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The persecution of homosexuals during the Holocaust

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THE PERSECUTION OF HOMOSEXUALS DURING THE HOLOCAUST

By

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Introduction

When the Holocaust has been written about or spoken of, it is often focused on the stories of the millions of Jewish people and political prisoners that were put into concentration camps, or killed. The voices of some of the smaller groups that were imprisoned have been lost over the years. Many of these groups were small before they were imprisoned and came out even smaller. Historians overlooked many of these groups, such as the Jehovah's Witnesses, gypsies, criminals, anti-socials, and homosexuals after the war was over, because many of the groups still had negative stigmas attached to them, and still do to this day. Gypsies are still often poor and have negative stereotypes perpetuated about them. After the war, criminals were still looked down on for their misdeeds. The homosexual men had it particularly rough after the war. They were often shamed into silence, put in Soviet prisons, and left off of memorials. This silencing of their histories has left minimal sources about the subject. Survivors felt shame for being imprisoned for being homosexual, and often stayed quiet about their experiences for years. As the last few homosexual survivors are finally speaking, there is some information coming forth about their experiences.

This paper will attempt to comprehensively tell the story of these survivors or "forgotten victims"¹, and to make the voices heard of those that history has pushed aside and shamed into silence. Topics I will be cover include life for homosexuals before the start of the war, the beginning of the Holocaust and the events that precipitated the imprisonment of homosexuals, life in the concentration camps, and life after liberation, including current memorials and reparations. Specific emphasis will be on homosexual men because of their special persecution under Paragraph 175, and the type of treatment inflicted on them. Lesbians were not persecuted as often, and were not seen as a threat. If they were put into a concentration camp, they were

¹Heinz Heger, "The Men with the Pink Triangle" (Los Angeles: Alyson Publications, 1980), 8.

labeled as “anti-socials” and not as homosexuals. While this paper primarily addresses male homosexuals because of their specific persecution, lesbians will be discussed where there is accurate information available. The difference in scope of information is indicative of the patriarchal beliefs of the Nazi party. Homosexual men were “identified” by their non-conforming behaviors and subsequently persecuted. They were thought of as weak and so they could not properly contribute to society. However in the case of lesbians, their non-conforming behaviors were not seen as a threat to the Nazi patriarchal power structure. Patriarchy and how it influenced the Nazi view of homosexuals ultimately led to the persecution, extermination, and silencing of the homosexual victims.

Life for Homosexuals Before the Holocaust

For homosexuals, life before the Holocaust was pretty good, especially in some of the larger cities. Many people could be open about their attractions and not have to fear severe repercussions. To many, especially those living in Berlin, this was known as the “Golden Twenties”² Despite this festive time in which homosexuality was tolerated and even flourished in larger cities, it did not stop the laws against homosexuality from strengthening under Nazi rule. During the 20s, the law, Paragraph 175 was almost repealed, but when the Nazis came to power, everything changed.

Before discussing the treatment of homosexual men during the Holocaust, it is important to address this specific law that was used to persecute them, as well as life leading up to the Nazi rise to power. These topics will help to better understand the lives of homosexuals during this time period.

Paragraph 175

² Ibid., 9

Sodomy law has been in place in Germany since its unification in 1871.³ It was more of a formality than a law that was actually enforced. It was rarely ever used against anyone, and citizens were not often worried about it. Paragraph 175 of the Penal Code of 1871 was revised after the Nazis came to power, but the language of the original version was as follows, “An unnatural sex act committed between persons of male sex or by humans with animals is punishable by imprisonment; the loss of civil rights may also be imposed.”⁴ Even then, imprisonment and “loss of civil rights” was left open to interpretation, unlike later versions, which became more and more specific. Even as the Nazis began to gain power, Paragraph 175 was mostly ignored, although it started to become more and more of a threat as the years went on.⁵ As is evident from the language, women were not included in this text, so many women enjoyed a great deal of autonomy since being persecuted under the law was less of a threat than it was for men. The phallic-centered thinking had a hard time imagining two women having sex, and was less threatened by women having close bonds, so Paragraph 175 really did not affect them. Men in power were concerned with the spilling of sperm for reasons other than procreation, so things like masturbation, bestiality, and sodomy were often specified in these penal codes.⁶ This was another reason that women were not included in the codes, because they could not waste what was thought to be important life-making material, especially at a time when there was a newly united Germany trying to establish their population. It was also thought that homosexual tendencies and actions made men weak so that they would be unable to work and

³ Ibid., 9

⁴ Günter Grau, “The Hidden Holocaust” (New York: Cassell, 1995), 65.

⁵ Paragraph 175, Directed by Rob Epstein and Jeffrey Friedman. Germany: Channel Four Films, 2000.

⁶ Richard Plant, “The Pink Triangle” (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1986), 31.

would have to live off the state.⁷ These false notions are what fueled the penal codes that years later were still being used as threats against homosexuals.

As the “Golden Twenties” were underway, there was more of a push to take Paragraph 175 off of the books. In the 20s there was a gay and lesbian movement that was gaining momentum. In 1929, there was a parliamentary commission that was rewriting Germany’s moral code, and because of the work of this gay and lesbian movement, they voted to drop the anti-sodomy statute. The commission’s recommendation was never brought to parliament, however, because of the rising influence of the Nazi party.⁸ So in a matter of a few years, Paragraph 175 went from almost being abolished, to being strengthened, which significantly altered life for lesbian and gay citizens.

Magnus Hirschfeld

Magnus Hirschfeld was an important sexologist and advocate for the rights of homosexuals. Hirschfeld was a homosexual, a Jew, and a physician. He was the founder of the Scientific Humanitarian Committee, which was very influential in the gay and lesbian rights movement, as well as in attempting to get Paragraph 175 repealed.⁹ He also founded the Institute for Sexual Research which housed many books, including his own research, on the topic. Hirschfeld was the figurehead for many international congresses on the subject of sexuality and changing policy so that homosexual men would not have the threat of being persecuted anymore. He, along with some other advocates, went before parliament a few times to try and get Paragraph 175 taken off of the books. First, in 1898, Hirschfeld, along with August Bebel, a leader of the Social Democratic Party, took a petition to the floor of the Reichstag to get Paragraph 175 repealed. They argued that the law was antiquated and pointless by then.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 31

⁸ Heinz Heger, “The Men with the Pink Triangle” (Los Angeles: Alyson Publications, 1980), 9.

⁹ Richard Plant, “The Pink Triangle” (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1986), 29.

Homosexuals could be found anywhere, at any level of society, and that if it were actually enforceable, Germany's jails would be overrun. Hirschfeld's petition was debated five times by special councils by 1913, but was often unfortunately used as a pawn in party rivalries, and did not go very far.¹⁰

Hirschfeld did a lot of research in sexology, specifically with gay, lesbian, and even intersex people. He wrote over 200 books, pamphlets, and other materials on these subjects.¹¹ These were very lengthy works, and while by today's standards they may not be seen as extremely accurate or well-researched, they brought about a discourse on sexuality and sexual orientation that had not previously been discussed. In 1903, the Scientific-Humanitarian Committee distributed 6,611 questionnaires to factory workers and university students in Berlin collecting data on contemporary sex habits and attitudes. From the data, Hirschfeld made the conclusion that 2.2 percent of German males were homosexual, which roughly added up to 1.2 million men.¹² These statistics should not be considered fact because the survey was only distributed in Berlin, which has historically been more open and accepting of homosexuals. However, this was the first study of its kind and was used to try to advance the rights of homosexuals, although it later fueled Nazi propaganda against them.

Much of Hirschfeld's research was focused on separating homosexual men and women from heterosexuals and proving that they were their own "third sex". He tried to find biological and physiological characteristics that made them distinct.¹³ He also reinforced the notion that homosexual men had more feminine characteristics. Although Hirschfeld later retracted these statements and acknowledged that homosexuals were not a "third sex", the damage was already

¹⁰ Ibid., 35

¹¹ Ibid., 29

¹² Ibid., 40

¹³ Ibid., 34

done. The Nazis were able to use Hirschfeld's own research against him for their own propaganda. They took Hirschfeld's words and made it seem as though homosexuals "were not really men" and were inferior to heterosexuals.¹⁴ They exploited the notion that homosexuals were inherently different from heterosexuals as a means to other them and persecute them. On May 6, 1933, the Nazis broke into the Institute of Sexual Research and smashed all they could, and confiscated more than twelve thousand books and irreplaceable photographs. These books and pictures were later burned in a public ceremony, permanently destroying much of Hirschfeld's research.¹⁵

The Golden Twenties

The 1920s were known in Germany as the "Golden Twenties" for many homosexuals as well as the general population. It was a time of burgeoning sexual freedom. This was especially true in the larger cities. During this time, the larger cities saw more gay and lesbian organizations, bars, journals, and publishing houses.¹⁶ In Berlin, it was said that there were close to a hundred gay and lesbian bars. Many celebrities frequented these bars when they were in Berlin, the Schwanberg and the Silhouette Club among them. These were some of the popular spots. Homosexual men and women could be out and open with their sexuality in Berlin. Some of the clubs were explicitly rented to homosexuals on certain evenings. According to Holocaust survivor Heinz F., Berlin used to be "wild and crazy and gay".¹⁷ There was a lot of poverty in Germany around this time, which contributed to the tensions that gave rise to the Nazi party, however for the homosexuals in these cities, multiple people referred to these times as

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 34

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 51

¹⁶ Heinz Heger, "The Men with the Pink Triangle" (Los Angeles: Alyson Publications, 1980), 9.

¹⁷ Paragraph 175, Directed by Rob Epstein and Jeffery Friedman. Germany: Channel Four Films, 2000.

“golden”.¹⁸ Even if they did not have much money, people could hang out at these clubs, or go to gay and lesbian organizations, be open, and meet other people like them. Annette Eick explains that there were many butch lesbians at these clubs, not just gay men. There was a sense of community that extended even through to the beginning of the war. Eick recalls how one of the lesbians she met in the clubs saved her life by giving her a permit so she could escape to England during the war.¹⁹ Many of the gays and lesbians at these clubs even tried to pair off and enter into marriages with each other to avoid being sent to the concentration camps. It was this openness during the 1920s and organizing on the part of lesbian and gays that allowed many of these “marriages” to happen.

The Beginning of the Holocaust

Paragraph 175 Revised

As the Golden Twenties passed and the Nazi party started to gain power, there became an increasing fear of homosexuality. Homosexuals were another scapegoat that the Nazi party could use as to why Germany was failing as a nation. Homosexuals were seen as weak degenerates who had to rely on state aid to get by. Their behaviors as homosexuals were what made them “weak” and that if they were allowed to continue, it would be “corrupt” other citizens.²⁰ Not to mention that these men were having non-procreative sex at a time when the Nazis wanted to have as many strong, good German citizens as possible, and so non-procreative sex was seen as a taboo.²¹ Nazi leader Heinrich Himmler said that homosexuality would deprive Germany of the children that they owed her.²² Paragraph 175 became the way that the Nazis could more effectively regulate this homosexual behavior. On May 14, 1928, the Nazis

¹⁸ *We Were Marked with a Big A*, Directed by Elke Jeanrond and Joseph Weishaupt. Netherlands, 1991.

¹⁹ *Paragraph 175*, Directed by Rob Epstein and Jeffery Friedman. Germany: Channel Four Films, 2000.

²⁰ Richard Plant, “The Pink Triangle” (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1986), 31.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 87.

²² *Paragraph 175*, Directed by Rob Epstein and Jeffery Friedman. Germany: Channel Four Films, 2000.

published a response to a question posed about their stance on reforming Paragraph 175. This is one of their more outright responses to the issue of homosexuality. They said,

It is not necessary that you and I live, but it is necessary that the German people live. And it can only live if it can fight, for life means fighting. And it can only fight if it maintains its masculinity. It can only maintain its masculinity if it exercises discipline, especially in matters of love. Free love and deviance are undisciplined. Therefore, we reject you, as we reject anything that hurts our nation.

Anyone who thinks of homosexual love is our enemy. We reject anything which emasculates our people and makes it a plaything for our enemies, for we know that life is a fight, and it is madness to think that men will ever embrace fraternally. Natural history teaches us the opposite. Might makes right. The strong will always win over the weak. Let us see to it that we once again become the strong! But this we can achieve only in one way- the German people must once again learn how to exercise discipline. We therefore reject any form of lewdness, especially homosexuality, because it robs us of our last chance to free our people from the bondage which now enslaves it.²³

This outright, public stance against homosexuality was only the beginning of many more strengthened laws and persecutions. Heinrich Himmler said that homosexuality was not just a criminal act but “a danger to the future Aryan race”.²⁴ As soon as Hitler took power, he attempted to strengthen anti-homosexuality laws. Just one month after he took office in 1933, homosexual rights organizations were banned.²⁵ Then, on June 28, 1935, a revised Paragraph 175 was put in to place, which strengthened the previous version considerably. Now, any suggestion or suspicion of homosexuality could be punishable by arrest, whether or not you were caught committing a homosexual act.²⁶ The revised wording for Paragraph 175, defining a sex offence between males, goes as follows,

175: A male who commits a sex offence with another male or allows himself to be used by another male for a sex offence shall be punished with imprisonment.
Where a party was not yet twenty-one years of age at the time of the act, the court may in especially minor cases refrain from punishment.
175a: Penal servitude up to ten years or, where there are mitigating circumstances, imprisonment of not less than three months shall apply to:

²³ Richard Plant, “The Pink Triangle” (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1986), 50.

²⁴ Heinz Heger, “The Men with the Pink Triangle” (Los Angeles: Alyson Publications, 1980), 9.

²⁵ Richard Plant, “The Pink Triangle” (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1986), 50.

²⁶ Heinz Heger, “The Men with the Pink Triangle” (Los Angeles: Alyson Publications, 1980), 9.

1. A male who, with violence or the threat of present violence to body and soul or life, compels another male to commit a sex offence with him or to allow himself to be abused for a sex offence;
2. A male who, by abusing a relation of dependence based upon service, employment or subordination, induces another male to commit a sex offence with him or to allow himself to be abused for a sex offence;
3. A male over 21 years of age who seduces a male person under twenty-one years to commit a sex offence with him or to allow himself to be abused for a sex offence;
4. A male who publicly commits a sex offence with males or allows himself to be abused by males for a sex offence or offers himself for the same.²⁷

This revised version of Paragraph 175 is much more lengthy than the previous version, and makes sure there are many more opportunities for males to be “caught” and persecuted. The revised version also doesn’t explicitly state what constitutes a “sex offence” between two men, so many men were persecuted simply because they hugged another man, or received a letter from a gay friend, or even just had gossip about their behavior going around the neighborhood.²⁸ Any and all signs of homosexuality were to be stopped. Bestiality even took a back seat to homosexuality, as it moved from the main body of the original Paragraph 175, to subsection b of the updated version.²⁹ This revised Paragraph 175 is what eventually led to the persecution and detention of thousands of males, many of whom were not actually homosexual, but were falsely perceived to be because of the witch hunt tactics of the Nazis and Paragraph 175.

Ernst Roehm and Heinrich Himmler

Ernst Roehm was one of Hitler’s friends and confidants, even before Hitler rose to power. Roehm met Hitler in 1919 and they became fast friends. They were so close in fact, that when speaking to Roehm, Hitler would use the familiar form of address. This was quite the gesture of intimacy, which he only ever used with Roehm and a couple of close chauffeurs and valets.³⁰

²⁷ Günter Grau, “Hidden Holocaust” (New York: Cassell, 1995), 65-66.

²⁸ Heinz Heger, “The Men with the Pink Triangle” (Los Angeles: Alyson Publications, 1980), 9.

²⁹ Günter Grau, “Hidden Holocaust” (New York: Cassell, 1995), 67.

³⁰ Richard Plant, “The Pink Triangle” (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1986), 58-59.

Hitler and Roehm participated in the Beer Hall putsch, which was an early attempt at a Nazi revolution, which ultimately failed. Hitler and Roehm were both jailed. This is where Hitler began writing *Mein Kampf*. Roehm was in charge of the SA, or the *Sturmabteilung*, which was the original paramilitary wing of the Nazi party. They were also referred to as the Brownshirts, because of their uniform. Roehm was a known homosexual and so these Brownshirts were often suspected of homosexual activity.

An all-male youth group called the Rovers, also had many reports of homosexuality and were under suspicion by the Nazis. Richard Plant, who narrowly escaped the hands of the Nazis, was part of the Rovers along with his friend Ferdi. The boys in the Rovers were open about their crushes on each other, and the Rover leaders had their "favorites". Plant says, "Other boys, more down to earth, talked openly about 'going with friends' and enjoying it."³¹ There were romances that went on between these boys that went beyond normal brotherhood. These types of youth groups, were highly scrutinized. Nazi youth groups were especially under close watch to make sure they were practicing acceptable behavior. Heinrich Himmler was especially enraged by homosexual behavior within the Nazi party.

Heinrich Himmler was an extremist in most of his ideals. He fueled many of the Nazis anti-Semitic, anti-homosexual, and other extreme policies as he gained more and more power within the Nazi party. On January 6, 1929, Hitler appointed Himmler as Reichsführer SS (*Schutzstaffel*), which was then under the command of Roehm.³² Himmler was very anti-homosexual and tried his hardest to convince Hitler that Roehm was not someone that the Nazi party should associate with. Roehm was very open about his homosexuality, which often made Himmler angry. However, while Roehm did "flaunt" his relationships with men, he never once

³¹ *Ibid.*, 3.

³² *Ibid.*, 78-79.

had a relationship with anyone under his command.³³ At first, Hitler tried to defend Roehm by issuing a public statement defending the right of officers to not be scrutinized for what they do in private. He said, "...The sole purpose of an inquiry must be to ascertain whether or not the SA officer... is performing his official duties... His private life cannot be an object of scrutiny unless it conflicts with basic principles of National Socialist ideology."³⁴ Roehm used this defense to further be open about his homosexuality. This infuriated Himmler, and he tried to think of a way to disgrace Roehm and make Hitler get rid of him. Around 1934, Hitler had to face the fact that the SS was stronger than the SA, so Roehm and the SA were not of very much use to him. Himmler saw his opportunity and he, along with a few other officers, started to make false documents "proving" that Roehm and the SA were going to start a revolution against Hitler, and slipping these onto Hitler's desk. They called him incessantly with new "news" about the SA's plans. Roehm had been increasingly ornery and overbearing on the entire party, including Hitler, whom he often complained about. Hitler had been conflicted about what to do with Roehm since they used to be friends. The new information Hitler was receiving all fit in perfectly with his plan of wanting to get rid of Roehm, and also to position himself as the moral leader of the Nazi party.³⁵ Since Roehm was so open about his homosexuality, it was an easy transition for Hitler to make, which would then make him more accepted as the leader of the Nazi party.³⁶ Hitler tried to have a meeting with Roehm to make it known that the SA was not the driving force anymore. Roehm was furious and flew into a rage after the meeting. This, along with Himmler's false information, and Hitler's yearning to be the moral leader of the Nazi party, all precipitated Hitler's decision to murder Roehm and many other SA members. On June

³³ Ibid., 61.

³⁴ Ibid., 61.

³⁵ Ibid., 65, 66, 67.

³⁶ Ibid., 64.

28, 1934, also known as the Night of the Long Knives and one year to the date prior to the strengthening of Paragraph 175, Hitler had troops storm a main SA house, and murder Roehm and many other SA officials. Then Hitler issued a statement saying, "I therefore require all SA commanders to take the utmost pains to ensure that offenses under Paragraph 175 are met by immediate expulsion of the culprit from the SA and the Party."³⁷ Himmler was then in position to take more power within the Nazi party. He helped to expand Paragraph 175, and on June 17, 1936, he became chief of all SS and police forces. Within three months he established the Federal Security Office for Combating Abortion and Homosexuality.³⁸ With Roehm now dead, Himmler started a major campaign against homosexuals, and made them one of the Nazi's targeted groups. He also vowed to rid the SS of any homosexuals, threatening to put them in camps and shoot them as they "tried to escape" if an officer was found guilty of homosexuality.³⁹ "Trying to escape" meant the Nazis would find any excuse to execute the officer and pass it off as the officer's own fault, especially so the other members wouldn't get suspicious.

Persecution of Homosexuals

Once the Nazis took power in 1933, they put their ideals into law and practice immediately. They sought to make a point to Germany that they were the new ruling power. In January of 1933, Hitler was appointed Chancellor, however he did not have enough support to win the election in March. In February, the Reichstag, the German parliament building, was set on fire by a Communist. Hitler saw his chance to set himself up as Germany's leader and savior. He went to the ruins of the Reichstag and made a speech, telling Germany that, "This is a sign of Providence from above. Now nobody will dare stand in our way when we crush the Communist

³⁷ Ibid., 67.

³⁸ Ibid., 80.

³⁹ Ibid., 90.

menace with an iron fist.”⁴⁰ This officially started the Nazi regime of terror. Jails became crowded extremely fast, and Himmler started ordering the construction of concentration camps, the first one at Dachau just outside of Munich. Homosexual rights organizations had just been forbidden a few days before the burning of the Reichstag, and so many of the leaders of these organizations were the first to be put into these jails. Despite this, many gay citizens felt that they were safe enough from the Nazis’ wrath. They figured that if they just laid low, they would be able to sneak by. Even though the gay bars had closed, gay citizens could not foresee the persecution that was to come. Often, Paragraph 175 was used as an easy way to arrest and punish people the Nazis disliked, like people of different political parties, no matter if they had actually engaged in homosexual behavior or not.⁴¹ It was very easy for someone to make up a story about having seen another person engaged in homosexual behavior. Criminals sought to make some money and would often take bribes from the Nazis to “confess” that they had seen someone engaging in homosexual behavior.⁴² It was now legal for the Nazis to persecute a German citizen for homosexuality for even being suspected of being a homosexual. Any type of gossip and innuendo could be taken as proof of someone being a homosexual, so even the slightest look, touch, or rumor could send the Gestapo coming to take the person away.⁴³ Rudolf Klare wrote a book which outlined same-sex felonies. These standards, along with Paragraph 175 were used by Himmler to persecute homosexuals. Klare’s criteria were:

- Simple contemplation of desired object (abstract coitus)
- Plain touching (which might lead to hyperesthesia, erection, ejaculation, orgasm)
- Petting, embracing, kissing of the partner with results similar to above

⁴⁰ Ibid., 106.

⁴¹ Ibid., 109.

⁴² Ibid., 141.

⁴³ Paragraph 175, Directed by Rob Epstein and Jeffery Friedman. Germany: Channel Four Films, 2000.

- Pressing of (naked) penis to any part of the partner's body, such as thigh, arm, hand, etc.
- Pressing of two bodies against one another with or without friction
- Rhythmic thrusts between knees or thighs, or in armpits
- Touching of penis by partner's tongue
- Placement of penis into partner's mouth
- Pederasty or sodomy (placement of penis in anus)⁴⁴

The Nazi use of these criteria is evident from the experience of Holocaust survivor Heinz Heger, and his recollections on how the Gestapo came to take him away suddenly one evening. He did not know what he had done but was summoned to the Gestapo headquarters in his area. Once there, he was confronted with a picture of himself and his boyfriend that he had given to his boyfriend. He had written on the back of it, "To my friend Fred, in eternal love and deepest affection". That was all the Gestapo needed to send him to prison and then to the camps. He was not allowed to go back home to even let his mother know what had happened to him.⁴⁵ This was a very common occurrence, even for many citizens that were not homosexual. The law could make any citizen seem like a homosexual, and therefore an easy target for the Nazis. The Nazis also decided that the anti-homosexual laws were retroactive. This meant that someone could have had homosexual relations in the past, or have been suspected of them, and they could still be persecuted.⁴⁶ Even if homosexuals went underground and stopped any type of behavior that could be deemed "suspicious" they were not always safe from the Nazis.

The Nazis cared the most about German citizens and their homosexual behavior. Since it was the Aryan race that they were trying to promote and preserve, they did not care about persecuting non-German homosexuals. They thought that homosexuals would deprive Germany

⁴⁴ Richard Plant, "The Pink Triangle" (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1986), 113.

⁴⁵ Heinz Heger, "The Men with the Pink Triangle" (Los Angeles: Alyson Publications, 1980), 19-22.

⁴⁶ Richard Plant, "The Pink Triangle" (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1986), 112.

of its rightful citizens that would be born from heterosexual unions. Following this logic about foreigners, they did not mind if “foreigners” were homosexual, because it would ultimately just be hurting the race the Nazis wanted to get rid of anyway.⁴⁷ The only foreigners that Hitler and Himmler did care about were those in regions that Hitler wanted to take over. So many Polish citizens, as well as citizens in the Alsace-Lorraine region of France were also persecuted under Paragraph 175. The only time that foreigners were left completely alone was during the Olympics in Berlin. Hitler tried hard to make sure that Berlin looked nice for the Olympics and did not reveal the true terror that was going on within Germany. A directive came down from Himmler that instructed the Secret State Police that, “For the coming weeks, I forbid the taking of action, including interrogation or summons, against any foreigners under Paragraph 175, without my personal approval.”⁴⁸ Hitler realized that many other nations and cultures find it acceptable for men to show affection towards other men, and that the Gestapo cracking down on that during the Olympics was not a smart political move. Even the newspaper headings went from talking about the roundup of homosexuals, to how excited everyone was for the Olympics.⁴⁹ After the Olympics closed, however, the Nazis went right back to their terrors and rounding up of homosexuals. Some of the gay bars were reopened by the Nazis during the Olympics, providing an opportunity for the Gestapo to watch to see who was inside.⁵⁰ Hitler Youth, a group for younger men, often fell under suspicion because of the nature of the group with young men in close quarters forming intricate relationships with one another. Especially after seeing how Roehm’s SA, to Himmler, was full of homosexuals, the SS wanted to make sure this reputation would not be put on them. They were under much scrutiny and Himmler was not

⁴⁷ Ibid., 118.

⁴⁸ Günter Grau, “Hidden Holocaust” (New York: Cassell, 1995), 59.

⁴⁹ Richard Plant, “The Pink Triangle” (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1986), 133-134.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 134.

afraid to put his own Hitler Youth in a concentration camp.⁵¹ The Nazis did not need much evidence or persuasion to persecute homosexuals. In order for the Aryan race to succeed, there were to be no homosexuals, as they would be a detriment and contagion to society.

In the Camps

The Pink Triangle

One of the more well-known facts about the Holocaust was of how Jewish people were forced to wear a yellow Star of David patch even before they were put in the concentration camps. However, it is less well-known that each group that was put in the camps had a certain colored triangle affixed to their prisoner clothing so that they were identifiable within the camps. For example, political prisoners wore a red triangle, criminals wore green, anti-socials wore black, and Jehovah's Witness wore purple. Other markings determined if you were Polish or Czech, a race defiler (Jews who had sexual relations with Aryans), or a repeat offender. The homosexuals were marked with a pink triangle. These triangles made it much easier for prisoners to be discriminated against even further because of why they were in the camp. Many homosexual prisoners in the camps mentioned that the pink triangles that were affixed to the uniforms were often larger than those of the other prisoners. This has not been proven for all prisoners with a pink triangle, but was mentioned by a few.⁵² This made them even more distinguishable from the other campers, and often predisposed them to harsher treatment. Heinz Heger reports that a SS Hauptsturmführer commanded that the prisoners pink triangles be replaced with ones that were twice as large as the original. The commander said, "That's so I can recognize you filthy queer scum before you get close."⁵³

⁵¹ Günter Grau, "Hidden Holocaust" (New York: Cassell, 1995), 54.

⁵² Richard Plant, "The Pink Triangle" (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1986), 164.

⁵³ Heinz Heger, "The Men with the Pink Triangle" (Los Angeles: Alyson Publications, 1980), 67.

The pink triangle was not the only symbol that was used to identify homosexuals. In one instance, there was a man who had "Paragraph 175" written on the back of his uniform until he was later identified by a pink triangle.⁵⁴ In Prettin, a town a few hours outside of Berlin, there was a castle that served as a camp for many homosexuals. One man, Kurt von Ruffin, was taken there and they marked all of the homosexual prisoners with a big red "A". He was allowed to run an errand in town one day, and when someone asked what the "A" meant, he said "Ausgang" which means "exit" in German. Von Ruffin was too ashamed to say what the "A" meant on record during his interview, but afterwards he said that it meant "Arschficker" or "assfucker".⁵⁵ This seems to be a specific incident to the camp at Prettin, however it illustrates the point that the Nazis made homosexuals easily distinguishable and set apart for special punishment and hard labor. While everyone was marked, homosexuals were often made to stand out even further by either the "A" or a larger pink triangle.

Special Barracks

At first, many homosexual prisoners were just put into the same barracks as everyone else. The camp officials were still trying to establish how they should be run, so at first prisoners were just shoved into the camps. Later on, many prisoners were broken up by group, and this was especially true of the homosexuals. One of the reasons that the homosexuals had their own barracks was because the Nazis thought that homosexuality was like a disease that you could catch. Especially in situations where men and women were already separated, the Nazis didn't want any of the other prisoners to be given even more opportunity to become a "sexual deviant". The Nazis believed that homosexuals were not as strong of workers as other prisoners and so they did not want any other prisoners to become "weak" like the homosexuals. Also, if the

⁵⁴ Paragraph 175, Directed by Rob Epstein and Jeffery Friedman. Germany: Channel Four Films, 2000.

⁵⁵ We Were Marked with a Big A, Directed by Elke Jeanrond and Joseph Weishaupt. Netherlands, 1991.

homosexuals were in barracks together, they could be more easily watched to make sure that they were keeping to themselves and not having any sexual relations, or even masturbating. They could also be more easily rounded up for special treatment by the camp officials. The men in the homosexual barracks were not allowed to go within five meters of the other blocks. The Nazis wanted them to stay as isolated as possible. If the prisoners were found too close to another block, they were taken and whipped upwards of 20 times, while many other homosexual prisoners were made to watch.⁵⁶

These barracks had many special rules attached to them. The main rule was that prisoners had to keep their hands and arms outside of their sheets at all times. They were also only allowed to wear a nightshirt, no pants. These rules were put in place so that the men would not be able to masturbate or engage in any other types of sexual activity. As one officer put it, "You queer assholes aren't going to be jerking off in here."⁵⁷ Even when it was freezing cold outside and the windows had completely frosted over, men were still allowed to only wear a nightgown and had to keep their hands outside the blankets. Some prisoners, just trying to stay warm, would try to sneak their hands under the blankets. However, if they were caught, they were taken outside into the snow and cold and would have bowls of water poured over them. Then they would be left outside for at least an hour. Many prisoners did not survive this, and if they did, they usually caught bronchitis.⁵⁸ It was these types of harsh measures that were often put upon homosexual prisoners that the other prisoners did not have to face. These brutalities were put into place to ensure that the homosexual prisoners knew they were thought of as subhuman and diseased. Sequestering the prisoners also made sure that they were easier targets for any type of punishment that an official felt like.

⁵⁶Heinz Heger, "The Men with the Pink Triangle" (Los Angeles: Alyson Publications, 1980), 34.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 34.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 34.

Labor/Punishments

The work that the Nazis gave to the homosexuals was among the most backbreaking work in the camps. Many non-homosexual prisoners attested to this. While all of the work in the camps was hard and many people died, the work that the homosexuals were made to do was especially dangerous. The most notorious of these jobs were working in the clay pits and working in the stone quarry. Many of the accounts of this type of treatment come out of Buchenwald Concentration Camp, where a large number of the homosexual prisoners were sent. However, this type of work and treatment was also recorded at other camps, so it was not unique to Buchenwald. Heinz Heger gives his own firsthand account at having to work in the clay pits at Buchenwald. He discusses how a fixed number of carts full of clay had to be delivered to the brickwork factory. It didn't matter whether it was extremely hot outside, or if the ground was covered with snow, the quota of carts had to be met. The quota was purposely very high, and the guards could get in trouble if their quota was not met, and so they pushed the prisoners to exhaustion in order to meet the quota. The clay in these carts was very heavy and the prisoners were already weak from starvation, exhaustion, and sickness, so they often had trouble doing this work. Heinz recollects,

Five or six prisoners had to load the carts with shovels, while other groups of the same size pushed the full carts uphill. The Capos and SS rained almost constant blows on us, hoping to accelerate the work in this way, but also giving free vent to their sadistic impulses... ..It happened very often that the prisoners shoving a full cart uphill simply ran out of strength, and the cart slipped violently back down on them. If it could not be braked in time with wooden sticks, then it ran right back with full force into the cart below. Many prisoners were already so numbed and indifferent that they didn't even

bother to jump out of the way when a full cart came roaring toward them. Then human bodies would fly through the air, and limbs be crushed to a pulp.⁵⁹

It is this type of work that was reserved specifically for the homosexual prisoners, which made them even more likely to be killed while working. The guards were ruthless in order to make sure that the prisoners were working as hard as they could to meet the quota so the guards themselves wouldn't get in trouble.

Another similar type of work was done primarily by the homosexual prisoners in the stone quarries at Buchenwald and Flossenburg. Much like the clay pits, prisoners were made to carry large rocks out of the stone quarry and transport them to be used by the Nazis. This work was dangerous, just like the clay pits, because often people would fall under the weight of the stones and sometimes be crushed.⁶⁰ The guards would also play "games" with the prisoners that would usually result in their death. None of the prisoners were allowed within 5 meters of the barbed wire gate. When the guards would get bored, they would choose a prisoner and put a bucket on his head and spin him around. Then they would take the bucket off and shove him towards the gate. The prisoner would be left dizzy and disoriented. Before he could right himself, he would get too close to the gate and would be shot by the guards for "trying to escape".⁶¹ Some prisoners also had their hats snatched off by the guards and thrown against the wire fence. Prisoners were required to have their caps on at all times. If they refused to go get their cap, they were severely beaten or shot. If they went after their cap, they would get too close to the gate and would be shot. These games went on often in the quarry unless workers were in short supply for the demand. The homosexual prisoners working in the quarry were then made to carry a stone from the quarry back to the camp. The guards would decide if a stone was large

⁵⁹ Ibid., 37-38.

⁶⁰ David Hackett, "The Buchenwald Report" (Boulder: Westview Press, 1995), 175.

⁶¹ Heinz Heger, "The Men with the Pink Triangle" (Los Angeles: Alyson Publications, 1980), 50.

enough or was too small and would make prisoners carry back stones that could easily crush them. Many prisoners did not make it out of the quarry. If prisoners were injured in the quarry, they were taken to the infirmary, and when the doctors found out they were homosexual, they were usually given a lethal injection.⁶²

Heinz Heger describes another type of work he was made to do in the concentration camps. He, along with other homosexual prisoners, was made to help build mounds of dirt that then the Nazis would use for target practice. However, the Nazis came early while the prisoners were still building these targets and they would start shooting at the “targets” which became the prisoners. Heger had to dodge bullets while still doing his job. He was lucky because he got transferred from that work fairly fast, but many prisoners that had to stay at that work, were “accidentally” killed on the job.⁶³

Punishment for homosexual prisoners ranged from being beaten to being given lethal injections. One of the less brutal ways that homosexuals were punished was trying to “reeducate” them. The prisoners were made to go the camp brothel and were forced to have sex with the women in the brothel in the hopes that if they did that enough time they would be “cured”. Even if they weren’t cured, they would still know how to have sex with women and would be used to it so that perhaps one day they could produce children with a woman.⁶⁴ Prisoners were also routinely whipped and beaten. They were usually made to strip naked, or at least made to take their pants off so their genitals were in full view. They were put on a “whipping horse” and lashed until they bled. Other homosexual prisoners were forced to watch. While the prisoner was being beaten, a few officers were known for standing there,

⁶² Ibid., 38.

⁶³ Ibid., 44.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 100

masturbating, while watching the beatings. They would get increasing joy and pleasure as the prisoner writhed with pain, and wouldn't let the beatings stop until they came.⁶⁵

Homosexual prisoners were also often hanged. Some were hanged in the camp square to show other prisoners what could happen to them if they engaged in that type of behavior. Most often, however, prisoners were hanged in the woods around the camp. One survivor recalled what was known as the "singing forest". This is where homosexual prisoners were taken and they were hanged from nails in the trees. They were usually nailed up in twisted positions, adding to the torture. The screams and cries of the prisoners could be heard well within the camp, thus giving it the name the singing forest.⁶⁶ The special punishment that was reserved for the homosexual prisoners was torturous, and often resulted in their deaths. At best they would be "reeducated" and perhaps beaten, but at worst, they could be hanged, given a lethal injection in the sick bay, or "accidentally" shot while working.

Experiments

The Nazis used their prisoners as human lab rats for most of the Holocaust. Experiments were done on prisoners in the sickbay, pregnant women, children, the disabled, twins, and homosexuals. The experiments performed were different for all groups and often had to do with exposing the victims to various germs and viruses, poison, amputation, and other cruel and inhumane "research". Many experiments were done to homosexual prisoners to see if the prisoners could be "cured". Other than the fact of the Nazis wanting to subject the homosexual prisoners to unnecessary torture, they thought that if they could "cure" the homosexuals, then they could become functioning German citizens and produce more offspring. However, because "results" were often slow, unreliable, and made up, many homosexual prisoners were left to

⁶⁵ Ibid., 55.

⁶⁶ Paragraph 175, Directed by Rob Epstein and Jeffery Friedman. Germany: Channel Four Films, 2000.

suffer the effects of these experiments for the rest of their lives without reparation, or they were exterminated.⁶⁷

One experiment that was done on homosexual prisoners was castration. Many homosexual prisoners were castrated just as a matter of routine practice for these prisoners, and for no real experimental reason. The castration was meant to further emasculate the men and essentially punish them for their "crime". It was hoped that castrated men would lose their sex drive, and therefore wouldn't need to be secluded from the rest of the population of the concentration camp because "homosexual misconduct" did not have to be feared.⁶⁸ However, this still often led to their extermination because they could not be functioning citizens of Germany. Castrated men often faced severe pain and the potential for other infections because of the crude and inhumane conditions in which they were castrated. Many of these prisoners were followed up with after their castration to see how their progress was and if they were satisfactorily "cured" enough for the Nazis.⁶⁹ Some homosexuals were forced into castration depending on if they were a multiple offender, or depending on the age of the other male they seduced. Other prisoners were given the option of "voluntary castration" which some prisoners believed would help keep them out of the gas chambers longer.⁷⁰

Another method of experimentation that the Nazis used on the homosexual prisoners was hormones. Hormone experiments were also done with the hopes of "curing" homosexual prisoners and returning them to what the Nazis considered a "normal" state of functioning. These hormone experiments were often haphazardly done, and results were scattered and unreliable. The files on the subjects were often incomplete or non-existent and did not provide

⁶⁷Heinz Heger, "The Men with the Pink Triangle" (Los Angeles: Alyson Publications, 1980), 101.

⁶⁸Günter Grau, "Hidden Holocaust" (New York: Cassell, 1995), 251.

⁶⁹Ibid., 255.

⁷⁰Ibid., 258.

reliable conclusions. Vials of blood were mixed up, lost, and broken before they even got tested for hormonal levels, since they were often sent out of the camp for testing.⁷¹ Records of the number of homosexual prisoners varied often, which shows the carelessness in accurate reporting by the Nazis, as well as prisoner deaths because of the experiments performed on them.

One of the main “doctors” that performed these experiments was Dr. Varnet. He often operated out of Buchenwald, which housed a large population of homosexual prisoners. His victims were given hormone treatments by making an incision in the thigh of the man, and placing a briquette of hormones inside. Then they were monitored regularly. Samples of their blood and urine were taken in order to see if they made any progress.⁷² Other homosexual prisoners were castrated as well as given hormones. This was an even more drastic attempt to “re-educate” and “normalize” these prisoners, in hopes that they would start to be interested in the opposite sex and perhaps even produce more offspring.⁷³ After castration or hormones, prisoners were often asked follow up questions to gauge their interest in the opposite sex. Some of the prisoners would report back that they had an increasing sexual interest in the opposite sex, and no longer felt attracted to the same sex in the hopes that they would be released from the concentration camp and pronounced “cured”.⁷⁴ This way, they would have a better chance at getting a job and resuming a normal life after the camp. Being a productive German worker who could potentially have more offspring for Germany was so highly valued many prisoners lied about the results. It was highly unlikely, however, that the prisoners were ever released from the camps until their liberation, for fear that they would divulge the horrors of the camp to the outside world.

⁷¹ Richard Plant, “The Pink Triangle” (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1986), 175.

⁷² Günter Grau, “Hidden Holocaust” (New York: Cassell, 1995), 281.

⁷³ Richard Plant, “The Pink Triangle” (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1986), 176-177.

⁷⁴ Günter Grau, “Hidden Holocaust” (New York: Cassell, 1995), 281.

Relationships with Kapos and Guards

Life inside the concentration camps was desperate for all prisoners. Prisoners either lost their spirit and drive, or they became very determined to survive. Those who lost their will to live often ended up wasting away or not caring about their fate. They felt defeated by the Nazis. Those who were able to keep their will to survive often tried to stay alive by whatever means necessary. The homosexual prisoners often had to resort to sexual favors to try and stay alive longer. They were not proud of it, but knew it was what they had to do. Those men who refused to give sexual favors to guards and other officers were often given much harsher treatment or were simply sent to be killed.⁷⁵

While the Nazis tried to make sure that the homosexual prisoners did not have sex with each other and did not spread their “disease” to other prisoners, they were much more lax when it came to fulfilling their own needs. Camp guards, as well as prisoners who functioned as bunk leaders, or Kapos, would often chose homosexual prisoners to become their personal sexual servant. When new transports of prisoners would come in, the homosexuals would be rounded up and guards would take turns picking out who would be their “favorites”. As one prisoner recalled, “I was already wise enough to know exactly why [they]... were admiring us in this way. They were on the lookout for a possible lover among the new arrivals.”⁷⁶

Once prisoners were chosen by the Kapos or guards, they were often watched over and protected by these people in power. This could ensure that they got more to eat, were assigned to easier jobs, didn’t receive severe punishment, among other things, which often helped to ensure their survival in the camps for a longer period of time. One prisoner recalled,

⁷⁵ Bozena Shallcross, “The Pink Triangle and Gay Camp Identity in Marian Pankowski’s Writings,” *Russian Literature* 70.4 (2011): 518, doi: 10.1016/j.ruslit.2012.01.009.

⁷⁶ Richard Plant, “The Pink Triangle” (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1986), 170.

The Kapo I had in quarantine was in fact the Blockältester. He was a particularly brutal man. He had his room at the entrance to the barrack. Opposite, another little room served either as lumber-room, or as the bedroom for the Pipel. The Pipel was a young boy, generally about twelve years old, whom the Blockältester always kept near him. He was the Blockältester's jack-of-all-trades and had to obey all his orders and fulfill all his wishes. He polished his shoes, cleaned the barrack, made his bed, and also had to satisfy his unwholesome desires when the kapo demanded. The youngster knew that if he were dismissed he'd be heading for certain death, so he had no choice but to obey. In exchange, he had a little more to eat than the others. The Blockältester just needed to give a bit less to one prisoner so he could give more to those he favored.⁷⁷

This shows how these special prisoners were not only made to give sexual favors, but do all sorts of other special tasks for their guard. This was preferable, however, to the other jobs they could be doing, such as working in the rock quarry. Even if they had to do out and do hard work with the rest of the prisoners, they were often still well protected. They were fed more, which gave them more strength to work, and helped keep them alive longer.

Another homosexual prisoner mentioned, "He [the Kapo] kept a protecting hand over me. He saved my life more than ten times over, and I am still very grateful to him for this today, more than twenty-five years later."⁷⁸ Even though this prisoner was chosen to become the Kapo's "dolly boy", as they were called, and had to do whatever the Kapo wanted, he still expresses gratitude, because the Kapo essentially let him live. When one prisoner was about to be transferred to another camp, he had to say goodbye to his Kapo friend, and face the uncertainties of a new camp. He says, "In the last few weeks, my life had been almost bearable, through this sexual relationship with my Kapo. He got more for me to eat, and thanks to his help I was assigned only to easier and nondangerous work... Experience, however, had taught me that it was possible to keep alive even in concentration camp... I was determined to survive."⁷⁹ This

⁷⁷ Bozena Shallcross, "The Pink Triangle and Gay Camp Identity in Marian Pankowski's Writings," *Russian Literature* 70.4 (2011): 518, doi: 10.1016/j.ruslit.2012.01.009.

⁷⁸ Richard Plant, "The Pink Triangle" (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1986), 170.

⁷⁹ Heinz Heger, "The Men with the Pink Triangle" (Los Angeles: Alyson Publications, 1980), 45.

determination to survive helped these prisoners to seek out opportunities and learn the ways that they could stay alive for even just one day longer.

Jewish Homosexuals

Firsthand testimony from gay Jewish victims is rare. One of the only survivors to address being gay and Jewish was Gad Beck, who only spent a brief time in a transit camp, and not a concentration camp. For most of the war he worked to provide food and shelter for Jews in hiding, and so his experience is not as focused on the concentration camps. Also, other than the fact that his boyfriend was taken away by the Gestapo, most of his story focuses on assisting Jewish citizens and keeping them safe.⁸⁰ Beck's story, as well as the lack of other gay Jewish survivor stories helps to illustrate the division between various victims of the Holocaust.

Scholarship tends to focus on one particular group of victims, and not their intersectionalities. There were prisoners who belonged to multiple groups. This is evidenced by the fact that Jewish prisoners with affiliations to another group would have one yellow, and one triangle of the color belonging to the other group to make their Star of David. For example, a homosexual Jewish prisoner would have one pink and one yellow triangle forming the Star of David. Each persecuted group wants to focus solely on themselves because it is preserving their history and memory. They do not want their stories or victimhood minimized by other groups. While this is understandable, it also presents many problems for survivors who were persecuted for multiple aspects of their identity and where they fit into Holocaust scholarship.

Lesbians

Lesbians were not often highly distinguishable in the camps. They were grouped together with the other "anti-socials" and were made to wear the black triangle. Lesbians were

⁸⁰ Gad Beck, "An Underground Life: Memoirs of a Gay Jew in Nazi Berlin" (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1999), 70.

not persecuted like the homosexual men, so lesbians could have come from any of the persecuted groups. Unlike the homosexual men, Paragraph 175 did not apply to women, so lesbians had to be persecuted other ways, if the Nazis even cared to persecute them. The Nazis did not care as much about lesbianism, but at one point they discussed including them in Paragraph 175. This was ultimately not done for a few reasons. The Nazis did not think that Aryan women could even be lesbians or that Aryan women would have a concept of what that was. In addition, even if some Aryan women were found to be lesbians, they could be used as “breeders” anyway, regardless of what their feelings were on the matter. Reproduction was one of the most important goals of the Nazis, and so they pushed women to have babies, and did not care about their consent. Also, since women were not in positions of power, the Nazis did not worry that lesbianism would spread or cause a problem. They thought that homosexual men would plan a conspiracy, however, women would not have the power or ability to do that. Essentially, lesbians were not seen as a threat to the Nazis or their plans, so long as they produced children.⁸¹ Some women were still afraid to be open about their sexuality though, because the Nazis were unpredictable and would put anyone in the camps who they felt didn’t fit their model citizens for the future. It was an uncertain time that bred fear in most citizens. One citizen discussed, “not letting anyone notice your true nature, or else I would have ended up in a concentration camp.”⁸²

While lesbianism could be found in any of the camps, since women were put in bunkers together, the camp of Ravensbrück was particularly known for its lesbianism. Ravensbrück was the women’s concentration camp, and so many stories have come out after the Holocaust of the same-sex relationships that went on in the camps. The concentration camps were a very scary and unpredictable place. If women weren’t sent directly to the gas chambers, they were often

⁸¹ Heinz Heger, “The Men with the Pink Triangle” (Los Angeles: Alyson Publications, 1980), 11.

⁸² William Spurlin, “Lost Intimacies” (New York: Peter Lang Publishing, 2009), 50.

separated from their families and children. The women relied on friendship with each other for comfort and survival.⁸³ Women were in extremely close quarters to each other, sleeping three or more to a bed, so they were often found cuddling together for warmth and companionship. Some women's relationships, however, went beyond that of friendship. Emotional and physical relationships formed within the camps. Many of the prisoners told stories of these relationships. One prisoner recalls that, "As they lay crammed together in their beds, they could not avoid seeing and hearing the lovemaking, 'sometimes shameless and unrestrained.' On occasion, if one got up at night to use the toilet, one had to wait because the 'little couples' (Pärchen) were in the small compartment with the doors locked."⁸⁴ This was a common story among many prisoners. Others recalled finding couples together, embracing, kissing, having sex, not only in bed at night but behind the blocks too. In other memoirs, prisoners describe having crushes on other prisoners, and thinking of fantasies between them. These fantasies would sustain the women and make them happy. Sometimes, the fantasies even became reality, and for a brief time, the women would have love and joy in their lives.⁸⁵ Not all of the women in relationships or engaging in same-sex sexual relations identified as bisexual or lesbian, but they engaged in this behavior to ease the loneliness and tension of the camps. However, it was documented that some prisoners had "firmly established identities as lesbians or bisexuals before ever arriving at Ravensbrück."⁸⁶ This behavior within the camps was not punished by the guards. The Nazis just let this behavior happen since these women could not be producing children anyway, and it was not thought of as making them "weak", as was the case with male homosexuality. The women could still do the work they were assigned even with these little "pet" relationships, as

⁸³ Jack Morrison, "Ravensbrück" (Princeton: Markus Weiner Publishers, 2000), 133.

⁸⁴ Ibid., 131.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 130.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 130.

they were seen. The treatment of lesbians in the camps was much different than for homosexual men, however much of this was rooted in the patriarchy and misogyny of the Nazi party. The misogyny of the Nazis actually worked in the favor of lesbians, and made them less threatening to the Nazis.

After Liberation

Soviet Imprisonment

Most of the victims of the Holocaust were freed after the war was over. The Americans and Soviets helped to free them and tried to restore Germany to order and safety. Prisoners tried to find surviving family members and go back to their hometown. It was disorienting, after being in the camps for so long and seeing all of the horrors, to go back to a world that did not yet understand what happened. However, the homosexual prisoners were liberated from the camps, only to face more discrimination. Since they were technically in the concentration camps because of a "crime" that they committed, they were sometimes put into Soviet prisons after they got out of the camps. Paragraph 175 had been on the books since 1871, and so the Supreme Court ruled in 1957 that Paragraph 175 still stood since it was not a law made by the Nazis. As noted, however, Paragraph 175 was strengthened by the Nazis and made into a more strict version of the law. So homosexuals were more persecuted during the Nazi regime than ever before, and in a much more brutal way than before or after the Holocaust, however the court did not recognize this. Paragraph 175 was kept on the books in Germany until 1969, meaning homosexuality was still thought of as a crime until that year. One man recalls that he was repeatedly arrested under Paragraph 175 throughout the 1950s and '60s.⁸⁷ While other prisoners were trying to make sense of what happened and rebuild their lives and families, homosexual prisoners faced even more discrimination, hardships, and imprisonment.

⁸⁷ Paragraph 175, Directed by Rob Epstein and Jeffery Friedman. Germany: Channel Four Films, 2000.

Stigmatization of Survivors/Reparations

Homosexual survivors of the Holocaust often faced extreme discrimination once they were liberated from the camps, even if they were not put into Soviet prisons. Survivors had to go back to their towns, and find family and friends, many of whom now knew the reason that the survivor was taken to the camps in the first place. Survivors often had to lie about why they were in the camps and keep quiet about their experiences. Prisoners who were in specifically homosexual barracks, or had experiments done on them, often kept quiet because they didn't feel that they could share their experiences for fear of ridicule or scorn. One man was in the concentration camps for over eight years, and when he got out, he went right back to work in his family store. He said he never told his mother anything that happened in the camps, he just kept everything quiet and went to work. He didn't think that she would be able to hear everything that went on, and didn't want her to have to deal with his "crime". He talked about "patiently carrying one's burden" and feeling shame about his imprisonment because he was imprisoned as a homosexual.⁸⁸ It was because of this shame that he never spoke to his mother about what had happened to him for over eight years. So much of his life and torture had to be repressed and kept a secret from everyone because he felt shame and was unsure how people would react. This was a common theme between many of the homosexual survivors of the Holocaust. They were shamed into silence. Their experience went unheard for many years because no one wanted to hear it, and they felt ashamed to tell it. Prisoners often felt isolated by their neighbors who knew that they were a homosexual and stayed away from them.⁸⁹ One prisoner recalls that after a week or so, no one wanted to hear about his experience anymore. They were horrified by it and could not comprehend what had happened, so they didn't want to talk about it anymore. The

⁸⁸ Paragraph 175, Directed by Rob Epstein and Jeffery Friedman, Germany: Channel Four Films, 2000.

⁸⁹ Heinz Heger, "The Men with the Pink Triangle" (Los Angeles: Alyson Publications, 1980), 117.

Nazis aimed to eradicate the homosexuals or “re-educate” them, and as Professor Lautmann of the University of Bremen put it, the re-education towards heterosexuality was somewhat achieved by the collective silence of the homosexual victims.⁹⁰

Reparations were given to many survivors of the Holocaust and their families, but not to the homosexual survivors. They were not recognized for many years as victims of the Holocaust. They were still discriminated against, and the government did not want to recognize them, especially since homosexuality was still against the law. It took courage for homosexual survivors to even start to press for reparations. They faced renewed discrimination, and before 1969, potential imprisonment.⁹¹ Heinz Heger describes his experience attempting to get reparations for his time in the camps, “My request for compensation for the years of concentration camp was rejected by our democratic authorities, for as a pink-triangled prisoner, a homosexual, I had been condemned for a criminal offense, even if I’d not harmed anyone. No restitution is granted to ‘criminal’ concentration-camp victims.”⁹² One survivor got a document from the British saying that he was in the camps and had suffered mental and physical trauma, however he was never fairly compensated for it. He was only living on 900 marks and had a very small apartment. In some cases, men were compensated up to 5,000 marks, but that was only in extreme, very well-documented cases. Since it was very hard to document this treatment, and the Nazis burned many of their documents as the end of the war was drawing near, it was hard to have a case for the courts to get reparations as a homosexual survivor.⁹³ It could be very hard to get jobs after the Holocaust if you were a known homosexual survivor. If they did get a

⁹⁰ *We Were Marked with a Big A*, Directed by Elke Jeanrond and Joseph Weishaupt. Netherlands, 1991.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁹² Heinz Heger, “The Men with the Pink Triangle” (Los Angeles: Alyson Publications, 1980), 117.

⁹³ *We Were Marked with a Big A*, Directed by Elke Jeanrond and Joseph Weishaupt. Netherlands, 1991.

job, it was usually menial work, and was not in a field they were passionate about or skilled in. They still faced extreme discrimination, and were barely compensated for their suffering.

Memorialization

In the 1990s, after the reunification of Germany, more LGBT rights groups and homosexual survivors of the holocaust began demanding an official memorial for the homosexual victims of the Holocaust. There were already many memorials for the other groups persecuted by the Nazis however, the homosexuals were routinely left out. Other survivors were not comfortable including the homosexuals in their memorials, and so they were left off of group memorials, continuing decades of discrimination and hurt. Historians warn that when writing about the Holocaust, people must be careful not to engage in, “a crass game of competitive victimhood.”⁹⁴ Everyone suffered horrible tortures in the concentration camp and it would not be fair to say who suffered worse or deserves more compensations or memorials. Yet, the homosexual victims did not start to be recognized until the 1990s, after they started to demand they be heard.

Some memorials started off as “guerilla memorials” where gay rights groups would go and place wreaths and other types of memorials at the concentration camps recognizing the homosexual victims. One gay rights group actually got permission to put a memorial with a pink triangle and the inscription “Beaten to Death-Silenced to Death” at Mauthausen concentration camp.⁹⁵ This memorial not only speaks to the treatment of the homosexual victims within the camps, but also the continued silence that happened afterwards. Other memorials to the homosexual victims had started to be approved and these victims were finally gaining some recognition for their suffering. Some concentration camps started to put up memorial plaques at

⁹⁴Bill Niven and Chloe Paver, editor, “Memorialization in Germany Since 1945” (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 146.

⁹⁵Ibid., 149.

the sites of the homosexual barracks, most notably one in Buchenwald concentration camp, where many of the homosexual victims were sent. Other countries like the Netherlands, had memorials put up much earlier than in Germany. In 2003, one of Germany's largest and most well-known memorials to homosexual victims was approved, and was finished in 2008.

Officially called the *National Memorial for the Homosexual Victims of the Holocaust*, it was the idea of Michael Elmgreen and Ingar Dragset. It is a large concrete block standing 12 feet tall, constructed in the Tiergarten. It has a small window in it which allows visitors to catch a glimpse of a video containing two men (although this is sometimes rotated to show two women) having to meet and share a secret kiss in the exact woods where the memorial is located. There is very little that indicates this is a memorial to the homosexual Holocaust victims. A small plaque and the video are the only clues. This was intentional, however, because Elmgreen and Dragset wanted it to be like someone was just randomly happening upon this clandestine relationship. They wanted to show the secrecy surrounding homosexual relationships and how "a simple kiss could land you in trouble".⁹⁶ By being placed in the Tiergarten, and not well labeled, the monument is a testament to the continued shame and secrecy that the homosexual victims faced, even after the Holocaust. When visitors just happen across this memorial, they are faced with watching a same-sex encounter and have to deal with their own feelings and potential prejudices about the video displayed. In this way, the memorial is continually challenging homophobia and honoring the continued victimization of homosexuals.

Not everyone was happy about the memorial, though. It intentionally bore resemblance to the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, which features large concrete blocks of various sizes in uneven rows. A museum/memorial is underground, beneath the blocks. The homosexual memorial is very close in proximity to this other memorial. Some Jewish victims

⁹⁶ Ibid., 152.

were upset at the new memorial's similarities to their memorial and the close location. All of this was intentionally done by the artists, showing the similar, yet othered nature of the homosexual victims and their relegation into secrecy yet again. Even though controversy has surrounded many of these memorials, they have served as a way to finally recognize the homosexual victims of the Holocaust and help to end decades of silence surrounding their suffering.

Conclusion

It has been estimated that over 50,000 men were arrested under Paragraph 175 during the time of the Nazi regime. Of those men, it is estimated that around 15,000 were murdered.⁹⁷ Exact numbers cannot be known because the Nazis often kept poor records and burned many of them when they knew their end was near. Many prisoners were quickly liquidated without accurate documentation of their deaths. All of these men suffered under the Nazis and should be remembered when discussing the Holocaust.

Before the Nazis came to power, Germany was experiencing more sexual liberation than ever before, especially in Berlin. There were many gay clubs and organizations, starting to work towards gay rights, specifically the repeal of Paragraph 175 which criminalized homosexuality. These "Golden Twenties" were cut short by the Nazis, who strengthened Paragraph 175 and started to persecute more and more homosexuals, and other men who they just believed to be homosexuals. They raided and burned Magnus Hirschfeld's Institute of Sexual Research, and assassinated Ernst Rohem, one of Hitler's closest confidants, who flaunted his homosexuality too freely. Homosexuality, especially within the Nazi party itself, was seen as a threat to the patriarchal behaviors of the party.

⁹⁷ Ibid., 148.

Homosexual men were thrown into separate barracks in the camps, and forced to do some of the most excruciating labor, which often resulted in death. They were severely punished, and were often seen as the lowest of the prisoners, even by the other prisoners. They often had medical experiments done to them that affected them and shamed them even after they were liberated, if the experiments didn't kill them first. While lesbians weren't specifically persecuted, many of them still ended up in the camps and faced discrimination, even though their treatment was not as brutal. This was because it was thought that they could just be forced into carrying out the Nazis will of Aryan procreation.

After the Holocaust, homosexual victims were often shamed into silence about their treatment in the camps. They faced renewed discrimination and potentially even imprisonment if they said why they were in the camps. They did not feel comfortable pushing for reparations and memorials until almost 50 years after they were liberated. Even today, they are still not well recognized or compensated. Only recently have we been able to get some testimony from homosexual survivors, many of whom did not want to be identified.

The homosexual victims of the Holocaust deserve respect and recognition for all of their sufferings within the camps. Their voices should be heard and their stories should be taught along with the other victims of the Holocaust. If we continue to ignore or silence their voices, we are letting the Nazis win, and are contributing to the homosexual victim's shame and victimization. It is important to keep the memory of these victims alive, especially as we enter into a time when many of our homosexual survivors are dying off, some of their stories never heard.

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