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THE LIVES OF LESBIAN WOMEN IN BERLIN BEFORE AND BEYOND THE RISE OF THE NAZIS: 1933-1945

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ABSTRACT

Often times in Holocaust scholarship the lives of lesbian women are overlooked. The purpose of this study is to examine the lives of lesbian women in Berlin before and during the Nazi regime. The first chapter lays the contextual and historical groundwork of LGBT life in Berlin during the Weimar Republic. Subsequent to the rise of the Nazis, the lives of lesbian women changed on an individual and communal level which ultimately led to the destruction of the budding LGBT social scene in Weimar Berlin. Chapter two addresses the experiences of lesbian women in Berlin during the Second World War. It examines the effects of Nazi policy on lesbian women’s personal and professional lives through biographical texts and State Prosecutor Files. The third chapter examines the lives of lesbian women in Nazi concentration camps, more specifically the only all-female camp Ravensbrück. Few lesbian women wrote or talked about their experiences and persecution after the war. Despite the limited source material on this subject, there is still a lot to be learned from the lives of lesbian women in Berlin from 1933-1945.
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Introduction
Prior to the rise of the Nazis, Berlin offered an environment for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) persons to socialize and discover their identities. Compared to many other cities in Germany, Berlin was a place for people who were ‘different’ and often provided a relatively safer environment than in the countryside. This environment existed in Berlin mainly due to a growing population and lack of a large Catholic community. When the National Socialist German Worker’s Party (NSDAP) came to power in 1933, the Nazis began to target non-political opponents, capitalizing on existing homophobia to arrest and prosecute gay men. The Nazis saw homosexuality as a form of sexual and social ‘deviance’. Homosexuality not only threatened moral standards of Nazi society but also threatened reproduction by “hereditarily fit Aryans.”¹ Under Paragraph 175, men labeled as ‘gay’ were sent to concentration camps to “cleanse Aryan society”. Enacted in 1871 and expanded by the Nazis in 1935, Paragraph 175 of the German Penal Code stated that, “Unnatural fornication, whether between persons of the male sex or of humans with beasts, is to be punished by imprisonment; a sentence of loss of civil rights may also be passed” (Appendix 1). Under Paragraph 175 50,000 men were convicted and between 10-15,000 men were sent to concentration camps.

While Nazi ideology sought to eradicate homosexuality in the Third Reich and ultimately destroy the organized of the LGBT scene in Berlin, Nazi policies differed starkly between men and women. The Nazis were obsessed with reproduction and quickly made the matter political. They believed that a woman would suffer without a child to care for and made it the duty of every ‘able Aryan woman’ to reproduce. This obsession with increasing the population was of higher

importance to the Nazis than imprisoning women based on their sexuality. Marriage and motherhood took priority over sexual deviance.\(^2\)

As I began to research this topic, I was surprised by the lack of scholarship surrounding lesbian women during World War II. When testimonies of Holocaust victims were recorded in the 1960’s and 70’s many LGBT survivors were too embarrassed by their identities to share their experiences. Living an open life as a gay man or lesbian woman was still a taboo topic well into the 1970s and is still taboo in some parts of the world today. Following the Nazi era, Paragraph 175 was reformed in West Germany in 1969 and 1973. It wasn’t until 1994 that the law was permanently removed from the German Penal Code. As attitudes towards LGBT persons have progressed, scholars have completed significant work on gay male survivors. However, there is a hole where the lesbian female narrative should be. Claudia Schoppmann is a leading scholar in queer studies and the Holocaust. Her recent work on lesbian women in the Holocaust has exposed the academic field to the lesbian narrative. However, a majority of Schoppmann’s work is not well known, nor taught amongst Holocaust scholars. I aim to expand upon Schoppmann’s work to identify missing key insights to the lesbian narrative of the Holocaust. Through testimonies and primary documents, I analyze the lives of lesbian women in Berlin from before and beyond the rise of the Nazi Party.\(^3\)

Before delving into the text, it is import to address my use of the term ‘LGBT’ in this paper. LGBT is an acronym that stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender. The contemporary term is an umbrella term that seeks to include all queer identities. I use this term to refer to the entire queer scene in Berlin, specifically if I am not referring simply to lesbian women. Although

\(^3\) Ibid.
the term is very modern and was not used in the context of Weimar Berlin, I have chosen to use it as to address all identities out of respect. There were many individuals in Weimar Berlin who identified as many different sexualities and genders. By using the umbrella term LGBT, this thesis attempts to be as inclusive as possible without misrepresenting any LGBT persons. This is not to infer that all members of the LGBT scene of Weimar Berlin accepted or recognized the existence of other varying identities. Taboos within the LGBT sphere were present then and still exist today.

The body of my thesis will be broken up into three parts. The first chapter will provide background information by examining the atmosphere of Berlin in the Weimar Republic with respect to homosexuality. Charlotte Wolff’s autobiography provides an excellent case study for this period because she sheds light on her experience as a young lesbian in Berlin during the 1920s. Robert Beachy has done extensive research on the LGBT scene in Weimar Berlin in his book “Gay Berlin”. Beachy explores the social expansion of lesbian and gay meeting places, police tolerance and scientific exploration that occurred during that time. His study on Magnus Hirschfeld highlights one of the leading academics and political activists whose actions reflect the progressive movements of Berlin during that time.¹ Chapter one also analyzes how the rise of the Nazis to power quickly dismantled the budding LGBT scene of Berlin.

Chapter two begins to deal with the wartime period and centers around the lives of lesbian women in Berlin during the war. Claudia Schoppmann interviewed lesbian women from this period in her book “Days of Masquerade”. I analyze the biographical texts of three women from Berlin in this book to understand how their lives changed during WWII. Then I discuss three very different State Prosecutor Files on three different lesbian women. These files uncover the rhetoric and socio-cultural attitudes towards lesbian women during that time. Finally, I examine “Marta

Halusa und Margot Liu: die lebenslange Liebe zweier Tänzerinnen“ by Ingeborg Boxhammer. This book combines biographical text with multiple files from the Berlin State Prosecutor files to provide a well-rounded and factually sound picture of the lives of two lesbian women in Berlin during the Nazi era.5

Chapter three pushes outside of the geographical boundaries of Berlin to explore the prejudices and attitudes that lesbian women faced in concentration camps. The reason that I am expanding the study geographically at this point is because there is simply a lack of information regarding lesbian women in concentration camps, specifically women from Berlin. However, there are at least three cases of documented lesbians in Ravensbrück. During my time in the archives there, I was able to access information about these three women as well as view secondary sources on the subject. I further utilize interviews from the Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive (VHA) about Ravensbrück and Auschwitz to uncover three main themes regarding lesbian activity in the camps. Third-party narratives describe the naivety towards homosexuality, homophobia and sometimes beneficial aspects of lesbian relationships in the camps.

The purpose of this thesis is not to argue whether or not lesbian women were targeted and persecuted by the Nazis. The purpose is to uncover the circumstances in which lesbian women found themselves after the rise of the Nazis. Their experiences differed starkly from homosexual men. Further, the experiences of each woman in this study differed greatly from the next. Lesbian women in camps were subject to similar prejudices as lesbian women outside of the camps. However, lesbian women in Berlin were affected personally and professionally in different ways

as a result of the rise of the Nazis. Therefore, it is ever more important that we study their lives to better understand the lesbian narrative and how their story fits into Holocaust.
Chapter 1

A History of Gay Berlin and the Sexual Revolution: 1919-1933

“But Berlin was the best place in which to get over disappointment and self-doubt - on the surface in any case. It catered to all and everything. People who don’t fit into stereotypes have an uncanny gift of recognizing one another...As far as I remember; the Weimar Republic gave everybody the chance to live their lives undisturbed.” - Charlotte Wolff
Out of the economic instability of Weimar Berlin arose three arenas that comprised the sexual revolution: the cultural, scientific and political movements. The cultural openness, which blossomed in the bosom of Berlin’s underground bars and clubs, created an environment in which individuals could discover more explorative sexual practices. The scientific expansion, built up by Magnus Hirschfeld and his cohorts, attempted to decode so-called sexual ‘abnormalities’ and created an arena for discourse. That discourse was then taken to the political stage where activism attempted to create equality for LGBT persons, mainly through the attempted repeal of Germany’s anti-sodomy law. By looking into the intersections of these arenas, this chapter sets the historical groundwork for this study so that we can better understand how the rise of the Nazis was so detrimental to the LGBT scene.

What better way to understand the cultural, scientific and political changes within the LGBT sphere of Weimar Berlin than through individuals who experienced it and participated in it? Charlotte Wolff and Magnus Hirschfeld are two such individuals. Wolff was born on September 30, 1897 into a middle-class Jewish family in West Prussia. She studied literature in Danzig and Freiburg, and then medicine in Königsberg, Tübingen and, finally, Berlin. Wolff’s autobiography is a wonderfully written, first-hand account of the cultural openness of the LGBT scene in Berlin from 1926 to 1936. Further, Wolff’s work in prenatal clinics exposed the increased importance of sexual discourse in the medical field. Magnus Hirschfeld was born on May 14, 1868 and emerged as a pioneering sexologist in Berlin during the Weimar Republic. In 1919, Hirschfeld founded the Institut für Sexualwissenschaft (Institute for Sexual Science) which, as the first of its kind, would become the model for the study of sex and sexuality. His work through the Institut für Sexualwissenschaft provides insight into the arenas of scientific research and political activism in

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Weimar Berlin. Through an examination of the lives of Charlotte Wolff and Magnus Hirschfeld, within the three arenas of the sexual revolution, we can gain a better understanding of what life was like in Berlin during that time as a person in the LGBT scene.

The German historian Detlev Peukert has argued that there were two strands of studying the sexual revolution in Weimar Germany: the bio-logistic approach and the psychoanalytic approach. The bio-logistic approach focuses on defining sexual behaviors by empirically studying human behavior. Following the struggle for population growth in Germany, bio-logisticians were concerned with intervening in the behaviors of ‘sexual deviants’ to comply with the established natural laws of human sexuality. Hirschfeld’s institute focused on the categorization of sexual beings and had a biological viewpoint. However, he departed from the bio-logistic field when variants of racial cleansing were introduced. On the other hand, psychoanalysts focused on the individual. Though they borrowed from the methodology of the natural sciences, psychoanalysts concluded that each person’s conscious was unique and should be treated accordingly. With the addition of “humanistic education reform”, the theoretical approach to studying sexuality and the human mind came to “display their full liberalizing potential.” While both approaches differed in methodology, they “had the common aim of combating prejudice, ignorance and baseless fears in the field of sexual behavior.” For the purposes of this study, I will focus primarily on the psychoanalytical approach and how the presence of the individual in medicine came to play a major role in the sexual revolution.

7 Beachy, 160.
9 Beachy, 103.
Cultural Change and Exploration

Charlotte Wolff was a first-hand witness to the sexual revolution (liberalization of attitudes towards sex) of Berlin during the Weimar Republic. Her testimony successfully communicates the many facets of social change, which occurred in Weimar Berlin such as the proliferation of LGBT nightlife and prostitution, effects of decreased censorship in the media, and the increasing acceptance of less traditional relationships. In Berlin, “We (Wolff) were free, nearly forty years before the Women’s Liberation Movement started in America...We were simply ourselves.”

Wolff’s account highlights many crucial cultural aspects of the LGBT sociocultural expansion in Weimar Berlin.

Following the creation of the Weimar Republic, restrictions on censorship were much less strict, allowing LGBT publications to circulate media and create films with much greater representation than before. Multiple magazines were created and circulated worldwide. Die Freundschaft became the world’s first homosexual magazine in 1919. Die Freunde, a lesbian journal, published romance stories, lesbian opinion polls and advised women to vote for gay-friendly parties. These journals and papers not only gave a voice to the LGBT sphere but also gave it life. Social change had never been more prevalent for lesbian and gay persons, not only in Berlin, but also around the world. Travel guides on gay-friendly vacation spots soon found their ways into the pages of the LGBT press. Die Freundschaft claimed to have over 10,000 subscriptions “as far-flung as North and South America.”

Through media, the LGBT scene of Berlin in Weimar Germany gained greater global visibility.

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10 Wolff, 106.
11 Beachy, 164.
12 Ibid, 192.
Apart from media and plays, films portraying LGBT characters made their way to the big screen, the most famous being Richard Oswell’s *Anders als die Andern.* 13 Roughly translated as *Different Than the Others,* the film centers on Paul Köner, a pianist who commits suicide when he is blackmailed for falling in love with his male pupil. The film highlighted the injustices faced by LGBT persons, and challenged the German anti-sodomy law then in place. Perhaps the most important scene of the film is when Köner attends a lecture by Magnus Hirschfeld, which acted as an educational tool for LGBT people and raised awareness of homophobic attitudes in Berlin. 14 Robert Beachy notes the importance of film as an educational tool in Weimar Berlin. He attributes the decreased censorship of the Republic to the increased presence of realistic LGBT characters in film. Paired with the increased LGBT media, according to Wolff,

> At no other time had there been such creative daring among German artists and thinkers alike. Culture flourished while the country seemed at death’s door. It was the heyday of erotic pleasures, sophistication and wit, which gave spice to plays, chansons and the cabaret. The ‘intimate’ theater with its musicals and revues reached a quality never achieved again... Heaven was not somewhere above us, but on earth, in the German metropolis. 15

Wolff highlights how, when allowed to publish media and create art, LGBT magazines were able to spread the word about plays and movie showings, which created a safe space for socialization. However, cinemas were not the main safe space for LGBT people. That responsibility fell within the limits of local LGBT bars and clubs of Berlin.

In Berlin, nightlife acted not only as a crucial arena for sexual experimentation and the discovery of different sexual and gender identity, but also as part of a larger social impulse for

13 *Anders Als Die Andern,* Directed by Richard Oswald. By Magnus Hirschfeld, Produced by Richard Oswald, Performed by Conrad Veidt and Fritz Schulz (Berlin: Richard Oswald-Film Berlin, 1919), Film.
14 Beachy, 167.
15 Wolff, 65.
sexual exploration. The creation of LGBT media introduced advertisement, such as the marketing of gay and lesbian bars and clubs. Beachy estimates the number of lesbian and gay establishments in Berlin may have ranged from 80 to 100 by 1926. Tiergarten and the Passage became synonymous with cheap prostitution and the West end of Berlin with more ‘sophisticated’ prostitutes and cocaine.\textsuperscript{16} Wolff recalls her numerous escapades to lesbian bars and clubs, such as the Verona Diele, where lesbians would dance together as men watched from the edges of the dance floor. Wolff exclaims, “It cast an unforgettable spell over me.”\textsuperscript{17} Beachy views the nightlife of Berlin not only as an arena for LGBT exploration, but also as a tourist attraction. He highlights the outsider’s’ curiosity about the sexual revolution of Berlin citing the notorious escapades of Oxford graduate students W.H. Auden and Christopher Isherwood. In 1930, Berlin was host to 280,000 tourists, however, it is hard to estimate just how many of them were tourists of Berlin’s less ‘moral’ activities.\textsuperscript{18}

What about those who did not identify within the LGBT sphere? Even those who did not partake in same-sex relations could still experiment with other forms of sexual freedom in Berlin during that time. In her autobiography, Wolff speaks of love triangles with married couples on more than one occasion. Open marriages and even polygamous relationships found their ways into Weimar Berlin. There was opposition to the movement from more traditional mores and LGBT people had to be careful. However, there was limited cushion room to allow LGBT people to function in a more open society.

\textsuperscript{16} Beachy, 191.  
\textsuperscript{17} Wolff, 75  
\textsuperscript{18} Beachy, 296.
In Weimar Germany, there were three types of institutes established in the medical field, which blossomed into the scientific movement of the sexual revolution. The scientific movement sought to eradicate ignorance and prejudice through educating the public on more liberal sexual relationships and practices. First, there was the creation of prenatal clinics that provided new family services that broke the mold of traditional medicine beyond eugenic premarital counseling. Further, there was the creation of birth control clinics whose only mission was to provide safe contraception. Finally, there was Magnus Hirschfeld and his Institut für Sexualwissenschaft (Institute for Sexual Science). Without Hirschfeld and the prenatal clinics, sexology would not have been nearly as successful as it was.

What do the institutes of Weimar Berlin have to do with the sexual revolution in relation to the LGBT scene? The most important impact of these programs was their ability to start the conversation on sexual discourse in its many forms. The scientific movement of sexology created an arena in which individuals could not only study sex but also convey their findings to the public. Prior to the sexual revolution, it was mostly a parent’s responsibility to educate children about sex. During the sexual revolution, the responsibility of sex education fell to medical personnel, changing the relationship between doctor and patient. Medical practice opened to the argument that patients should have control over their own bodies. Doctors should provide counseling to enable individuals to make their own decisions medically as well as sexually. This turned the patient into a person, rather than just another medical case, which granted them agency. Without this ability to see patients as active individuals with the need to decide their own medical treatments, the medical field would not have shifted to treat the needs of the individual. This
conversation became crucial to the political movement because it exposed how homosexual individuals required different forms of sexual education and treatment than had been provided in the past. Without the scientific movement, the political reform of the Weimar Republic with respect to the LGBT scene would not have been possible.

While the creation of the Institut für Sexualwissenschaft became extremely important for scientific research and counseling, the creation of prenatal clinics further opened the rhetoric of the medical field. In her book on sexual reform, Atina Grossmann outlines the services provided by these clinics. Doctors and social workers provided education on pregnancy, breastfeeding, childbirth, hygiene and nutrition. Further, the clinics provided aid to victims of rape, alcoholism, child abuse, infertility, wife battering and a slew of other dangers that faced women in those times.19 For the first time, private matters of the home came into the public sphere. More importantly, they were considered within the medical sphere as detrimental to health and could therefore be treated by professionals. While some clinics aimed to expose private matters, some were designed to limit the public’s view of the medical relationship between a doctor and patient. Supported by Margaret Sanger, the pioneer of the American birth control movement, and her German companion Agnes Smedley, five birth control centers were established in Berlin in 1928. The sole purpose of these birth control clinics was to provide women with access to and education on birth control. In their first year of operation, the clinics treated 2,705 patients. In the following year the number increased significantly.20

Grossman also highlights the importance of female doctors and social workers in the field of prenatal medicine. These female doctors considered themselves more highly qualified than their

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20 Ibid, 55.
male counterparts since they understood the “total context of a woman’s life”. This method, known as the holistic ‘women-oriented approach’, served the social role of incorporating gendered terminology into the medical field. Before Charlotte Wolff migrated to Great Britain, she began what she claims was some of her most rewarding work as a prenatal doctor in Berlin. She worked twice a week under the director of the first birth control clinic. She saw the advantage to psychoanalysis as “a pointer to a wider view of the nature of human beings.” Her work not only gave her satisfaction in knowing that she educated and provided invaluable aid to poorer Berliners, but that she was also contributing to a new and creative facet of the medical field. Wolff knew how important her work was, but also acknowledges the importance and far-reaching influence of sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld.

If there is one individual who can be credited for bringing the sexual revolution in Berlin to science, it is Magnus Hirschfeld. His founding of the Institut für Sexualwissenschaft was the first of its kind, attempting to establish sexology as a field of legitimate study and provide care to patients on a specifically sexual basis. Supported by paying customers, the institute had departments on sexual biology, sociology, pathology and ethnography. Hirschfeld’s resources benefitted not only homosexuals, but heterosexuals as well. The institute gradually expanded to include services for families such as sex education, sexual counseling, and treatments and medical experiments for sexually transmitted diseases and impotence. In 1921, the institute opened a library with access to many of Hirschfeld’s scientific results. Access to counseling and information on specifically sexual topics further widened the conversation on sex.

21 Ibid, 67.
22 Wolff, 103.
23 Beachy, 161.
24 Ibid, 161.
Magnus Hirschfeld was not only involved in academic activism, but also opened the door to political change. In his appearance in *Anders als die Andern*, the film discussed earlier, Hirschfeld speaks of the political struggle for the repeal of Paragraph 175. Two main political groups were involved in the attempt to repeal Paragraph 175. Although the two groups had similar goals of advocating for gay rights, their methods divided them severely. The Wissenschaftlich-humanitäres Komitee (WhK), or Scientific-Humanitarian Committee, advocated for the use of scientific research on homosexuals to educate the public and government. Headed by Kurt Hiller and Richard Linsert and allied with the communist parties of Berlin, they sought limited reform, arguing particularly for the repeal of Paragraph 175.25 It should not come as a surprise that the WhK took much of its methodology from the teachings of Hirschfeld and his scientific approach. One primary argument of Hirschfeld’s group in defense of men accused of violating Paragraph 175 was that homosexuals had “a lesser resistance to their heightened sexual instinctual drive”. This argument appealed to the German code that pardons men who commit crimes in irrational states of mind.26 It is easy to see how other pro-repeal groups saw this argument as problematic, as it denied the gay men of any agency in their sexual acts.

On the other end of the political spectrum was the Gemeinschaft der Eigenen (GdE), or Community of the Self-Owned, who stressed the importance of “a broad cultural and aesthetic program”. The GdE relied on the Hellenistic model to portray the positive “model of erotic male

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25 Ibid, 89.
26 Ibid, 100.
comradeship” which was put forth by GdE leaders Adolf Brand and Ewald Tscheck. By appealing to the elite, the GdE attempted to prove that “male friend-love” was not only beneficial to society but also crucial for the rejection of “bourgeois social norms and proletarian-based socialism.” The emergence of racial nationalism and eugenic cleanliness are also present in the rhetoric of the GdE. This model of perception led the GdE to focus more on influencing the elite society for acceptance. They highlighted the positive influence of homosexuals on culture rather than cooperating with other LGBT political groups for greater equality.

Paragraph 175 only applied to acts of sexual conduct between men, so how does this political debate have anything to do with Berlin’s lesbian women? In his article titled “The Rites of Artgenossen: Contesting Homosexual Political Culture in Weimar Germany”, Glenn Ramsey sheds light on a third political group, the Bund für Menschenrecht (BfM), whose influence on LGBT politics in Berlin during the Weimar Republic gave women some, if not minor, say in the political arena. The BfM differed from the other two political groups in that it demanded that the state recognize the rights of individuals. This liberal framework opened up avenues for women to voice their concerns for women’s rights. Serving as members of the executive branch, some females aimed to “win broader social awareness of women’s relationships and the connection between lesbianism and gender-inverted clothing styles.” With the way the trend for gay rights and cultural openness was leading, women could only assume that greater equality for them would follow as well. These political movements were successful in the passing of proposed Paragraph 296, which would have legalized homosexual acts in 1929. However, their progress was quickly

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28 Ibid, 104.
29 Ibid, 96.
30 Ibid, 99
dismantled in 1933 and Paragraph 175 remained a part of the German penal code until March of 1994.

Polizei to Gestapo: the Rise of the Nazis

Despite the illegality of same-sex relations between men, the Weimar era police force in Berlin allowed the LGBT scene to exist within limits. As Berlin’s population grew at staggering rates, policing public spaces grew to be very challenging. Therefore, Berlin Police Commissioner Leopold von Meerscheidt-Hüllessem decided that it would be easier to coexist with budding homosexual meeting places rather than to expend resources to dispose of them.\(^{31}\) It is estimated that between 1904 and 1920, only one case of two men caught having homosexual relations was reported. Allegedly, Berlin officials continued the practice of tolerance as late as 1932.\(^{32}\) This practice of passive enforcement allowed for LGBT persons to gain visibility and identity within limits in Berlin prior to 1933.

While the practice of authoritative toleration seemed to continue, there were undoubtable instances of homophobia. Homophobic attitudes from the 1800s were still widely present, especially among more religious crowds. Social norms dictated what was ‘morally pure’ and outlined the importance of marriage between a man and a woman to uphold community interests. Peukert hypothesizes that a key aspect of the sexual revolution was the attempt of LGBT activists, such as Hirschfeld, to educate the public and steer them away from ignorance and prejudice.\(^{33}\)

One of the greatest threats posed to homosexuals during the Weimar Republic was the issue of

\(^{31}\) Beachy, 55 \\
^{32}\) Ibid, 83 \\
^{33}\) Peukert, 102.
blackmail. Locals and tourists alike were targeted by blackmailers and Berlin became synonymous with this crime. Hirschfeld estimated that nearly 30 percent of homosexuals in Berlin had been victims of blackmail. Unlike Hirschfeld, the majority of gay men and lesbian women expressed their identities behind closed doors. Being gay or lesbian was still a very taboo topic, and despite police tolerance, the public was not always as accepting.

As early as 1931, the rise of authoritarian attitudes began to have a negative effect on the sexual revolution in Berlin. In the spring of 1931, Charlotte Wolff was released from her position as a prenatal doctor for her ‘safety’ and began working as a low-profile electro-physical therapist. She does not state whether this move was political or due to her sexuality. Wolff refers to 1932 as “a year of doom for me” when, in autumn, her longtime partner of nine years left her for fear of dating a Jew. In February of 1933, she was formally and abruptly dismissed from her job at the Krankenkassen and was arrested that same day for cross-dressing. Three short months later, Wolff boarded a train headed to Paris, leaving behind the life she had worked so hard to build. Hirschfeld was also targeted by the new regime. On the morning of May 6, a group of 100 students, accompanied by a brass band, stormed the Institut für Sexualwissenschaft and destroyed the library that Hirschfeld had spent 14 years building. Luckily, Hirschfeld had been traveling on a lecture tour at the time and escaped to Paris where he died two years later of a heart attack.

The trend of cultural expansion and openness would not continue, but reverse as the Nazis came to power in 1933 and began to overthrow the political and social structure. Decades’ worth of progress for LGBT people ended amidst the cries of “Heil Hitler”. On February 23, 1933, all

34 Beachy, 82.
35 Wolff, 109.
36 Beachy, 241.
homosexual meeting places such as clubs and bars were closed.\textsuperscript{37} The next day, the Nazis banished all LGBT publications. Homophobia had existed for generations before in Germany, manifesting itself in the law as Paragraph 175. The Nazis only expanded upon an underlying fear to further their own purposes. Nazi eugenic policy was chiefly concerned with “pure Aryan” reproduction. This meant not only ensuring that the “Aryan” race was racially pure, but also that all those who were pure and able to were actually reproducing. Gay men were seen as a significant danger to this policy. Not only were they a threat to reproduction, they posed the threat of corrupting future generations. Through propaganda the new regime blamed male homosexuals for decreased birth rates and effectively began to persecute them under the expanded version of Paragraph 175.\textsuperscript{38} By 1936, the number of men accused of violating Paragraph 175 had increased dramatically. Men labeled as ‘gay’ were sent to concentration camps to cleanse “Aryan” society.

Why did the Nazi state persecute only gay men and not lesbian women under Paragraph 175? The law simply did not apply to women. There was much discourse among Nazi officials about including women in the expansion of Paragraph 175. However, officials thought it would be superfluous. Homosexuality was considered synonymous with prostitution. Therefore, since prostitution was already illegal, outlawing lesbianism would not help the Reich. The Criminal Law Commission spoke out on this matter in 1935 after disputes concluded that male homosexuality posed a greater threat to the government than female homosexuality did. Their final decision not to punish lesbians reads as follows:

Female homosexuality should essentially be regarded as punishable behavior, for it is likely to undermine blood values and to draw women away from their duties to the Volk. However, the special circumstances of the present time – above all, the great loss of men in the world war which has reduced women’s prospects of

marriage – do not make it seem appropriate that lesbianism should be prosecuted under criminal law. The definition of such offence must be postponed because female homosexuality in its full extent is no longer simply substitute behavior but an inner lack of stability. 39

This quote further substantiates the stereotype that Nazi officials believed women and not men could be ‘cured’ of their ‘immoral’ sexualities. It is because of this distinction that the Nazi regime did not target women. However, that is not to say that their experiences did not differ from the experiences of non-LGBT women. By 1933, lesbian women in Berlin found themselves in these circumstances. Some hid, some fled, some were persecuted and some were lucky to survive. However, a majority of Holocaust scholarship ignores the narrative of these women. Further investigation is needed to understand the plight of lesbian women as the rise of the Nazis led to the decline of freedom for lesbian women in Berlin.

39 Quoted after Grau, ibid, 84.
Chapter 2

The Lives of Lesbian Women in Berlin under Nazi Rule

“Hannelore wears a tuxedo
And around her neck a tie.
And hanging by a silk cord,
A monocle on her eye.
She boxes, foxes, golfs, and taps,
And just 'tween you and me, she swipes!
Especially in May.
An’ I even heard someone confide
She has a bridegroom and a bride
All that just by the way-
Hannelor! Hannelor!
Most beautiful kid from Hallesches Tor” - Claire Waldoff
Prior to the beginning of fascist rule in Germany, the budding existence of queer culture had created somewhat of a safe haven for LGBT people to grow into themselves as individuals and as a community. As discussed in the previous chapter, the Nazi party quickly demolished this network of inclusivity and left fear in its place. This chapter seeks to understand the experiences of lesbian women in Berlin who were subject to this fear. While some lesbians were prosecuted and sent to camps (perhaps not because of their sexuality but for their religion or political stance), this chapter focuses on women who stayed in Berlin. Many of these women had experienced both the expansion and destruction of the LGBT scene. This chapter draws on the experiences of many women who witnessed this destruction firsthand. By comparing their experiences through biographical accounts and police records, I aim to analyze how their lives changed once the Nazis came to power.

I will begin by examining three interview-based biographies from Claudia Schoppmann’s *Days of Masquerade*. Schoppmann’s attention to detail provides us with a fully developed picture of the lives these women led. Then I will examine multiple cases from the Berlin State Prosecutor’s Files that are about lesbian women. These files lack extensive detail about the personal lives of these women. However, they show an interesting view into the rhetoric of the Nazis towards lesbian women and the public’s attitude towards female homosexuality. The final section of this chapter focuses on a combination of the first two sections. The work of Ingeborg Boxhammer utilizes biographical text combined with cases from the Berlin State Prosecutor’s Files to examine the relationship of two lesbian dancers in Berlin. Her work provides a more complete picture on how the lives of two specific lesbian women changed after 1933. After analyzing all three sections, it is clear that the rise of the Nazis drastically altered the lives of all of these women in very different ways.
Although each individual experienced a variety of differing struggles, I conclude that the impact of Nazi policy and persecution on lesbian women in Berlin during World War II was more perilous for some than it was for others. One major distinction between these women was whether the regime’s policies affected their private or personal lives. Some lesbian women faced harsh realities of personal threat. Others remarked that the Nazis changed their careers rather than their personal lives. The following biographical and archival material delves further into how the Nazis affected the lives of lesbian women in Berlin during World War II.

**Claudia Schoppmann *Days of Masquerade***

Claudia Schoppmann suggests that one of the greatest influences the Nazis had over sexual policy was over the destruction of the public, organized, sexual movement.\(^{40}\) Her work on the experiences of lesbians in concentration camps is at the forefront of queer studies and the Holocaust. One of her more recent works, titled *Days of Masquerade*, is comprised of short biographical narratives about lesbian women before and during World War II. For this chapter, I have taken three biographies from Schoppmann’s book to examine; Claire Waldoff, Margarette Knittel and Ruth Roellig. Each of these women provides a very different view on the prejudices and attitudes that lesbian women experienced in Berlin during WWII. Although there are many more biographies in her book, I have chosen these specific women based on two criteria; they lived in Berlin, and they were not politically or religiously opposed to the regime. By controlling for political activity and religion, I aim to remove outside factors that might have affected how the

Nazis targeted these women. The goal is to ensure that their only ‘offense’ against the Third Reich was their sexuality.

**Claire Waldoff**

Claire Waldoff was born as Clara Wortmann in October of 1884 to a large family in an industrial mining town.\(^1\) After graduating high school in Hannover, Waldoff moved to Berlin in 1906 to try her hand at acting. Her preliminary ventures in the entertainment business gained her popularity and the Roland, the premier cabaret club at the time, quickly picked her up. Waldoff quickly rose to fame, singing at all the major clubs in Berlin, around Germany and even in London. Her satire appealed to the masses and her facial expressions and lackadaisical manner put the crowds at ease. Waldoff herself seemed most at ease among the lesbian bars in Berlin. The singer and actor made little effort to hide her sexuality from the public. A number of her performance pieces, when talking about love, referred to women (see the quote at the beginning of the chapter).\(^2\) She began a lifelong relationship with Olga von Roeder during World War I. The two remained inseparable throughout their lives and are buried together today in the Prague Cemetery of Stuttgart.

Waldoff’s career flourished in the time of the Weimar Republic; however, it would be severely affected by the Nazi rise to power. Information surrounding Waldoff during the Nazi era is foggy. Different accounts provide different information. However, Waldoff’s career took a nosedive after she received a “temporary political performance ban”.\(^3\) Shortly before a highly

\(^1\) Ibid, 58.
\(^2\) Ibid, 60.
\(^3\) Ibid, 66.
contested performance of hers, reports surfaced claiming that Waldoff had been arrested and had hung herself in her cell on July 7, 1935. Comically enough, on July 25th of that year, Waldoff published a letter, alive and well, from a vacation in Berchtesgaden. Soon after, the contested performance (scheduled prior to her ‘death’) occurred and angered Nazi officials. Eventually, Nazi Propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels banned the performer from appearing on stage. However, Waldoff continued to perform until 1943.

What I find to be particularly important about this case is how Waldoff’s career was affected more than her personal life. Despite her sexuality, Waldoff continued to perform, even if it meant altering her material to be more ‘appropriate’ for Nazi audiences. Perhaps it was her stature and popularity that protected her. Waldoff’s experiences under the Third Reich provide a more pensive presentation of the experiences of lesbian women in Weimar Berlin. Schoppmann does not mention whether or not her love life suffered during this time. Compared to many of the other women in this paper, Waldoff was only slightly affected. She once wrote, “Nothing happens to me. I danced at the edge of the abyss and no one dared to push me off.”

Margarette Knittel

Margarette Knittel was born in September of 1906 and grew up as an only child in Friedrichshain, Berlin. Even from a young age, Knittel knew she had an “innate natural predisposition” towards women. By 19 years-old, she had entered into her first serious relationship until her girlfriend got married. Her second girlfriend, Else, introduced her to the

44 Ibid, 69.
46 Ibid, 92.
budding LGBT scene in Berlin. She read lesbian magazines, attended gay nightclubs and fashioned suits and a short haircut. When the Nazis rose to power, the clubs were closed so Knittel and her friends began meeting at their apartments. They even ventured to rent out a dance school in Mahlsdorf until the owner became scared.47

For Knittel, it seems that the Nazi rise to power did not affect her in any great way. Despite the fact that the clubs were closed, her friends remained close and found other ways to socialize. She was not Jewish and claimed that she rarely faced any harassment for her sexuality.48 Schoppmann hypothesizes that Knittel’s relative safety was because she lived with her father until 1959, instead of living with her girlfriend. Knittel and her girlfriend, Friedel, moved in together after the war ended and remained together until Friedel’s death in 1977. Knittel later became very active in reviving lesbian subculture in Berlin.

A prominent theme within Knittel’s testimony is the existence of fake marriages. She recounts multiple occasions where homosexual men and women got married to avoid public skepticism. Her second girlfriend, Else, married a gay man named Fritz in 1937.49 While women were not specifically targeted by Paragraph 175, the Nazi regime imprisoned between 5,000 and 15,000 gay men in concentration camps.50 By entering into a fake marriage, Else could possibly have saved his life. These relationships are important to the narrative of gay men and lesbian women during the Nazi era. On multiple occasions, sources mention homosexuals entering into

47 Ibid, 94.
48 Ibid, 96.
49 Ibid, 97.
platonic marriages to avoid scrutiny. However, if such marriages remained childless their relations could come under suspect by the Nazis.\textsuperscript{51}

\textit{Ruth Roellig}

The story of Ruth Roellig is mixed with mystery and contradiction. The somewhat famous author of Berlin was born December 14, 1878.\textsuperscript{52} After graduating as an editor in 1911, Roellig began working for a publishing house in Berlin. Prior to the 1933 Nazi ban on magazines with homosexual content, Roellig wrote for many of the popular same-sex centered magazines, such as \textit{Garconne} and \textit{Frauenliebe}. She published short stories and poems among editorials. Amidst many of her works, one specific text stands out because it relates to the LGBT scene in Berlin; \textit{Berlins Lesbische Frauen}. First published in 1928, her book described 14 bars, clubs and meetings spots “in the world of women” of Weimar Berlin. Perhaps the most important part of her book was not that it acted as a guide to lesbian activity in Berlin during that time, but that it attempted to destigmatize it. She wrote, “Lesbian women are neither sick nor inferior-lesbian women are indeed different, but they are no better or worse than normal human beings.”\textsuperscript{53}

By 1935, her writing had taken on a more conservative tone to avoid outright confrontation with the Gestapo. \textit{Der Andere}, published in 1935, follows the story of an unsuccessful author. The murder mystery plot attempts to skillfully mask the appearance of the main character as a closeted gay man.\textsuperscript{54} The book also features flirtations between two female characters and supports the ideal of independent women. \textit{Der Andere} was not a typical Nazi-era book that the regime would have

\textsuperscript{51} Schoppmann, 1997, 180.
\textsuperscript{52} Schoppmann, 1996, 136.
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid, 134.
\textsuperscript{54} Ibid, 139.
supported. However, just two years later, Roellig published a starkly different book that supported many of the Reich’s ideals. Soldaten, Tot, Tänzerin is the anti-communist, anti-Semitic tale of a woman’s struggles in World War 1. The only theme consistent with her earlier writings is that of the strong, independent female. Claudia Schoppmann provides varied hypotheses about the sudden change of writing style from Roellig. Perhaps the author needed money or wanted to make a career for herself. Perhaps she felt pressured by the Nazis to write something more in-line with fascist ideology.

It is clear to see the literary shift that Roellig made was because of the Nazi rise to power. Her writings during the Weimar republic were some of the most progressive works of their time. With the bloom of LGBT literacy, Roellig was in the epicenter writing for the most popular lesbian magazines. Her shift to Nazi-supported texts is stark and unsettling. While Schoppmann does not uncover much about Roellig’s personal life, the attention to her shifting content is just as important. Not only was the Nazi party successful in shutting down all LGBT publications, they also successfully manipulated the authors to support their beliefs as well. Similar to the way that Waldoff had to alter her performances, Roellig was forced to drastically change her writing style to please the Nazis.

State Prosecutor Files

During my visit to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum Archive, I came upon a collection of State Prosecutor Files pertaining to Paragraph 175, the German penal code that outlawed homosexual activity. This collection documents the persecution of homosexuals by the

55 Ibid, 140.
Nazis. The State Court of Berlin was the largest of its kind, due to its location and proximity to the political sphere. After sorting through the long list of male names, I was able to find a short list of women’s names. These cases were selected simply because they were the most promising. After translating a majority of the other cases, I found that some were not really about lesbian women. Most times the file was about women who had turned in gay men to the Nazis and were testifying against them. Of the few cases that were actually about lesbian women, I found that these three not only discussed the topic of interest, but also exposed three very different stories about lesbian women in Berlin during WWII. The first case is about a lesbian woman who committed suicide in 1943. The second case examines the relationship of two women despite one of their mother’s protests. Finally, the third case speaks to the limited social lives of a pair of lesbian women. These cases illustrate how the Gestapo portrayed and treated lesbian women in Berlin during the Third Reich.

Gerda Metsch

Gerda Metsch was born in Weissensee, Berlin on February 24, 1923. She lived with her uncle, Arno Meyer, and was raised by him in Berlin. Metsch committed suicide on July 26, 1943. She was found lifeless on the ground, in men’s clothing, with a gun loaded with five bullets. In a report from the Kriminal Sekretär (police investigator), details surface about the personal life of

Metsch. The *Kriminal Sekretär* wrote that Metsch was “anormal (lesbian)” and “averse to work”.\(^\text{58}\)

She was found to be in breach of an employment contract and it is assumed that she committed suicide out of fear of repercussions. In her mother’s testimony, Erna Metsch says that she suspected her daughter was depressed but not suicidal. Arno Meyer, Metsch’s uncle and caretaker, was more aware of her situation. In his testimony, he reveals that she had tried to commit suicide by overdosing on medication before.\(^\text{59}\) He learned about her past attempt 8 days before her death. It was then that he also learned of her “abnormal disposition” towards her female friends. His testimony does not suggest that he took any actions to help her, nor does he equate her sexuality with suicidal inclinations.

Perhaps the most fascinating part of Metsch’s file is a collection of personal notes that she left behind, written 2 days before her death. The first few notes are addressed to loved ones, apologizing for her actions and claiming that she wants no more of this life. There are two notes that stand out since they are not addressed to anyone in particular and are written in a more formal handwriting. The first note expresses that she would like to be buried as she was found, in men’s clothing.\(^\text{60}\) The second letter (Figure 1) emphasizes that her roommate, Erna Bartel, was not a love interest. The formal tone and handwriting suggest that the messages were meant for an authority figure. Her note stresses their relationship as one only of friends, not of lovers. Testimony from Erna Bartel seeks to confirm that the two were only friends and that Bartel was not ‘anormal veranlagt’, or ‘abnormally inclined’. She does state, however, that both Metsch and their mutual friend, Elvira Schmidt, were ‘abnormally inclined persons’.\(^\text{61}\) This defensive rhetoric against

\(^{58}\) Ibid, 2.
\(^{59}\) Ibid, 21.
\(^{60}\) Ibid, 10.
\(^{61}\) Ibid, 26.
claims of homosexuality carries on throughout the case. In a testimony from Erika Drescher, a friend of Metsch’s, Drescher clearly states that there was no relationship between the two friends.

Figure 1 Suicide note from Metsch claiming only platonic relations with Bartel. USHMM Record Group 14.070M, “General State Prosecutor Office of Berlin Records,” Fond A Rep 538, reel 5771, page 18.

I hereby certify, that I lived with Ms. Erna Bartel at 31 Brunnensstrasse 67, Berlin and had no relationship with her and Ms. Bartel was only a passing acquaintance of mine. Should the contrary be claimed, I hereby declare an act of revenge against them.
This statement occurs at the beginning of her address and further exposes the fear surrounding accusations of sexual ‘abnormality’. Drescher also claims that Metsch and Bartel, to her knowledge, were not in a relationship. Another testimony, from Gertrud Kassbohm, again opens with defensive remarks that she and Metsch never had ‘abnormal intercourse’.

After investigation, the Kriminal Sekretär claimed that her suicide was a result of the stresses of working in a labor camp and the fear of repercussions from repeated breach of contract. This case is rife with fear; fear of repercussions for violating a work contract, fear of being accused of homosexual inclinations. While we may never know for certain why she killed herself, it is safe to assume that some of the fear that pushed Metsch towards suicide stemmed from her sexuality. The fact that in her last testament she clarified that Bartel was a platonic friend emphasizes that Metsch felt such an accusation would be detrimental to her friend. This case is also highlights her friends’ and families’ disinterest in her sexuality and mental state. Though they all knew she was mentally unstable, it seems that none of them tried to help her.

*Selma Kalinowski and Lieselotte Paarmann*

Selma Kalinowski was born on November 25 in 1919 in Berlin. Her mother was also gay but conceived Kalinowski with a man other than her father. Lieselotte Paarmann was born only a few days earlier on November 7 in 1919. The two had been childhood friends and became a couple when Kalinowski’s mother passed away in 1934. Paarmann’s home life, even from when she was a child, was very hard. The investigation is against both Kalinowski and Wilhelm Paarmann,

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Lieselotte’s father. This case largely explains the relationship between Paarmann and her mother and father.

The case against Selma Kalinowski begins with a criminal charge of ‘vindictive fornication’ from Alma Paarmann, Lieselotte Paarmann’s mother.\(^{63}\) Alma claims that Kalinowski seduced her daughter, Lieselotte. Her daughter, completely under the influence of Kalinowski, moved out of the house with her parents, and into a room with Kalinowski. In written and verbal testimony, Lieselotte openly admits to being in a same-sex relationship with Kalinowski.\(^{64}\) She also admits to having been in a relationship with a woman before. When her mother, Alma, found out about the previous relationship, she forced the two apart and Lieselotte attempted suicide. After Lieselotte came out to her mother, she was called “gay pig” and was threatened by Alma. Her mother also threatened Kalinowski with a kitchen knife, claiming she would tell the Gestapo that she had called Hitler a “gay dog”.

Since Paarmann was 10 years old, her father sexually abused her. Her testimony expands upon his abuse and how she feels he is to blame for her disgust towards men. However, this case becomes more about the abuse from her father than her relationship with Kalinowski. In the end, however, the Criminal Secretary finds no evidence against her father (Figure 2).

\(^{63}\) Ibid, 424.
\(^{64}\) Ibid, 427.
Berlin, den 1. 9. 43.

Vermerk:


Lieselotte Paarmann hat hier noch angegeben, daß sie vor dem gleichgeschlechtlichen Verhältnis mit der Falinowski ein solches mit einer gewissen Mittelstädter -Bl. 5- unterhalten hat. Der Vorgang wird daher nochmals der KJ M II ? zur Kenntnis zugeleitet.

S. 243 -14- 3

Ordnungsstück.

1. Der KJ M II ? zur Kenntnis und Auswertung.

2. Index auszustellen: Hal 7 194 E 143.

3. Urschriftlich

dem Herrn Generalstaatsanwalt
bei dem Landgericht
in Berlin

Übersandt. I. A.

[Signature]

7875 510/43 21 2678 45 28
This case provides multiple talking points on the rhetoric and attitudes towards lesbian women in Berlin during that time. The relationships between all four characters create an intricate web of deceit and honesty. While Lieselotte Paarmann and Kalinowski openly declare their love for one another, Alma Paarmann declares her outrage towards the couple. Interestingly enough, both the police and Alma seem more concerned with the homosexuality of the two women than the sexual abuse that Lieselotte experienced at the hands of her father. Perhaps this case merely represents the attitudes of the time with respect to homophobia and women’s rights that were in place around the world. Perhaps these attitudes were more central to the Third Reich and their obsession with reproduction. It would make sense, however, for the Nazi regime to be concerned with the immoral sexual behavior exhibited by Wilhelm Paarmann. However, this case focuses on the sexuality and ‘immoral behavior’ of the two women, rather than the sexual abuse by Paarmann’s father.

**Sophie Raak and Elisabeth Ehlert**

Two women on the opposite spectrum from the more reserved women mentioned above are Sophie Raak and Elisabeth Ehlert. Raak was born on February 25, 1893 in Berlin. Ehlert was born many years later in March of 1909. The case against these two opens with a written testimony by a Dr. Horst Hölz after a night out with his wife and a group of friends.65 Hölz and his party were interrupted by a pair of rowdy women who sat down, quite drunkenly, at the table next to them. In his initial observation of the two, he commented that both were dressed in men’s clothing and donned short hair. He therefore concluded that they were ‘homosexually inclined’. After being

asked to quiet down, the two women continued to unapologetically harass the party. Soon after, a small group of police arrived and detained the two after they refused to show their papers. Hölz continues to claim that their cruel intentions were based on “abnormal” sexual behavior.

The testimony from Raak opens with the defense of her sexuality, rather than a defense of the actions for which she was arrested. Raak strongly states that she and Ehlert were only friends and roommates. Raak lays out evidence that she had been engaged with a man for 30 years but hadn’t slept with a man since she was 27 years of age. As for defending her actions, Raak simply states that she cannot remember exactly what happened. Ehlert, on the other hand, first addresses the charges of disorderly conduct and then the homosexual allegations. Ehlert similarly claims to be heterosexual and explains that she is currently in a relationship with a man.

While both testimonies from the women state that they are heterosexually inclined, the report from the Kriminalpolizei suggests that the two are still romantically involved. The text roughly translates: “Although both said they are normally sexually inclined in interrogations, according to the situation, it must be possible that Ehlert and Raak are predisposed to homosexuality and are in a relationship with one another.” That is all the report says with respect to their sexuality. It further outlines the use of Ehlert’s savings to support their extravagances and lets the women go with a warning. Here we must be doubly critical, since we cannot be sure if the two were truly lesbians or not. Nevertheless, it is important to analyze the rhetoric here. Two women were out having maybe a little too much fun and are suddenly accused of being homosexuals. The reaction by Hölz and the police again expose the homophobic attitudes that women (perhaps even straight women) were exposed to.

67 Ibid, 1047.
68 Ibid, 1049.
Life-long Love between Two Dancers

The following case study examines the lives of two lesbian dancers in Berlin during World War II. In “Marta Halusa und Margot Liu: die lebenslange Liebe zweier Tänzerinnen”, Ingeborg Boxhammer combines biographical text and pictures with archival documents to paint a fuller picture of what their lives were like in the Nazi era.

Margot Johanna Holzmann was born into a Jewish family on 16 January 1912 in Ratibor, Silesia.69 Her family moved to Breslau where her father opened a grocery store, later cigarette shop, after World War I. After the death of her mother in 1925, Holzmann’s father moved the family to New Isenburg. Margot was sent to live in the Judischer Frauenbund’s Home for Endangered Girls.70 Margot attended Ballet school where she excelled and began to perform all over Germany. By 1936, she had become a prominent dancer in Berlin.71 In 1938, the Nazis declared that Jews were no longer able to perform on the stage. Margot and her sister Ilses moved to Berlin, where Margot began work at a laundromat.72

Marta Halusa was born on March 7, 1910 in Brunsbuettelkoog where she lived until she was 18.73 As a young adult, she did many odd jobs before moving to Hamburg. It was in Hamburg that Halusa learned how to dance, and where she met Holzmann. They hit it off right away and

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69 Boxhammer, 11.
71 Boxhammer, 21.
72 Ibid, 23.
73 Ibid, 28.
became dance partners who performed not only at the variety Ballhaus Alkazar, in Germany, but also all over Europe. Holzmann performed under the alias of ‘Pepita’ while Halusa donned men’s clothing and performed under the alias of ‘Peter’ (Figure 3). However, when the pair moved to Berlin in 1937 things began to change for them professionally and personally. Soon after their move to Berlin, the economic situation and Nazi ban on Jewish performers forced the pair to give up dancing. In 1939, someone denounced the couple and the Gestapo arrested them. Holzmann was arrested for ‘anti-fascist aggression’ and Halusa was imprisoned for living with a Jew. They were prosecuted for a variety of crimes such as prostitution, lesbian activity, anti-fascist agitation and Halusa for fostering a Jew. Both were detained for weeks at a time on multiple occasions.

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74 Ibid, 41.
75 Ibid, 46.
One of the more important components of the continued police interference in the lives of these two women stems from a marriage. Holzmann met a Chinese national named Chi-Lan Liu in September of 1941 on Liu’s birthday. Liu recounts that Holzmann took an interest in him and the two had sexual intercourse in early November of that year. Soon after, Holzmann came to Liu claiming that she was pregnant with his child and that the two must be married immediately. On November 13, 1941, the two were married and that night Holzmann told Liu of her relations with Halusa. When Liu discovered that Holzmann was, in fact, not pregnant he filed for divorce just a few months later in March.  

Figure 4 Halusa, Holzmann and Liu (from left to right) at Holzmann and Liu's Wedding Celebration. Boxhammer, 51.

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76 Boxhammer, 50.
According to Boxhammer, Holzmann received a deportation order from the Nazis in November of 1941. By marrying a Chinese national, Holzmann had become a Chinese citizen and thus could not be deported. Should the divorce have been successful, Liu would have effectively handed Holzmann back over to the Nazis and she would have been deported. Luckily, for Holzmann, the Public Prosecutor refused to hear the case. His statement claimed that since she was now a Chinese citizen, her fate was no longer in the German public’s interest. He refused to annul the marriage, claiming that a ‘disgusting’ lesbian Jew threatened the Third Reich. 77 The marriage effectively fell apart and Halusa and Holzmann were left to continue their life together as best as they could.

Unfortunately, their luck ran out when they were discovered by Stella Kübler, a German Jew infamous for collaborating with the Nazis and denouncing many underground Jews in Berlin. They proceeded to bribe her for seven weeks before going into hiding at Swinemünder Strasse 82. In April of 1945, the Gestapo came to search the house they were hiding in and arrested the two. During their imprisonment, they were beaten and tortured. The two managed to escape together during a prison transfer and remained hidden until the Soviet Army reached Berlin later that month. Four years later the couple immigrated to England where they hoped to begin a new life together. However, the wounds of the past never left them. Holzmann was mentally unstable. She would hallucinate and have convulsions and insomnia because of her imprisonment. Halusa’s hip was permanently deformed from being beaten and she suffered from migraines. 78 In the end, the two were able to create a fulfilling life in England despite the many struggles they faced during Nazi rule in Berlin.

77 Ibid, 51.
78 Ibid, 67.
Compare and Contrast

Through three biographies, Schoppmann provides clear insight into how the Nazi Party affected the lives of some lesbian women in Berlin during World War II. A majority of Schoppmann’s biographies suggest that the private lives of lesbian women were not severely affected by the Nazi rise to power. Yes, the LGBT scene was destroyed on the surface, but it seems that all three of Schoppmann’s women were able to continue their lives in more private spheres. On the other hand, their careers as performers and writers changed to fit the ideology of the Nazi party. Both Waldoff and Roellig adjusted their content and style in order to stay on the ‘good side’ of Nazi officials. Another recurring theme that Schoppmann uncovers is use of marriage to evade Nazi scrutiny. By entering into a ‘fake’ marriage both parties evaded initial scrutiny of the Nazi party. This theme will present itself again later in Chapter 3 where three prisoners at Ravensbrück were purported to have also entered into fake marriages.

Comparatively, the State Prosecutor Files seems to uncover more about the personal rather than professional lives of lesbian women in Berlin during that time. The cases expose homophobic tension between families and strangers in the public sphere, more so than discrimination by the Nazis and officials. Since these cases were initiated by civilians, it is important to note how they represent attitudes towards homosexuality during that time. For example, the case about Sophie Raak and Elisabeth Ehlert is essentially a noise complaint from a stranger. Dr. Hölz insinuates that the two are romantically involved and the severity of their behavior is elevated. Hölz seems to base this assumption off the masculine attire of the couple. Further, the case of Selma Kalinowski and Lieselotte Paarmann exposes familial tensions surrounding the topic of homosexuality. Most interesting in this case is that both women openly admit to their relationship. Despite the social views of the time and apparent threat of the Nazis, these two women seemingly lived open lives.
Boxhammer’s portrait of two women is the most complete and sound of the three sources. Combining biographical material with the State Prosecutor Files limits the erosion of memory over time and succeeds to produce a factually accurate case study. By basing biographical information within the context of multiple case studies, Boxhammer provides a sound timeline of the lives of these two women. The combination of multiple sources also provides a clear and elongated picture of what life was like for these women before and after the rise of the Nazis. We can clearly distinguish how their lives changed over time and how they suffered because of their sexuality during the Nazi era. Boxhammer’s incorporation of pictures adds a more personal element that further connects the reader to the case. Her complete and sophisticated story about Marta Halusa and Margot Holzmann suggests that there are more stories like theirs yet to be discovered and thoroughly researched.

This chapter highlights just how different the experiences of lesbian women in Berlin during World War II were. Each woman discussed above had very different experiences from one another. Because the Nazis outwardly targeted gay men, it is much easier to depict an overarching narrative of the lives of gay men as victims of fascism. The varied experiences of women suggest that there may not be an overarching narrative of lesbian women as victims of fascism. For some, their lives changed on a personal level and for others, on a professional level. Perhaps their lives did not change as a result of their sexuality but as a result of being a woman in general during that time. These discrepancies only further my belief that more research is needed in this field. While the narrative of the lives of lesbian women outside of the camps poses more questions than it answers, we can look to the experiences of lesbian women in concentration camps to provide a more consistent history.
Chapter 3

The Experiences of Lesbians in Nazi Concentration Camps

“I was together with her after she was released, not long-maybe a year. She was a very beautiful woman, delicate, blond, very good-looking...They picked her up at five in the morning and took her to Ravensbrück. There were many like us in the camp, but whether they were like that before or got that way from being locked up together...? Not until we had been together for quite a while did she tell me that she had been abused. They had knocked out her teeth and she had two holes in her head...When we broke up she married a Dane, maybe just to have a place to go, who knows? But that didn’t last very long.” – Anneliese “Johnny” W.
The narrative of lesbians in concentration camps is small. Of all existing Nazi camp prisoner lists, there are only three women who have been labeled “lesbisch” or lesbian. Three women out of millions - and what we know about those three women is limited. So how can we begin to understand the experiences of lesbians in concentration camps if we cannot identify them? While we may not have autobiographical data from lesbians who survived, we can rely on the testimonies of others to reveal bits and pieces of what lesbian life was like inside the camps. Further, it would be ideal to keep the scope of testimonies focused on lesbian women from Berlin. However, since there is so little information on lesbian women in the Nazi camps, it is nearly impossible to limit this study geographically.

In the concentration camps, Nazis created a ranking of prisoners through a system of colored triangles sewn to prisoners’ uniforms. At the top of the ranks were the Communist and political prisoners who wore their red triangle badges proudly. Under them were the Jehovah’s Witnesses, criminals and the “asocial” prisoners. At the bottom of the camp ranks were the Jewish prisoners. “Asocial” prisoners were an eccentric group of women whose varied circumstances had led them to the camp. Mariechen Schneeman was labeled as an “asocial” after her arrest in 1941 for wearing a Hitler Youth badge despite the fact that she was not a member. Prostitutes, lesbians, Roma and Sinti and “misfits” also fit into this category. Though the definition of an “asocial” prisoner was never set in stone, a circular from the Reich Criminal Police Office in 1938 described “asicals” as “those who do not fit into the community, even if they are not criminally inclined.”

Since the definition of an “asocial” prisoner is so varied, it is hard to determine the percentage of “asocial” prisoners who were arrested for lesbian activities.

To account for the geographical limitations of this study, I have chosen the concentration camp of Ravensbrück, located just an hour north of Berlin, for this study. The presence of lesbian activity is noted more frequently in Ravensbrück than any other camp. Of the 50 oral testimonies that I sampled, almost all of the women who cited lesbian activities in the camps had been at Ravensbrück and spoke of such activities there. The location and frequency of reported lesbian relationships makes Ravensbrück an ideal case study for this paper. However, there are also third-party narratives about lesbians in Auschwitz and other concentration camps. There is an incredible amount of homophobic tension in these testimonies, exposing the increased prejudice that lesbian prisoners faced. If this study focused solely on Ravensbrück, we would be unable to examine these other testimonies, which provide greater insight into the lesbian experience in camps.

In this chapter, I will outline the experiences of many lesbian women who lived as gay women in the camps. I begin by summarizing the history of the Nazi’s all-female prisons before the camps and the experiences of Elsa Conrad in Moringen. My focus then shifts to Ravensbrück, the only all-female concentration camp and the experiences of 3 lesbian women there. Finally, I address the experiences of lesbian women across all the Nazi camps through Visual History Archive testimonies to reveal the observer’s attitude towards lesbian relations in the camps.

**Moringen and Lichtenburg**

In October of 1933, Moringen Prison was designated as the sole all-female prison in Germany. The provincial estate was rented by the Prussian Gestapo and placed under the control of Hitler’s SS. At first, prisoners consisted predominantly of Communists and Jehovah’s Witnesses. In 1936, Heinrich Himmler, the chief of German Police, widened the definition of a
prisoner to include persons convicted of all kinds of crimes including prostitutes and social “undesirables”. Elsa Conrad, who had a previously established lesbian identity in Berlin prior to 1933, was arrested and held in Moringen. Her story helps us to understand the experience of lesbian prisoners in Moringen.

Elsa Conrad was born in Berlin on May 9, 1887. In 1910, she married Kellner Wilhelm Conrad, a suspected homosexual man. Conrad is most known for her club, Monbijou, which was one of the famous lesbian clubs of the Weimar Republic era. Conrad owned the club alongside her partner, Amalie Rothaug. Monbijou was closed in February of 1933. Conrad was arrested on the 5th of October in 1935 and accused of having violated the Nuremberg Laws. Her sexuality was considered a threat to the racial superiority of the “Aryan” race. She was sentenced to 15 months in prison and was admitted to Moringen in January of 1936. Her files associate her arrest and sentencing with “lesbian activities” and “defamation of regimen”. Conrad was later informed that the only way she would be freed from Moringen was upon her agreement to emigrate from the country. Conrad left Germany after her release and sailed for Tunisia in 1938. She lived in Nairobi as a nanny and shop assistant until returning to Germany in 1961. Elsa Conrad died on the 19th of February, 1963 in Hanau.

After 5 years, the Nazis realized that the number of female prisoners had outgrown the capacity of Moringen and closed the camp in March of 1938. Over 518 female prisoners were transported to Schloss Lichtenburg, in a small town located between Dresden and Berlin.

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82 Ibid, 100.
83 Nachum and Porat, 19.
1937, Lichtenburg served as a camp for primarily homosexual male prisoners. The number of female prisoners would soon outgrow the capacity of Lichtenburg as well and about 1,350 women were transferred to the newly constructed camp of Ravensbrück in 1939, just to the north of Berlin.

It is important to understand the narrative of lesbian imprisonment before Ravensbrück so that we can analyze how the narrative changes. Time spent in the prison system was different for women than time spent in the camps. In Moringen, prisoners were able to receive mail, physical violence was not part of everyday life and food was provided. This atmosphere was starkly different from the conditions to come in the concentrations camps. However, depression and solidarity were still present within the walls of the camp. All women who went through Moringen and onto Ravensbrück experienced the decline of camp life through that transition. Beyond that transition, we can further examine the lives of lesbians in camps built for severe persecution such as Ravensbrück and Auschwitz.

**Ravensbrück**

Located in the ethereal setting of Lake Schwedt, just an hour by train north of Berlin, Ravensbrück became known by prisoners as “women’s hell”. Built in 1939 to support the growing number of female prisoners of the Third Reich, Ravensbrück functioned as the main all-female concentration camp until its liberation by the Red Army in 1945. During WWII, nearly 132,000 women from over 42 nations would be imprisoned there.\(^{84}\) As the end of the war loomed over the camp, the Nazis began to implement measures that drastically decreased the population of the

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\(^{84}\) Ibid, 18.
camp. Such measures included death marches, deportations and decreased quality of life. When the Red Army liberated the camp on April 30, 1945, less than 3,500 prisoners remained.85

By 1940, “asocial” prisoners made up about one third of the population of Ravensbrück.86 Included in that group were lesbian prisoners. Some scholars lend this increased presence of same-sex female attraction in testimonies to the fact that Ravensbrück was an all-female camp. In her recollection of camp life in Ravensbrück as the leader of the “asocial” Block, Nanda Herberman stated, “women were so ‘morally deprived’ that ‘sexuality was the only thing left for them.’”87 However, the lack of male figures does not explain the same-sex attraction for the prisoners who

86 Morrison, 44.
87 Sarah Helm, If this is a Woman: Ravensbrück: Life and death in Hitler’s concentration camp for women (London: Little Brown, 2015), 93.
had pre-existing lesbian identities before the war. Testimonies reveal that openly gay women did not make a point to hide their sexuality in the camps, some even taking up male names such as Max or Charlie.\(^{88}\) Ideally, I would have liked to focus solely on these women and examine how their lives changed before and after interment. However, due to a lack of sources, this is not possible. Scholars such as Insa Eschebach and Claudia Schoppmann have had some success in this regard by studying the lives of the three women labeled as ‘lesbisch’ in the camp ledgers; Margarete Rosenberg, Mary Pünjer and Henny Schermann. By comparing the experiences of these three women, we may begin to see how their lives changed as a result of incarceration based on their sexual orientations.

Margarete Rosenberg was born on August 4, 1910 in what today is known as Szecin, Poland. She moved to Berlin in 1931 where she worked as a waitress and prostitute. By 1933, Rosenberg was required to see the health authorities and began to clean up her life for fear of being arrested for prostitution. She married a baker named Arthur Rosenberg in January of 1935. Over time, their marriage came under scrutiny, as the couple remained childless. In her new job as a streetcar trainer, her boss suspected her of same-sex relations with her co-workers. He fired her and the other trainers claiming that they were having same-sex relations with one another. After her arrest and several interrogations, Rosenberg admitted to having same-sex relations with the other trainers and was deported to Ravensbrück on November 30, 1940.\(^{89}\)

\(^{88}\) Ibid, 93.
\(^{89}\) Schoppmann, 2012, 100.
Upon her arrival at Ravensbrück, Rosenberg was given a red star and prisoner number 5138. More importantly, the word “lesbisch” was recorded next to her name in the camp prisoner log. In November of 1941, she was convicted of perjury and sentenced to one year in the camps. Rosenberg faced terrible conditions as a forced laborer for Siemens & Halske in Ravensbrück. She was transferred to Buchenwald in 1945 where she remained until liberation. She spent a total of four years and seven months in concentrations camps. Rosenberg died on March 20, 1985 in Hamburg where she had lived for 50 years.

Figure 6 The notation of Rosenberg’s entrance (4th from the top) to Ravensbrück on November 30, 1940 with the label “lesbisch”. Schoppmann, 2012, 101.
Mary Pünjer was born to a Jewish family on August 24, 1904 in Hamburg-Wandsbek. She married Fritz Pünjer, a non-Jewish man, in 1929 but the couple remained without children. Pünjer was arrested in Hamburg on July 24, 1940 and deported to Ravensbrück in October of that year. However, instead of being labeled as a Jew, Pünjer was marked as “asozial” and given a black star on her uniform. She was brought back to Hamburg to be tried for ‘sexual offenses’ in November. She left Hamburg with the label of ‘asozial/lesbische’ and returned to Ravensbrück on March 15th where she was held in solitary confinement. Pünjer was a victim of the first systematic murder operation of the camp under Dr. Friedrich Mennecke. Based off of the T4 euthanasia program, ‘Aktion 14f13’ labeled prisoners as ‘worthy’ or ‘unworthy’ to live. The action began by targeting insane asylum patients, then the sick, and eventually anyone seen unfit to live. It is assumed that Pünjer was eventually seen as ‘unworthy’ and was gassed in Ravensbrück. The camp records state that Pünjer died of ‘heart failure’ on May 28, 1942.90

Little is known about how the Gestapo discovered Pünjer’s sexuality. In her file from the Hamburg Gestapo, she is described as “married fully Jewish. Very active lesbian. Continually visited lesbian pubs, exchanged affections.”91 Her affiliation at local lesbian bars is most likely what led to her arrest, however, we do not know if the police were tipped off or any details of her arrest. Perhaps someone suspected she was partaking in a fake marriage. We also assume that Pünjer was unsuccessful in denying any allegations against her. While these speculations do not help us understand what led to her arrest, they do expose the fear and scrutiny these women came under during that time. It also helps us to see how drastically different her life became after her arrest. Pünjer would never have been targeted by ‘Aktion 14f13’ and probably would not have

90 Ibid, 104.
died from it. However, her Jewish background suggests that she would still have been arrested and
depor ted at some point.

Henny Schermann was working as a shop assistant in Frankfurt when she was
arrested in March of 1940. She was arrested at age 24 and detained at Ravensbrück for
unknown reasons and labeled as a political and Jewish prisoner. Her sentencing took place in
Frankfurt in June, where she was sentenced to 6 months in prison for refusing to use the middle
name ‘Sarah’, as was required of all Jewish females. She began her time in Prenzlau Court
Prison and was transferred to Ravensbrück by the end of 1941 where she met Mary Pünjer.
Schermann died on May 30, 1942 according to the camp ledger. It is assumed that she, like Pünjer and some 6,000 women fell victim to ‘Aktion 14f13’. Dr. Mennecke’s ‘diagnosis’ on the back of her prisoner photo reads: “Jenny (sic) Sara Schermann, born February 19, 1912, Frankfurt am Main. Unmarried shop girl in Frankfurt am Main. Licentious lesbian, only visited such [lesbian] bars. Avoided the name 'Sara.' Stateless Jew.”

Figure 7 Picture of Henny Schermann with Dr. Mennecke’s ‘diagnosis’. Schoppmann, 2012, 110.

The three portraits painted by Claudia Schoppmann about Rosenberg, Pünjer and Schermann provide insight into the lives of the only three women to be recorded under the label “lesbisch” in the Ravensbrück camp log. However, a lot is left to be learned about their experiences in the camp. Did these women face any prejudice from their campmates because of their sexuality? How did sexuality affect the lives of various women in the camps? What were their emotional responses to lesbian activity in the camps? Without any autobiographical text from these three women, two of whom perished in Ravensbrück, we as scholars are left to find other sources to examine what their lives in the camp may have been like. Here I turn to third-party testimonies to uncover various attitudes and biases to which lesbian women were exposed to in the camps.

**Outside Perceptions of Lesbian Activity in the Camps**

While Ravensbrück is central to the lesbian narrative in concentration camps, it is important to acknowledge the existence of lesbian prisoners and lesbian relations at various other camps. Another such camp known to have many lesbian relations is Auschwitz. To tell the story of lesbian inmates at other concentration camps, I focus on testimonies from the Visual History Archive (VHA) from the USC SHOAH Foundation and memoirs. From the testimonies of 50 women, there are three main themes that surface surrounding the topic of lesbian activity in the camp: exposure to new sexual activity, homophobia and the attribution of lesbian relationships to survival.

Why was there a large presence of lesbian activity in testimonies regarding the camps? Perhaps women were drawn to each other in times of despair and in the absence of men. Perhaps the exposure to lesbian relations provided prisoners with a new way of life. Further, sex offered
solace and companionship, which was hard to come by in the camps. Some testimonies reveal that lesbian relations occurred as an abuse of power in which guards took advantage of female prisoners during their internment. No matter what the reason, this presence of lesbian activity in testimony enables us to better understand the conditions that lesbian women faced in the camps.

A majority of VHA testimonies by women commenting on lesbian behavior in the camps reveals that many were not previously aware that such a lifestyle existed. Edith Englander was born in Vel’ky Saris, Czechoslovakia and deported to Auschwitz in 1942 for being Jewish. In her testimony, she recalls her first impressions and exposure to lesbian relationships and sexual activity:

I was brought up in a very innocent way, I didn’t know anything about those things and I learned very fast in the camp. I couldn’t help but seeing there were two very intelligent young girls who were bunking on the bunk right across from me, and I would see what was going on I just couldn't help seeing it. And it was a new revelation to me, I absolutely didn’t know that these things existed.\(^{94}\)

Her shocked reaction is one of many survivors’ reactions to their exposure to lesbians in concentration camps. Regina Greitzer-Ptasznik recalled her exposure to lesbian relations in Bendorf claiming, “This was something that I had never heard and never knew about.”\(^ {95}\) In Bergen-Belsen, Frances Gelbart had the same reaction; “I was exposed the first time, not personally, but I was explained what’s happening. I’d seen two women being in love, in the same bunk. Not too far from my bunk and I couldn’t understand this. It was hard for me, my Aunt explained to me that they were two women that love each other.”\(^ {96}\) The naivety of female prisoners to same-sex

relations exposes the sociocultural attitudes towards lesbian relationships, which include homophobia.

When Sientje Backer arrived in Ravensbrück, she did not “dare to go to sleep because of all of the lesbians. I was terrified.” Backer’s commentary is one of many in a line of homophobic recollections of lesbian activity in the camps. Homosexual relations were not generally accepted during that time, or as previously discussed, widely understood. Lea Gottesman recalled that her mother punished a fellow prisoner simply because she was a lesbian. Multiple women recall lesbian women making passes at them and denying them with disgust. Many testimonies describe the lesbian women as “butch”, a label that still holds a negative connotation to this day.

In her personal account of her time in Ravensbrück, Wanda Półtawska provides another compelling side of the lesbian narrative. Her experience in Block 11, the ‘lesbian block’ of Ravensbrück, was such a negative experience for her that thoughts of those days are chilling to her. She claims that the women stole all of her belongings, blocked her access to the washroom and was terrorized by lesbian sexual activity. She even goes as far as saying that the “incredible goings-on in that block destroyed my faith in the innocence of even the simplest human gesture.” Półtawska’s testimony provides a critical view of the lesbian narrative. It is important to recognize that lesbian women were not perfect and had the ability to instill fear in others as well. Not one story is true or false; as a scholar it is important to view all sides of every experience in an attempt to understand their lives as broadly and fully as possible.

The final theme that comes to the forefront in testimonies regarding lesbianism in concentration camps focuses on the positive aspects of relationships and survival. Perhaps the most positive VHA testimony is that of Erika Brodsky. Born in Vienna on November 1, 1924, Brodsky was deported to Auschwitz as a Jewish prisoner. During her time in Auschwitz, she spent a significant amount of time in the Strafkommando, or punishment block, where the lesbian prisoners lived.

They were all paired up, they were all homosexual women, who were there because they were homosexual. And they were all in pairs, there was a husband and wife in each pair. They had absolutely no interest in hurting anyone and they were very good to me and I became the ‘Bube’, I was the lookout. During that period of time I lived very well. I mean I ate with them.\footnote{Erika Brodsky. Interview 3945. Segment 84. Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation, 1999. Accessed 20 May 2016.}

Her experiences with lesbian life in camps is not tainted with any homophobia and genuinely recalls her time in the Strafkommando as one of her fondest from the camps. She further recalls that she was never pressured into participating in any of the activity she was privy to. Stephanie Heller recalled the experience of another prisoner in Auschwitz:

There was a German prisoner who was called Orie and she was in prison I think because she was against the regime or that she was a communist...she was good looking, energetic, small woman, full of energy and she has chosen one of our girls, good-looking Slovak girl… and she was given good clothes and she was always with her… that was reason why that girl survived.\footnote{Stephanie Heller. Interview 21978. Segment 24. Visual History Archive, USC Shoah Foundation, 1999. Accessed 20 May 2016.}

Both narratives show lesbian relations in a much more positive light. Edith Morenstein recalls her experience on a death march where a female guard was pursuing homosexual relations with an inmate. Morenstein says that they never partook in sexual activity but that the guard made sure
that she lived. These narratives are crucial in understanding the full scope of lesbian experiences in all of the camps. While naive and homophobic comments reflect a more time-appropriate response to same-sex relationships, these stories show a relatively more progressive experience.

Lesbian Guards in the Camps

While some women, as discussed above, found themselves in the camps based on pre-war lesbian identities, other women were able to evade detection in the camps. Some of those women found their way to the camps as guards instead of prisoners. Some of the more interesting testimonies from the VHA and biographies detail advances made by female guards on female prisoners. Their relationships are important to analyze, as most of the time, the guards seem to have taken advantage of their place of power. The following testimonies describe such situations in which lesbian guards took advantage of their stature to ‘prey’ on prisoners with the intent of lesbian relations as the outcome.

Silvia Grohs found herself at the center of a female night guard's affection during her time in Ravensbrück. The flirtatious courting started with conversation and then the guard began to bring her small treats and sandwiches. Grohs recalls her naivety to the encounters, stressing that she simply enjoyed the company until the encounters became more forward:

The friendly night guard’s intimations were just too subtle. Innuendo after innuendo, cleverly disguised words and phrases resembling a monologue of the perplexing prologue to some enigmatic play… It was her suddenly moving closer and planting her hand firmly on my thigh that did it. That’s when I understood what

I had never wished to understand. That this genial Fraülne, this night shift guard, was after my body.103 The guard went on to comfort Grohs, suggesting she was only interested in helping her and reinforcing statements of trust. Trust not only in helping her escape but helping her to discover the details of intimate same-sex relations. Grohs continually deflected such advances and even suggested to the guard that there was a spy watching their interactions. This method worked well and put the guard on edge seeming to “distress her immensely”. The threat of discovery and its effect on the guard’s advances exposes a truth about the importance of secrecy in lesbian relationships. Eventually Grohs was taken off the night shift which took her away from the guard and her unwarranted advances. Irene Scharfstein recalls a relationship between a high level SS woman and Jewish women in Berlin-Neukoelln camp.104 When Grohs’ mother accidentally walked in on them she began to fear for her life since she knew about a relationship that was supposed to be kept secret.

The story about Irene Gut-Opdyke strays a little from the narrative of guard and prisoner power relations but adds valuable insight to such advances based on power. Gut-Opdkye, a Polish woman who is famous for harboring Jews during the war, was working on the eastern front in Kpznienice during the Russian invasion as a nurse. She was working under Dr. Olga Pavlovskaja who was a Russian woman in her late 40s or early 50s. The doctor invited Gut-Opdyke over to her house for a hot dinner and a bath:

Finally when I came from the bathroom she said, ‘Irene, you beautiful’. First time I felt that I am Irene Gutuvna again. The mirror told me so and something had happened that after dinner she gave me a sweet drink and I am not used to anything like that and so I went right away and fell in sleep...but when I was sleeping I did

have a nightmare. I felt that somebody is with me, kissing me, and it was a nightmare. In the morning she wake me up… when I jumped out of bed I noticed I did have like scratches on my neck and my breasts.\textsuperscript{105}

Upon leaving Pavlovskaiia’s house she was given a warm coat and new shoes. She was uncertain of the reality that she had been drugged and raped. The second time she was invited to dinner with Dr. Pavlovskaiia, the doctor said, “that she wanted me to go with her to Moscow. And she told me that she loved me, told me she was a lesbian.”\textsuperscript{106} Gut-Opdyke stressed that she only wanted a ‘normal life’ and left on good terms with Pavlovskaiia. She was invited back a third and final time before Pavlovskaiia was due to leave. Gut-Opdyke awoke the next morning in the hospital after negatively reacting to the drugs the doctor had used on her the night before. This topic, among others, needs further investigation.

We may never know for sure how many lesbian women suffered in Nazi concentration camps as victims of fascism. However, the testimonies presented above show that lesbian women did have different experiences in the camps because of their sexuality. Some prisoners were exposed to lesbian activity for the first time in the camps while other carried previous homophobic attitudes into the camps with them. Lesbian women were feared and could have been fearful due to the prejudices both guards and fellow prisoners displayed towards them. Although the narrative of lesbian women in concentration camps is small, that does not make it any less important. Scholarship cannot afford to disregard the narrative of minority groups in history. As historians, it is our duty to analyze historical facts and present that information so that future generations may learn from the past. Now, more than ever, minority groups are scrutinized by the public. By exposing and educating people about minority groups of the Holocaust, such as lesbian women,


\textsuperscript{106} Ibid.
we not only honor the lives of these women but aim to build a future rooted in tolerance and understanding.
Conclusion
The lives of lesbian women before and beyond the rise of the Nazis changed on a communal and individual level. The Nazis destroyed the social sphere of the LGBT scene of Berlin and dismantled the social settings that finally allowed it to have greater visibility. This changed the lives of lesbian women by eradicating the night clubs, bars and publications that had allowed them to come together and celebrate their sexuality. Nazi officials forced the budding LGBT scene of Weimar Berlin to metaphorically step back in to the closet. On an individual scale, every woman in this study was affected very differently when the Nazis came to power. For some women, the only change they experienced was this general loss of the LGBT scene. For others, it meant the loss of their lives. The varying discrepancy in all of the experiences these women endured only further exposes the need for more research on this topic.

While further research on the lesbian narrative of the Holocaust is necessary, it will not necessarily come easily. One reason there is a lack of literature on lesbian women during the Nazi era is that there is limited first-hand material. I believe there is a lack of material on this subject based on three reasons. First, it was taboo to be a homosexual and to talk about it. Even after the war, sexuality was not something people discussed openly until the 1960s. Even past then, people who lived through the Second World War were raised with a different set of social norms and would not have been likely to speak about their experiences. It is also possible that many women had not had the opportunity to discover their sexuality when they were young and were most likely not going to begin at such a late stage in their lives. Further, silence in Holocaust literature failed to address the lesbian narrative until very recently. The second reason pertains to almost all Holocaust testimonials, perhaps there was material and it was destroyed or these individuals never got the chance to speak. The Nazis were successful in destroying the lives of millions of individuals, most of whom we will never know a great amount of information about. Third, since
women were not persecuted under Paragraph 175, Nazi officials did not arrest them or keep records of them. While there are vast records of homosexual men who were persecuted, there is very little material about women who were persecuted because of their sexuality.

One of the hardest aspects of this study is the differentiation between lesbianism and lesbian activity. We know that some of the women discussed did, in fact, self-identify as lesbians. However, there are some women discussed above whose self-identification we cannot fully account for. For example, all of the third-party testimonies from the Visual History Archive allude to women who partook in lesbian activities in the camps. We cannot be certain if those women self-identified as lesbians or not. The same can be said for women in the State Prosecutors Files who had not expressed their sexuality explicitly in the report. However, despite how those specific women identified, the VHA records portray sociocultural attitudes that lesbian women in the camps were subject to. Whether those specific women identified as lesbian or not, we can still create a broad picture of what life for lesbian women in Berlin and beyond during the war.

After researching this topic for a year and a half, I am left with more questions than I have answered. How many more lesbian women suffered as victims of fascism that we do not know about? Does this sample size provide us with enough information to formulate a picture of what life was like for lesbian women? What other information is there about lesbian authority figures in concentration camps? Research on lesbian women during the Nazi era has just begun to touch the surface and much more research has yet to be done.
Appendix

Paragraph 175

The following text is a translation of Paragraph 175 of the German Penal Code that outlawed homosexuality between men. This law was revised by the Nazis in 1935 to be even stricter than before.107

PARAGRAPH 175

175. A male who commits lewd and lascivious acts with another male or permits himself to be so abused for lewd and lascivious acts, shall be punished by imprisonment. In a case of a participant under 21 years of age at the time of the commission of the act, the court may, in especially slight cases, refrain from punishment.

175a. Confinement in a penitentiary not to exceed ten years and, under extenuating circumstances, imprisonment for not less than three months shall be imposed:

1. Upon a male who, with force or with threat of imminent danger to life and limb, compels another male to commit lewd and lascivious acts with him or compels the other party to submit to abuse for lewd and lascivious acts;

2. Upon a male who, by abuse of a relationship of dependence upon him, in consequence of service, employment, or subordination, induces another male to commit lewd and lascivious acts with him or to submit to being abused for such acts;

3. Upon a male who being over 21 years of age induces another male under 21 years of age to commit lewd and lascivious acts with him or to submit to being abused for such acts;

4. Upon a male who professionally engages in lewd and lascivious acts with other men, or submits to such abuse by other men, or offers himself for lewd and lascivious acts with other men.

175b. Lewd and lascivious acts contrary to nature between human beings and animals shall be punished by imprisonment; loss of civil rights may also be imposed.

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Education

The Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA
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Professional Experience

Fraser Street Deli - Shift Manager
Fall 2015-Spring 2017
- Works closely with the store owners to identify problems and create timely solutions to provide excellent customer service
- Maintains a sanitary environment through effective oversight and closely monitored food preparation to minimize waste

Schreyer Honors College - Independent Researcher
Summer 2016
- Conducted independent research on women in the LGBT+ community of Berlin from 1933-45 in Washington D.C. and Berlin
- Received three prestigious grants to design and execute this project as well as managed all logistical aspects of travel and archival visits

Leadership Experience

Penn State Dance Marathon - Special Events Captain
Fall 2013-Spring 2017
- Provided emotional and financial support to families impacted by childhood cancer as well as spread awareness all in search for a cure
- Ensured the safe and effective entrance and exit of over 16,000 student volunteers from all THON events

Savoir Faire A Cappella - Assistant Musical Director
Spring 2016-Spring 2017
- Assists in composing music for and directing Penn State’s original all-female a cappella group

One Team International - Mission Chair
Fall 2014
- Facilitated group discussion on the topics of gender discrimination to raise awareness of the importance of education and diversity
- Raised funds to benefit a school in Mumbai to promote equal opportunities in youth athletics

Awards

Student Marshal for Global Studies Major – Spring 2017
Rodney A. Erickson Discovery Grant - Spring 2016
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Languages

German: Advanced Speaking, Writing and Reading
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