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Queer In/visibility: Gay Men's and Lesbians' Experiences of Persecution in Nazi Germany

Tegan A. Smith

When the Nazis came to power in 1933, they eliminated what Robert Beachy describes as “the world’s most vibrant and public homosexual culture.”¹ Germany boasted the first openly gay man, the first gay rights organization under famous sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld, and the “first legislative debate over the sodomy law repeal.”² It has also been argued that Germany was the first place where an identity based on sexual orientation emerged. The word “homosexuality,” coined in 1869, is a German invention. Germany created the concept of homosexuality in the mid-nineteenth century through the “collaboration of Berlin’s medical scientists and sexual minorities.”³ There was also sustained public discourse about and defense for homosexuality after its inception, resulting in the popularization of the term. Pre-World War I Germany saw support for the gay rights movement from the liberal press and Social Democratic Party.⁴ Additionally, before 1907, the Berlin police “turned a surprisingly blind eye” to gay meeting places. This allowed people of a range of gender identities and sexual orientations to gather in bars and clubs to engage in public debates with the scientific and medical community.⁵

Post-World War I Germany was also connected to the gay rights movement. Though homosexuality was still technically criminalized and socially stigmatized, there were increases in gay

¹ Robert Beachy, “The German Invention of Homosexuality,” *Journal of Modern History* 82, no. 4 (December 2010): 837.

² Christopher Capozzola, “Almost Revolutionary,” *Gay and Lesbian Review* vol. XXII, no. 2. (2015): 47.

³ Beachy, “The German Invention,” 804.

⁴ Laurie Marhoefer, *Sex and the Weimar Republic: German Homosexual Emancipation and the Rise of the Nazis* (Toronto, Canada: University of Toronto Press, 2015), 22.

⁵ Capozzola, “Almost Revolutionary,” 47.

activism and sexology research.⁶ Art and culture remained important outlets for queer communities, as did meeting spaces like bars, clubs, and pubs. People also established magazines, periodicals, and other print media, which were typically safer and easier to access than public meeting spaces. These publications presented information about gay, lesbian, and trans subcultures, which helped people explore their sexuality with less social stigma, fear, and shame than if they were to meet in public.⁷ However, the Third Reich brought significant changes to homosexual organizing, visibility, and culture. Nazi policies snowballed from closing queer meeting spaces to making Paragraph 175, a provision of the German criminal code that criminalized male same-sex relations, more severe, to persecuting and murdering gay men, as well as increasing denunciations against lesbians and gender non-conforming women. The Nazis aimed to erase all people whom they classified as racially inferior, including “those marked as sexually other.”⁸

This paper will attempt to understand why gay men and lesbians were considered inimical to the ideals and goals of the Nazi regime—and what resulted from this classification. The lenses of gender and sexuality help to uncover why and how gay men and lesbians were targeted and how they were treated during the Third Reich. Like gender, sexuality informs one’s subjectivity and shapes one’s way of being in the world. Sexuality is an integral part of one’s personhood due to its influence on one’s thoughts, desires, passions, and self-conceptions. For these reasons, I aim to study how gender and sexuality impacted gay men’s and lesbians’ experiences before and during the Holocaust, what characterized their mistreatment, and how Nazi ideology enabled their persecution.

⁶ Marhoefer, *Sex and the Weimar Republic*, 31.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 68–70.

⁸ William J. Spurlin, *Lost Intimacies: Rethinking Homosexuality under National Socialism* (New York, NY: Peter Lang Publishing, Inc., 2009), 17.

I argue that the Nazis wanted to make gay men and lesbians invisible from the public sphere because they challenged the norms, ideologies, and goals of the Third Reich. Non-conformity to Nazi norms, specifically those related to gender and sexuality, resulted in varying reasons for, types of, and degrees of persecution for gay men and lesbians. To support this argument, I will focus primarily on analyzing the ideologies of the Third Reich, anti-homosexual mobilization, and how gender and sexual orientation impacted a group's persecution. I will conclude with why it is necessary to expand upon this research in genocide studies, women's and gender studies, and queer studies. Homophobia was a "technology of Othering" that played a key role in buttressing hetero-national masculinity during the Third Reich. Practicing or promoting homophobia created an emasculated Other that helped heterosexual men "consolidate their own hegemonic masculinity."⁹ Hegemonic masculinity could only be performed by heterosexual men, positing all gay men as members of marginalized masculinities. Relatedly, nationalism also uses homophobia as a masculine technology of Othering. Nationalist movements use homophobia to "distinguish the national Self from external enemies and threats to the nation."¹⁰ Therefore, gay men were the foil to hetero-national masculinity because they were not straight, masculine, or racially pure.

According to the Reich Citizenship Law, a citizen of the Reich was "of German or kindred blood who, through his conduct, shows that he is both desirous and fit to serve the German people."¹¹ The Nazi racial worldview held that the "German" or "Aryan" race possessed characteristics in their blood that, according to SS leader Heinrich Himmler, enabled them "to be

⁹ Koen Sloopmaeckers, "Nationalism as Competing Masculinities: Homophobia as a Technology of Othering for Hetero- and Homonationalism," *Theory and Society*, 48 (March 2019): 247.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 249.

¹¹ Text of the laws in Jeremy Noakes and Geoffrey Pridham, *Nazism 1919–1945: A Documentary Reader, vol. 3, Foreign Policy, War and Racial Extermination* (Exeter, UK: University of Exeter Press, 1988), 535–7.

better soldiers, better statesmen, to reach a higher level of culture and a higher character [than non-Aryans].”¹² Other races supposedly lacked these inborn qualities, making them biologically inferior. Moreover, since all racial characteristics were “transmitted, completely, ineluctably, from one generation to the next,” the alleged superiority and purity of Aryan blood would be “tainted” by “race-mixing” or by reproducing with “defective” Aryans.¹³ Among the “defective” were homosexuals. Nazis believed that “undesirable” outward behavior, like vagrancy, alcoholism, prostitution, and homosexuality, were caused by biological deficiencies. Accordingly, homosexuals did not fit the acceptable behavioral or biological requirements established by Nazi race thinking and racial policies. For the Nazis, “hereditarily determined” defects in homosexuals’ blood caused an “irremediable attitude” that rendered homosexuals undesirable and unfit to serve the Aryan race and German nation.¹⁴

The racialization of sexuality delineated who constituted the national Self and who was an external enemy. By defining sexual Others as racial Others, the category of external enemy expanded, and the category of national Self narrowed. The national Self was a hypermasculine, non-Jewish, and heterosexual member of the Aryan race.¹⁵ Gay men were considered an external enemy because of the “culture-destroying” traits in their blood; they challenged binary gender roles, the reproductive capacity of the nuclear family, and the “economic and political well-being of the nation-state.”¹⁶ Furthermore, gay men were seen as a source of social

¹² Himmler in a lecture to a Wehrmacht class, “Wesen und Aufgabe der SS und der Polizei,” January 1937, in Michalka, *Drittes Reich* 1, 161–2, quoted in Eric D. Weitz, “The Primacy of Race: Nazi Germany,” in *A Century of Genocide: Utopias of Race and Nation - Updated Edition* (Princeton, NJ; Oxford, UK: Princeton University Press, 2013), 107.

¹³ Weitz, “The Primacy of Race,” 106.

¹⁴ Circular, Reich Ministry of Interior, 18 July 1940, quoted in Michael Burleigh and Wolfgang Ippermann, *The Racial State: Germany 1933–1945* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 182.

¹⁵ Spurlin, *Lost Intimacies*, 31.

¹⁶ Weitz, “The Primacy of Race,” 107; Spurlin, *Lost Intimacies*, 33.

degeneracy that would threaten the morality, superiority, and respectability of the German nation and its people.¹⁷ In short, gay men were a threat to racial hygiene and gender ideology. They were threatening to the Nazis' nation-building project because of their racial "impurity" and failure to perform hetero-national masculinity, making them a threat to the homogeneity the Third Reich sought to create.¹⁸ So although there was no Final Solution for gay men as there was for Jews, homophobic violence and terror were still integral evils of the Holocaust.

Homophobia also aided the 1935 expansion of Paragraph 175, which increased official persecution against gay men. One way this was accomplished was through the expansion of what constituted a homosexual act. Before the revision of Paragraph 175, the prosecution needed to prove that penetrative sex acts took place in order to convict someone of homosexuality. People in the professions, primarily more conservative physicians and lawyers, "paved the way for more brutal and official persecution" because they were frustrated by how challenging it was to convict someone of homosexuality.¹⁹ After the revision, any embracing, kissing, or touching between two men also counted as homosexual acts.²⁰ In the case of one man, just touching someone was enough to get him arrested. Karl (last name unknown) was placed under military arrest for brushing against a plainclothes SS sergeant while walking around a known cruising location for gay men in Breslau, Germany.²¹ Reflecting on his trial, Karl recalls being depicted as a

¹⁷ Spurlin, *Lost Intimacies*, 31.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 43.

¹⁹ Geoffrey J. Giles, "Why Bother About Homosexuals?: Homophobia and Sexual Politics in Nazi Germany," United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Center for Advanced Holocaust Studies, (2001): 8.

²⁰ Geoffrey J. Giles, "Legislating Homophobia in the Third Reich: The Radicalization of Prosecution Against Homosexuality by the Legal Profession," *German History* 23, no. 3 (August 2005): 351.

²¹ Jürgen Lemke, *Gay Voices from East Germany* (Bloomington, IN, Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Press, 1991), 33.

“corrupter of German youth, a foreign body in the German race that must be eradicated.”²²

The revision of Paragraph 175 also criminalized the articulation of homosexual thoughts, feelings, or desires.²³ Stefan Kosinski’s experience exemplifies the impact of these new changes. Kosinski was arrested in 1942 after sending a letter to his boyfriend, a German soldier. The letter was intercepted and read by the Gestapo, who arrested Kosinski and interrogated him for two weeks. Reflecting on his time in interrogation, Kosinski says, “They beat me as never before...I couldn’t breathe; I couldn’t speak.” Over these two weeks, the Gestapo tried to get Kosinski to identify other suspected gay men. He did not know anyone in the pictures he was shown, but the Gestapo continued to torture him. At the end of these two weeks of torture, Kosinski was charged with violating Paragraph 175 and sentenced to five years in prison.²⁴ The criminalization of enacted and articulated homosexual desires that came with the expansion of Paragraph 175 reveals that the Nazis wanted to eliminate the acts and identities of the homosexual.²⁵ And, as the story of Kosinski suggests, the Nazis were willing to go to great lengths to seek out more gay men to arrest.

The revision of Paragraph 175 was just one of the means Nazis used to convict 50,000 men of sodomy. Another method was Himmler’s establishment of the Reich Central Office for Combating Homosexuality and Abortion. A primary task of the Central Office was to collect data about men who were “suspected of homosexual activities.” Consequently, the Central Office, Gestapo, and SS compiled “pink lists,” denunciations, and forced confessions that helped them pursue arrests. On some nights, the

²² Ibid., 34.

²³ Spurlin, *Lost Intimacies*, 31.

²⁴ Stefan Kosinski, “Under the Shadow of Paragraph 175: Part 2: Stefan Kosinski,” interview by Jeffrey Langham, USC Shoah Foundation, 18 May 2015, Visual History Archive, <https://vhaonline.usc.edu/viewingPage?testimonyID=7200&segmentNumber=0>.

²⁵ Spurlin, *Lost Intimacies*, 31.

Nazis arrested “an estimated 230 men” in a single city.²⁶ This suggests how seriously the Nazis pursued the persecution of homosexuals. Himmler, one of the most powerful men in the Third Reich, believed that gay men were a formidable threat to Nazi population policies because of their refusal to procreate and their ability to seduce “others into their degenerate lifestyle.”²⁷ He pledged to pursue homosexuals in a “‘merciless and pitiless’ fashion” so that they would not ruin the nation.²⁸ As a result, from 1937 to 1940, nearly 95,000 men were arrested “on suspicion of homosexual offenses.”²⁹ As mentioned earlier, the Third Reich saw 50,000 men convicted of sodomy. Some of these men were sent to regular prisons, but between 5,000 and 15,000 of them were sent to concentration camps, where an estimated two-thirds of them died.³⁰

The imprisonment of homosexuals in concentration camps was an important step in the Nazis’ radicalization of the persecution of homosexuals. Homosexual inmates, identified by the pink triangle on their clothing, were typically at the bottom of the camp hierarchy. They were abused by the SS and other inmates, who were frequently encouraged or enabled by the SS to act on their existing prejudices against homosexuals.³¹ Moreover, homosexual inmates were exploited and tortured by camp officials,

²⁶ W. Jake Newsome, “Homosexuals after the Holocaust: Sexual Citizenship and the Politics of Memory in Germany and the United States, 1945–2008,” (PhD diss., The State University of New York at Buffalo, 2016): 50.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 52.

²⁸ Radio address by Himmler on the occasion of the Tag der deutschen Polizei 1937 (15 Jan. 1937), text in Hans Volz, ed., *Von der Großmacht zur Weltmacht 1937* (Dokumente der deutschen Politik, 5, Berlin, 1938), 235–40, quoted in Giles, *Legislating Homophobia*, 350.

²⁹ Statistics given in Stümke, *Homosexuelle* 90, 118–9, quoted in Giles, *Legislating Homophobia*, 350.

³⁰ Claudia Schoppmann, *Days of Masquerade: Life Stories of Lesbians during the Third Reich* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 10.

³¹ Wolfgang Röhl, “Homosexual Inmates in the Buchenwald Concentration Camp,” *Journal of Homosexuality* 31, no. 4 (18 Oct. 2010): 1.

inmates, and doctors.³² This included hard labor, sexualized attacks, abuse, and medical experimentation. Some Nazi doctors argued that hard labor and discipline in the camps could “cure” some of the homosexuals. There were also doctors who promoted and performed castration on homosexuals for its alleged curative, preventative, and/or punitive purposes.³³ Heinz Heger discusses all these acts in his first-hand account of the Holocaust, *The Men with the Pink Triangle*.

Heger was first imprisoned in Sachsenhausen, which he refers to as the “‘Auschwitz’ for homosexuals” due to the harsh working conditions, frequent torture, and incessant threat of violence.³⁴ Heger recalls the inmates with pink triangles being “living targets” for the SS who, as Heger says, “ravaged the ranks of us gays.”³⁵ According to Heger, the guards and other inmates held another level of contempt for the 175ers (people who were convicted of violating Paragraph 175). Gay men were relegated to their own block of the camp and were destined to “extermination through back-breaking labor, hunger and torture.”³⁶ One of Heger’s survival strategies in the camps was providing sexual favors to a Capo in exchange for more food and “easier and nondangerous [sic] work.” Heger continued this arrangement with the Capo throughout his transfer to Flossenbürg.³⁷

Like Heger, Erich (last name unknown) was a 175er who survived his imprisonment at Sachsenhausen and Flossenbürg. Erich recalls “always and everywhere, in every camp, the hardest and shittiest work was reserved for us [homosexuals].”³⁸ For more

³² Doris L. Bergen, “Sexual Violence in the Holocaust: Unique and Typical?” *Lessons and Legacies VII: The Holocaust in International Perspective*, (2006): 183.

³³ Giles, “Why Bother About Homosexuals?: Homophobia and Sexual Politics in Nazi Germany,” 15–7.

³⁴ Heinz Heger, *The Men with the Pink Triangle* (Boston, MA: Alyson Publications, 1980), 37.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 44.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 39.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 45.

³⁸ Lemke, *Gay Voices from East Germany*, 19.

than ten years, Erich was imprisoned in different prisons and concentration camps. While the conditions of the camps varied, homosexuals faced the worst treatment wherever Erich went. He believes this is because “the hierarchy of the triangles was a reflection of the outside world.” Homosexuals, the men with pink triangles, were “beneath the very lowest,” meaning underneath the political offenders, habitual criminals, and Jehovah’s Witnesses.³⁹ Gay men were a group of people that others could unite against, both inside and outside the camps.

Lesbians had a different persecution experience than gay men. To begin, Paragraph 175 did not include the criminalization of female same-sex relations. One reason for this is that sociological and medical information at the time reported that homosexuality was more prominent among men than women.⁴⁰ Another reason was that fewer women were “in employment, the public, and the state” because this sphere was “reserved for men.”⁴¹ Therefore, a legal framework that criminalized gay men was more pertinent because gay men had more visibility. It was assumed that there were more gay men than lesbians and that gay men were more likely to have larger and more powerful public roles because of their gender. Gay men also met in public more frequently than women did, which increased the argument that gay men had more degenerative effects on society than lesbians.⁴²

Additionally, it was assumed that lesbians’ sexuality was more malleable and mutable than gay men’s sexuality. According to the Reich Minister of Justice, lesbians were more likely to assume “normal relations” (i.e., heterosexuality) than gay men.⁴³ It was believed that women, regardless of their sexuality, retained their “usability in terms of population policy,” meaning they would still have heterosexual intercourse and bear children. This reveals

³⁹ Ibid., 21.

⁴⁰ Spurlin, *Lost Intimacies*, 51.

⁴¹ Schoppmann, *Days of Masquerade*, 11.

⁴² Spurlin, *Lost Intimacies*, 51.

⁴³ Ibid., 53.

the Nazi ideology of sexist supremacy.⁴⁴ Women were less of a political and social threat to the German national community because they lacked the same positions of and access to power as men. So, as long as lesbians did not undermine the procreative capacity of the nuclear family, they were considered less dangerous to the nation-building project than gay men. Lesbians did not experience systematic persecution comparable to gay men because lesbians were considered less of a threat to Nazi gender ideology and the nation at large. This resulted in different degrees of and forms of persecution.

Lesbians were not systematically persecuted to the same extent as gay men; however, as Samuel Huneke argues, limiting our understanding of queer experiences during the Holocaust to persecution or tolerance is insufficient. To support this argument, Huneke analyzes four criminal police files from Berlin that contain the denunciations of eight women. Sometimes these denunciations were made because of the denouncers' "genuine dislike of female homosexuality," while others had separate motivations.⁴⁵ For example, in an attempt to regain control of her daughter's life, Frau Anna Klopsch denounced "her daughter and her daughter's alleged lover" for being in a lesbian relationship. However, the criminal case was dropped because same-sex relations were not illegal between women.⁴⁶ What is most interesting about this case, like the three others Huneke discusses, is that even though the denunciations and interrogations revealed that the women were lesbians, law enforcement ruled that no illicit acts took place. In fact, seven of the eight women discussed in the four cases were lesbians. This is particularly important considering one woman was Jewish, one was a known sex worker, and another was

⁴⁴ Schoppmann, *Days of Masquerade*, 17.

⁴⁵ Samuel Clowes Huneke, "The Duplicity of Tolerance: Lesbian Experiences in Nazi Berlin," *Journal of Contemporary History* 54, no. 1 (Jan. 2019): 52.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 43.

mentally impaired—all additional factors that could have sent them to concentration camps.⁴⁷

One of Huneke's most interesting conclusions resulting from his analysis of these cases is his adoption of Jacques Derrida's definition of tolerance: "scrutinized hospitality."⁴⁸ This suggests that although these women were not criminally charged, they were still policed by their family members, loved ones, strangers, and themselves. The Third Reich cultivated a culture of denunciations that was dangerous for lesbians because they could lose their "social capital" if denounced.⁴⁹ The women of the four criminal cases were terrified of being charged and consistently denied homosexual desires or feelings, even in the face of contradictory evidence.⁵⁰ Yet, law enforcement did not pursue these cases. Due to the small sample size, these records are by no means representative of all lesbians' experiences with law enforcement under the Third Reich. However, these cases are valuable in that they reflect the breadth of lesbians' experiences and the challenges and inadequacies of categorizing groups as being either persecuted or tolerated. Tolerance is a limited category that fails to measure how society's views impact people's quality of life. Tolerance can mean indifference, acceptance, or even persecution. Furthermore, it is particularly challenging to argue that lesbians were tolerated when some of them faced criminal charges and were sent to concentration camps.

Lesbians were not as likely to be persecuted for their sexuality alone, as men often were. Non-conformity to gender norms had a significant influence on their experience of persecution, especially if their non-conformity challenged Nazi ideology or the gender/sexual politics of the Third Reich.⁵¹ As a

⁴⁷ Ibid., 53.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 52.

⁴⁹ Laurie Marhoefer, "Lesbianism, Transvestitism, and the Nazi State: A Microhistory of a Gestapo Investigation, 1939–1943," *American Historical Review* 121, no. 4 (October 2016): 1170, quoted in Huneke, "The Duplicity of Tolerance," 35.

⁵⁰ Huneke, "The Duplicity of Tolerance," 54.

⁵¹ Spurlin, *Lost Intimacies*, 45.

result, many lesbians evaded persecution by performing conventional femininity. Lesbians entered heterosexual marriages, had children, quit their jobs, and avoided masculine gender presentations.⁵² Elisabeth Zimmermann utilized some of these survival strategies to avoid persecution. After a three-year relationship with a woman, Zimmermann married a man. However, Zimmermann still defined her life before and during her marriage as “the long period of secrecy.” She recalled her days being marred by “repression, not letting anyone notice [her] true nature, or else [she] would have ended up in a concentration camp.”⁵³ Although heterosexual marriage provided some sense of security, it did not quell all of Zimmermann’s concerns. She still had to police her desires, actions, and identity to evade persecution.

The lives of Freia Eisner and Annelise W., or “Johnny,” also reveal how lesbians attempted to escape persecution. However, these women differed from Zimmermann because they were gender non-conforming, unmarried, and more involved in Berlin’s lesbian subcultures. Eisner went to lesbian bars and clubs in Berlin in 1931, the same year 15-year-old Johnny started attending.⁵⁴ Both women enjoyed being a part of the lesbian subcultures, though they observed many changes when Hitler came to power. For example, Eisner’s lover was embarrassed to be in public with her and feared being noticed due to Eisner’s masculine gender presentation. Therefore, Eisner had to “wear more feminine dresses” and curl her hair if she and her lover went out in public.⁵⁵ Unlike Eisner, Johnny never strayed from her “short, man’s haircut” and “tailored suit,” but she saw many of her friends alter their appearances and marry men in an attempt to escape persecution.⁵⁶

⁵² Ibid., 54.

⁵³ Schoppmann, *Days of Masquerade*, 122.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 42.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 149.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 44.

It also became harder for lesbians and gender non-conforming women to have unchecked access to homosexual clubs, bars, and parties. Police raids became increasingly frequent, as did club closures and arrests.⁵⁷ Several of Johnny's friends were arrested by the Gestapo, though there is no evidence that any of them were prosecuted as lesbians. However, Johnny remained acutely aware of how easily she and her friends could have ended up in a concentration camp. One of her lovers, Helene Bartelt, spent two years at Ravensbrück where Johnny says, "there were many like us."⁵⁸ The number of lesbians sent to concentration camps is unknown. Many were prosecuted as "asocials," which was a wide category for "socially maladjusted" people.⁵⁹ This is yet another instance of lesbian invisibility within the Third Reich that adds to the challenge of researching lesbians, as well as gender non-conforming women.

The experience of lesbians during the Third Reich was characterized by repression and erasure. Though lesbians were not tried under Paragraph 175 nor taken to camps in numbers comparable to gay men, they still experienced violent and non-violent forms of oppression that were leveled against them because of their sexuality and/or gender presentation.⁶⁰ Lesbians lived in fear of being denounced, fired from jobs, arrested, and sent to concentration camps. Some tried to avoid persecution by changing their gender presentation, marrying men, or even emigrating. Living under the Third Reich made it challenging for them to freely access lesbian meeting spaces, media, and community, let alone develop a positive sexual or self-identity. The same can be said for gender non-conforming women who had similar experiences of persecution since all women were expected to abide by the same population policies and gender norms.⁶¹

⁵⁷ Ibid., 51.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 52.

⁵⁹ Spurlin, *Lost Intimacies*, 57.

⁶⁰ Huneke, "The Duplicity of Tolerance," 35.

⁶¹ Spurlin, *Lost Intimacies*, 60.

The racialization of sexuality and ideologies of German hetero-nationality determined whom the Third Reich considered a political and social threat. Gay men were systematically persecuted because they were perceived to be a larger threat to the goals and ideologies of the Nazi regime whereas the threat of lesbians was negligible.⁶² Gay men were antithetical to the Third Reich because they failed to contribute to population growth, could not perform hegemonic masculinity, and were wholly incompatible with Nazi racial, gender, and sexual ideology. Resultantly, gay men were arrested, sent to prison and concentration camps, and murdered in greater numbers than lesbians. Lesbians lacked the political and social capital to be considered as threatening as gay men because of their gender. Women were “subordinate to men,” so if lesbians conformed to the Nazis’ feminine ideal and population policies—and were also not endangered by their ethnicity, race, party membership, or ability—they were less likely to experience persecution.⁶³ Lesbians’ experiences were more frequently characterized by the repression of their identity, fear of denunciations, and erasure of their subcultures.

Ultimately, Nazi norms, ideologies, and goals called for the eradication of homosexual identities and (sub)cultures. This undoubtedly took a psychological, emotional, physical, and intellectual toll on many gay men and lesbians, as suggested by the first-hand experiences of the survivors included in this paper. The Third Reich limited gay men’s and lesbians’ access to community and altered gay men’s and lesbians’ sense of self. Additionally, the Nazis’ persecution of gay men “fulfilled genocide criteria” and deserves to be recognized as such.⁶⁴ It is also important to consider the ways in which the erasure of queer (sub)cultures during the Holocaust might also be classified as a genocidal act. The United Nations’ *Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the*

⁶² Schoppmann, *Days of Masquerade*, 20.

⁶³ Spurlin, *Lost Intimacies*, 54.

⁶⁴ Matthew Waites, “Genocide and Global Queer Politics,” *Journal of Genocide Research* 20, no. 1 (March 2018): 57.

Crime of Genocide (1948) does not currently include cultural destruction as an act of genocide, nor does it use gender or sexuality to define members of a group that can be targeted for destruction.⁶⁵ As other genocide studies scholars have argued, these are two areas of the *Convention* that warrant reconsideration so that more groups are properly recognized and equally protected under the law.⁶⁶

Going forward, queer studies, women's and gender studies, and genocide studies must do a better job of incorporating, challenging, and expanding each other's bodies of work. More research should be done to theorize and analyze how gender and sexuality are constructed and constricted by political powers, societal pressures, and legal systems. Within Holocaust research, there needs to be more work that considers the experiences of lesbians, gender non-conforming women, and people of various gender identities and sexual orientations. LGBTQ+ people's experiences of genocide speak to broader social, political, and systemic oppressions that continue today. Moreover, they can also reveal how LGBTQ+ people become bystanders and perpetrators themselves. These experiences and the multitude of factors that create these experiences ought to be explored if we aspire to prevent future genocides and foster acceptance and respect for all individuals.

In conclusion, it is essential to excavate and compile LGBTQ+ people's histories because they reveal the depth and breadth of LGBTQ+ experiences while also exposing how homophobia and heteronormativity operate within political structures, social institutions, and everyday life. Furthermore, they expand the growing body of work on the deleterious impacts of racialization by providing additional evidence of racialization's nationalistic, imperialistic, and genocidal effects. Historians, activists, genocide scholars, and queer theorists must continue to

⁶⁵ United Nations, *Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide* (1948), in *United Nations Treaty Series* Volume 78 (1951): 277–322.

⁶⁶ Waites, "Genocide and Global Queer Politics," 49–53.

create space for LGBTQ+ people to share their perspectives and histories. Hopefully this paper offers a portal for further research because history is powerful and necessary. It helps explain, inform, and shape the present in numerous ways. Queer history is particularly important to research and understand because LGBTQ+ people still face invisibility, discrimination, and persecution. Genocide studies is equally vital because genocide education has the power to widen people's perspectives, teach them compassion, and invest them in ongoing efforts toward achieving social justice and protecting human rights. Historical research not only raises awareness of the past but can orient us in the present toward the future we want to create. Furthermore, feminist historical research disrupts master-narratives, combats stereotypes, and expands understandings of people's lived experiences and the factors that create those experiences. There are many unexcavated perspectives, stories, and communities that deserve to be uncovered—along with additional research on what social, political, economic, cultural, epistemological, and linguistic constraints leave these topics on the margins. However, there must be a series of seismic shifts in people's practices, values, and perceptions before this is possible throughout academia. One shift in praxis is greater interdisciplinary and transnational research accompanied with community outreach and coalition-building. Researchers have the power to create new ways of thinking and being in the world that promote transformation and liberation for all peoples, which will only be strengthened by community engagement and civic participation. More scholars who seriously consider power differentials, scrutinize their methods of analysis and theoretical frameworks, and use their work to promote social justice will result in an abundance of politically relevant works that can inform public policy, advocacy, and grassroots organizing. Feminist historical research is one point of departure for this kind of work, especially that which seeks to understand the lives and contexts of otherwise marginalized historical actors. Using gender and sexuality as categories of analysis to understand the

experiences of gay men and lesbians under the Third Reich is one among many necessary contributions to feminist historiography, though there is always more work to be done.

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