knew each other's past and knew that they had both acted immorally.²⁵⁷

Though the source of this information is anonymous, it is reasonable to assume that some relationships during incarceration persisted afterwards because of the mutual understanding between the two parties.

Though sexuality had positive affects for prisoners during their incarceration, the benefits ended once they were liberated from the oppressive environment. Those who made the decision to engage in sexual activity in the camp, though it may have helped ensure survival, often suffered extreme emotional, physical, and sexual trauma afterwards because of this choice. There would be no way for a prisoner to know the future repercussions of a decision of this magnitude, and it is not these thoughts that motivated their decision. For many in the camp, the choice was made only in the hopes of living long enough to survive the war and the end of the Nazi regime. The effects of incarceration were not important to the decision making process; nonetheless, the sexual experiences of camp life invaded all aspects of a survivor's post-war life and these they had to deal with in spite of stigmatization and inconsistent legal acknowledgement.

Conclusion

At the time of the Nürnberg Trials, sexual experimentation on women was the only gendered oppression subject to legal scrutiny. Because of survivor silence about sexual violations such as forced prostitution, prosecutions of the perpetrators were lacking in post-war Europe. That means that following the Holocaust, forced sterilization was the main sexual persecution that was penalized. Today, prosecution of sexual crimes is more comprehensive: rape, forced prostitution, and acts that prevent birth are all subject to criminal sanctions.

²⁵⁷ Lucille Eichengreen, *From Ashes to Life*, 189 quoted in Anderson Hughes, "Forced Prostitution: The Competing and Contested Uses of the Concentration Camp Brothel," 258.

However, much of the gendered harassment perpetrated in the Holocaust is still not criminalized, such as the shaving of intimate body parts.²⁵⁸ As discussed above, however, many forms of gendered persecution could and did have profound psychological effects on a woman's human identity. Though gendered persecution is now more recognized in international politics than it was post- World War II, there are still aspects of sexual oppression that are not criminalized but nonetheless create lasting trauma.

The Nazi leaders controlled every aspect of life in a Nazi concentration camp, including sexual behavior and intimacy. SS officials attempted to regulate all sexual activity in the camp, whether by producing an androgynous environment segregated by gender or by creating formal brothels within the confines of the camp. Yet, some aspects of sexuality and intimacy in the camps could not be entirely dictated by SS authorities, and there was some—if very small—room for prisoners to make decisions. Prisoners who chose to engage in sexual relations exhibited an exceptional will to survive that was brought on by the stark reality of their imprisonment. By embracing sexuality, some prisoners were able to adapt to the oppressive camp environment in a way that benefitted both their emotional and physical survival. However, as mentioned above, some paid the price for this willingness to adapt in their post-liberation lives.

Survivor Liana Millu explains that there was “truly nothing so insufferable as futile complaints and the inability to adapt.”²⁵⁹ A moral dissonance existed within the camp because prewar society and values often shaped expectations for behavior within the prisoner's new environment. Prisoners who understood the reality of their situations were more inclined to

²⁵⁸ Fionnuala Ni Aolain, “Rethinking the Concept of Harm and Legal Categorizations of Sexual Violence During War,” *Theoretical Inquiries in Law* 1 (2000): 311,321,328.

²⁵⁹ Millu, *Smoke over Birkenau*, 183.

adapt to new conditions, even in terms of sexuality, and seem to have had a better chance at physical survival. On the other hand, those who remained morally and mentally tethered to civilized society often suffered for their inability to adjust. Survivor and sociologist Anna Pawełczyńska perhaps most succinctly states the importance of understanding the sexual oppression perpetrated by Nazis in concentration camps and its affects when she says:

It is not true that ‘suffering ennobles.’ Suffering can strengthen but it can also totally shatter. Life can be lived within the conventions of decency without banging one’s head against the wall of human misfortunes. But should there arise in a person a real need for such an understanding, should he be capable of tearing himself away from normal routine, should he manage to turn his back on socially sanctioned personal ambitions and egoisms—he will expose himself to a life considerably more painful but perhaps richer. The understanding of ultimate situations allows one to look life or death in the eye with courage; it allows one to view the affairs of men against the background of history. It also enables one to understand that the ability to inflict terror and commit crime and the capacity to resist violence have shaped the history of one generation after another. Only the psychic and historical manifestations of that resistance are different.²⁶⁰

By understanding sexuality as it occurred during the Holocaust, we acknowledge the significance of intimacy in history. The Nazis used sexuality as a method of inflicting terror, but camp inmates, whose every other claim to humanity had been taken away, used it as the most basic form of resistance and method of survival.

²⁶⁰ Pawełczyńska, *Values and Violence in Auschwitz : A Sociological Analysis*, 5.

Bibliography

Archival Collections

Archiv der Mahn- und Gedenkstätte Ravensbrück (AMGR)

Published Primary Sources

Borowski, Tadeusz. *This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen / Introduction by Jan Kott ;*

Introduction Translated by Michael Kandel. Translated by Barbara Vedder. Penguin

Twentieth-Century Classics. New York: Penguin Books, 1976.

Delbo, Charlotte. *Auschwitz and After; with Introduction by Lawrence A. Langer.* Translated by

Rosette C. Lamont. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995.

Fénelon, Fania, and Marcelle Routier. *Playing for Time.* Translated by Judith Landry. New

York: Atheneum c.1976, 1977.

Hitler, Adolf. *Mein Kampf.* Translated by Ralph Manheim. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company,

1971.

Ka-tzetnik 135633. *House of Dolls.* Translated by Moshe M. Kohn. New York: Simon and

Schuster, Inc., 1955.

Kautsky, Benedikt. "Benedikt Kautsky's Description of the Concentration Camp Hierarchy

(Retrospective Account, 1961)" in *Nazi Germany (1933-1945)*, edited by Richard

Breitman, volume 7, *German History in Documents and Images*, German Historical

Institute, Washington, DC (www.germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org)

Lengyel, Olga. *Five Chimneys: The Story of Auschwitz.* New York: Howard Fertig, c1947, 1983.

Levi, Primo. *Survival in Auschwitz: The Nazi Assault on Humanity/ Including "A Conversation*

with Primo Levi by Philip Roth." Translated by Stuart Woolf. New York: Collier Books;

Toronto: Maxwell Macmillan Canada; New York: Maxwell Macmillan International, 1993.

Millu, Liana. *Smoke over Birkenau*. Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1991.

Perl, Gisella. *I Was a Doctor in Auschwitz*. New York: International Universities Press, 1948.

Jorge Semprún. *What a Beautiful Sunday!*, Translated by Alan Sheridan, A Helen and Kurt Wolff Book, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1982.

Zywulska, Krystyna. *Tanz, Mädchen...: vom Warschauer Getto nach Auschwitzwitz; ein Überlebensbericht*. München: Dt. Taschenbuch-Verl, 1988.

Secondary Sources

Anderson Hughes, Jessica R. "Forced Prostitution: The Competing and Contested Uses of the Concentration Camp Brothel," 2011.

Baer, Elizabeth Roberts, and Myrna Goldenberg, eds. *Experience and Expression : Women, the Nazis, and the Holocaust*. Detroit : Wayne State University Press, 2003.

Bridenthal, Renate, Atina Grossmann, and Marion A. Kaplan, eds. *When Biology Became Destiny: Women in Weimar and Nazi Germany*. New Feminist Library. New York: Monthly Review Press, 1984.

Burleigh, M., and W. Wippermann. *The Racial State: Germany 1933-1945*. Cambridge University Press, 1991.

Frauen: German Women Recall the Third Reich. New Brunswick, New Jersey, and London: Rutgers University Press, 2007.

Friedman, Jonathan. "Togetherness and Isolation: Holocaust Survivor Memories of Intimacy and Sexuality in the Ghettos." *The Oral History Review* 28, no. 1 (January 1, 2001): 1–16.

Goldenberg, Myrna. "Lessons Learned from Gentle Heroism: Women's Holocaust Narratives."

Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science 548 (November 1, 1996): 78–93.

Hájková, Anna. "Sexual Barter in Times of Genocide: Negotiating the Sexual Economy of the

Theresienstadt Ghetto." *Signs* 38, no. 3 (March 1, 2013): 503–33.

Hedgepeth, S.M., and R.G. Saidel, eds. *Sexual Violence Against Jewish Women During the*

Holocaust. HBI Series on Jewish Women. Brandeis University Press, 2010.

Heineman, Elizabeth D. "Sexuality and Nazism: The Doubly Unspeakable?" *Journal of the*

History of Sexuality, no. 1/2 (2002)

Herzog, Dagmar. *Sexuality in Europe: A Twentieth-Century History*. New Approaches to

European History. Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011.

———. *Brutality and Desire : War and Sexuality in Europe's Twentieth Century*. Basingstoke,

Hampshire; New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

Janz, Ulrike. "Zeugnisse überlebender Frauen." *Frauenzeitung* 9, no. Sommer 2 (1994): 21–50.

———. "Zeugnisse überlebender Frauen (Teil II)." *Frauenzeitung* 10, no. Herbst/Winter 3

(1994): 20–41.

———. "Zeugnisse überlebender Frauen (Teil III)." *Frauenzeitung* 11, no. Frühjahr 1 (1995):

48–51.

Kidron, Carol A. "Toward an Ethnography of Silence: The Lived Presence of the Past in the

Everyday Life of Holocaust Trauma Survivors and Their Descendants in Israel." *Current*

Anthropology 50, no. 1 (February 1, 2009): 5–27.

Koonz, Claudia. *Mothers in the Fatherland: Women, the Family, and Nazi Politics*. New York:

St. Martin's Press, 1987.

- Maslow, A. H. "A Theory of Human Motivation." *Psychological Review* 50, no. 4 (July 1943): 370–96.
- Master-Hunter, Tarannum, and Diana L. Heiman. "Amenorrhea: Evaluation and Treatment." *American Family Physician* 73, no. 8 (April 15, 2006): 1374–82.
- Ni Aolain, Fionnuala. "Rethinking the Concept of Harm and Legal Categorizations of Sexual Violence During War." *Theoretical Inquiries in Law* 1 (2000): 307.
- Ofer, Dalia, and Lenore J. Weitzman, eds. *Women in the Holocaust*. New Haven : Yale University Press, 1998.
- Paul, Christa. *Zwangsprostitution: Staatlich Errichtete Bordelle Im Nationalsozialismus*. 1. Aufl. Reihe Deutsche Vergangenheit, Bd. 115. Berlin: Edition Hentrich, 1994.
- Pawelczyńska, Anna. *Values and Violence in Auschwitz : A Sociological Analysis*. Translated by Catherine S. Leach. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1979.
- Ringelheim, Joan. "Women and the Holocaust: A Reconsideration of Research." *Signs* 10, no. 4 (July 1, 1985): 741–61.
- Roden, Rudolph G. "Sexuality and the Holocaust Survivor." *Israel Journal of Psychiatry and Related Sciences* 22, no. 3 (1985): 211–20.
- Roos, Julia. "Backlash against Prostitutes' Rights: Origins and Dynamics of Nazi Prostitution Policies." *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 11, no. 1 (2002): 67–94.
- Ryn, Zdzislaw. "Between Life and Death: Experiences of Concentration Camp Mussulmen during the Holocaust." *Genetic, Social & General Psychology Monographs* 116, no. 1 (February 1990): 7.
- Saidel, Rochelle G. *The Jewish Women of Ravensbruck Concentration Camp*. Madison, Wis.; London: University of Wisconsin Press ; Eurospan [distributor], 2006.

Sommer, Robert. *Das KZ-Bordell: Sexuelle Zwangsarbeit in Nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslagern*. Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2009.

Timm, Annette F. "Sex with a Purpose: Prostitution, Venereal Disease, and Militarized Masculinity in the Third Reich." *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 11, no. 1/2 (January 1, 2002): 223–55.