

Hubris and Hypocrisy, Incitement and Disavowal: Sexuality and German Fascism

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It is not acceptable to disguise dirty desires with National Socialist ideas. . . .
There are no two sides to the Jewish question and it is not admissible to damn the Jew in his political, economic and human manifestation while secretly, for personal convenience, to maintain the customs he has suggested in the realm of love- and sex-life.

Dr. Ferdinand Hoffmann, 1938

WHAT IS THE relationship between sexual and other kinds of politics? Few cultures have posed this puzzle as urgently, or as disturbingly, as Nazi Germany. The answers are multiple and as yet unresolved; each emerging answer raises further questions. What exactly were Nazism's sexual politics? Were they repressive for everyone, or were some individuals and groups given sexual license while others were persecuted, tormented, and killed? How should we periodize transformations in the history of sexuality in Germany? How do we specify the continuities and ruptures that mark the transition from the Weimar era into the Third Reich, and how do we periodize changes that occurred in the course of both eras? How do we make sense of the evolution of postwar interpretations of Nazism's sexual politics? What do we make of the fact that scholars from the 1960s to the present have repeatedly assumed that the Third Reich was "sex-hostile,"

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“pleasureless,” and characterized by “official German prudery,” while in films and popular culture there has been a countervailing tendency to offer lurid and salacious anecdotes as a substitute for serious engagement with the complexities of life under German fascism?¹

Another bundle of questions has to do with theoretical approaches. The topic of sexuality under Nazism exposes the poverty of our available conceptual languages and frameworks. Numerous scholars in the history of sexuality have turned away from the work of Sigmund Freud to that of Michel Foucault. Yet it is possible that we need both of them in order to understand and convey the distinctive qualities of life and death in a grotesquely brutal but wildly popular dictatorship that was obsessed with issues of both reproduction and pleasure.² It is also possible that we need to return to the work of such an intermittently neglected theorist of sex and power as Herbert Marcuse.³ All three thinkers struggled over how to put into words the coexistence of the seemingly contradictory; such Freudian terms as condensation, projection, splitting, transference, displacement, and disavowal are as indispensable as Foucault’s challenges to the repressive hypothesis and insistence on the mutual imbrication of power and knowledges. And few terms capture as well as Marcuse’s famous “repressive desublimation” the controlling components also of emancipatory injunctions. In addition, Marcuse was one of the first to try to articulate how Nazism’s hubristic racism was inseparable from its attempts to reorganize sexual life, how central the politicization of the previously more private realm of sexuality was to the Nazis’ political agenda, and how it was that sexual arousal could become a mechanism for social manipulation.

But there are many further interpretive dilemmas. It seems, for example, that we need not only to ask the increasingly more widely acknowledged—but still very pressing—questions of how categories of “race” and

¹Joachim Hohmann, *Sexualforschung und -aufklärung in der Weimarer Republik* (Berlin, 1985), 9; Sabine Weisser, “Sexy Sixties,” in *CheSchabShit* (Berlin, 1984), 99; Scott Spector, “Was the Third Reich Movie-Made? Interdisciplinarity and the Reframing of ‘Ideology,’” *American Historical Review* 106, no. 2 (April 2001): 472. On the emergence in the 1960s of the idea of Nazism as above all sexually repressive, see Dagmar Herzog, “Pleasure, Sex, and Politics Belong Together: Post-Holocaust Memory and the Sexual Revolution in West Germany,” in Lauren Berlant, ed., *Intimacy* (Chicago, 2000).

²On the importance of interrogating Foucault as closely as Freud, see Ann Laura Stoler, “The Education of Desire and the Repressive Hypothesis,” in *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault’s History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (Durham, 1995). On the need, as it were, to resupplement Foucault with Freud, see Teresa de Lauretis, “The Stubborn Drive,” *Critical Inquiry* 24, no. 4 (summer 1998).

³See Herbert Marcuse, *Technology, War and Fascism: Collected Papers of Herbert Marcuse*, vol. 1, ed. Douglas Kellner (New York, 1998), esp. 80–92, 162–64; and Jeffrey Herf, “One-Dimensional Man,” review of H. Marcuse, *Technology, War and Fascism*, in *New Republic*, February 1, 1999, 38–41.

“class” cut across and complicate categories of gender and sexual orientation but also to explore such finer delineations of sexuality and related realms as arousal, inhibition, anxiety, satisfaction, attachment, repulsion, envy, longing, and ennui.⁴ We need to think as well about what insights queer theory can offer not only into male and female homosexuality but also into heterosexuality and a host of other emotions and practices. And we need to consider what it might mean to extend and adapt our still only tentative understanding of such phenomena as pornography, voyeurism, or exhibitionism—usually analyzed in the context of individual feelings and behaviors—to such an area of inquiry as the ideological work of a culture more generally.⁵

The Nazis, as they worked to consolidate power, sanctimoniously claimed to be restoring law and order and returning marriage and family life to their proper dignity. Many scholars have taken them at their word. No less an authority than George Mosse, in *Nationalism and Sexuality* (1985) and *The Image of Man* (1996), described Nazism as profoundly repressive and intensely preoccupied with sexual propriety rather than liberation, and he argued at length that the ubiquitous nudes of the Third Reich were in actuality emptied of eroticism. Although in both books he made very perceptive points about the tensions between camaraderie and homoeroticism inherent in the Nazi ideal of male bonding and about the conflicting injunctions to fidelity to the community of males (the Männerbund) and to heterosexual family life with which Nazism confronted its male followers, Mosse remained committed to a vision of Nazism as hostile to nudism and pornography (indeed, to “all printed material that . . . could produce an erotic effect”) and “a movement that made every effort at middle-class respectability.”⁶ The two most recent German-language studies that claim to offer a comprehensive overview of Nazism’s sexual politics—Udo Pini’s *Leibeskuult und Liebeskitsch* (Cult of the body and love kitsch) and Stefan Maiwald and Gerd Mischler’s *Sexualität unterm Hakenkreuz* (Sexuality under the swastika)—once again reinforce standard assumptions. Pini paints the picture of a world in which

⁴On the need for finer interpretive tools than the usual clumsy race/class/gender/sexual orientation, etc., as well as more expansive understandings of the sexual and related realms, see especially Eve Sedgwick, “Introduction: Axiomatic,” *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley, 1990), and Lauren Berlant and Michael Warner, “Sex in Public,” in Berlant, ed., *Intimacy*.

⁵A brilliant preliminary exploration of these phenomena as they operate at the cultural (and not just individual) level in the present-day United States is offered by Ann duCille, “The Unbearable Darkness of Being: ‘Fresh’ Thoughts on Race, Sex, and the Simpsons,” in Toni Morrison and Claudia Brodsky Lacour, eds., *Birth of a Nationhood: Gaze, Script, and Spectacle in the O. J. Simpson Case* (New York, 1997), 293–338.

⁶George Mosse, *The Image of Man: The Creation of Modern Masculinity* (New York, 1996), 175–76.

“eroticism as a sensibility was suppressed,” bedrooms were “darkened” spaces in every sense of the word (*düster* means not only dark but also gloomy or depressing), and “feelings were as coordinated as the organizations.” Pini also reflects popular assumptions about periodizing sexual mores. In his view, under fascism, “whatever Weimar had thought and partially practiced as progress, was radically denied or terminated.” In fact, Pini opines that the “extremely uptight” state of affairs lasted “until 1968.”⁷ In a similar spirit, Maiwald and Mischler’s book announces succinctly that in the 1930s, “in London and Paris, in the German Reich as well as the United States, the prudery of the nineteenth century still dominated people’s love-lives. But no state limited the choice of partners as much as National Socialist Germany. The total state left no room in German beds for self-determined sex. The subjects of the NS-state had to forfeit their sexuality unconditionally to the regime.”⁸

Studies such as these neglect the fact that the Nazis also used sexuality to consolidate their appeal—and that they did so in many different ways. It is useful here to remember Foucault’s warning that repression is only one side of the history of sexuality; the other involves the positive play of power. We simply cannot understand why Nazism was attractive to so many people if we focus only on its sexually repressive aspects. Without question, Nazis were conflicted among themselves over sexual mores; some did indeed want a return to more conservative values and behaviors, but many others worked to detach emancipatory impulses from their association with “Marxism” and “Jewishness” and to redefine sexual liberation as a “Germanic,” “Aryan” prerogative. The regime ultimately offered, to those broad sectors of the populace that it did not persecute, many inducements to pre- and extramarital heterosexuality. Meanwhile, some of the most overtly repressive rhetoric was in its own way inciting. But it is also not adequate to emphasize only the incitements. Among the challenges that confront us, for instance, are the need to make sense of the inextricability of anti-Semitism from both anti-*and* prosexual Nazi efforts, as well as the inseparability of homophobia from injunctions to happy heterosexuality. Also challenging is the struggle to put our accounts of pleasure and horror under Nazism into some kind of relationship with each other. Sexuality in the Third Reich was, after all, also about the invasion and control and destruction of human beings.⁹ There was

⁷Udo Pini, *LeibeskuIt und LiebeskuIt: Erotik im Dritten Reich* (Munich, 1992), 9–11. Pini even speculates that Germans’ willingness to be “distracted away from eroticism and sexuality” was indicative of a deeper and more lasting national sickness, “a political German masochism, a joyful subordination and . . . willingness to deny one’s own feelings” (11).

⁸Stefan Maiwald and Gerd Mischler further contend that “in the NS-state individual claims to happiness are supposed to disappear from family life. . . . In the National Socialist worldview sexuality loses all ties to feelings” (*Sexualität unterm Hakenkreuz: Manipulation und Vernichtung der Intimsphäre im NS-Staat* [Hamburg and Vienna, 1999], 57, 60). See also pp. 114–16 for their very one-sided summary of Nazi attitudes toward women’s sexuality.

⁹In a pioneering essay, Sophinette Becker proposes that the contradictions in Nazi sexual rhetoric, policy, and practices were in fact only “seeming contradictions” (*Scheinwidersprüche*)

a “will to know” about the functioning of psyches and bodies that, over and over, crossed the border into violence, even as the resulting knowledges could appear as indistinguishable from the knowledges produced under liberal regimes. There was also, manifestly, a will simply to destroy.¹⁰

Especially by attending to the contradictory ways in which references to Jewishness were deployed in discussions of sex in the Third Reich, we can begin to develop a more differentiated picture of the reworking of mainstream sexual mores under Nazism. Whether anti-Semitism was deeply felt or simply strategically utilized, there is no question that it provided one of the premier sense-making systems in use in the Third Reich. A classic example of how conservative mores could be advanced through anti-Semitic argumentation is provided by the Nazi-identified physician Ferdinand Hoffmann, even as his work also provides significant evidence of just how unpopular sexual conservatism was. As the epigraph by Hoffmann already suggests, Hoffmann was clearly frustrated that other Nazis and the non-Jewish German masses did not agree with him. In a book published in 1938, Hoffmann fumed that “approximately 72 million condoms are used in Germany each year” and that “in the surroundings of big cities, evening after evening, the roads into the woods are covered with automobiles in which, after the American pattern, so-called love is made.” Premarital heterosexual intercourse was nearly ubiquitous, Dr. Hoffmann complained. “A young man who does not have a girlfriend is a priori a dummy; a girl without a boyfriend is a ‘homely Gretchen type.’” This was not just a matter of boys sowing their wild oats; girls too played the field. The idea that one should stay chaste until marriage “possesses absolutely no more validity.” At best, 5 percent of women entering marriage were still virgins; many had already had numerous boyfriends. Even after marriage Germans were hardly faithful to their spouses. Hoffmann imagined a map on which “all the criss-cross relationships of broken fidelities and adulteries are drawn; a filigreed network of lines would bind cities and towns and villages.”¹¹ Early-twenty-first-century readers might find images of millions of used condoms, multiple premarital relationships, and adultery as routine in urban centers and rural villages alike to be incompatible with their notions of National Socialism. What strikes many of us today as somewhat incongruous is also what bothered Dr. Hoffmann.

whose contradictoriness was actually central to their “functionality” for Nazism’s main purpose of “annihilation.” As she puts it, building on Herbert Marcuse’s insights: “In National Socialism, taboos were simultaneously intensified *and*—motivated by racism—ruptured, which was accompanied by the de-tabooization of violence.” See Sophinette Becker, “Zur Funktion der Sexualität im Nationalsozialismus,” *Zeitschrift für Sexualforschung* 14, no. 2 (June 2001): 130–45, esp. 139, 143.

¹⁰I thank Isabel Hull for an important conversation about violence and the “will to know” that took place at Cornell University in April 2001. On the dynamism of destructive action under Nazism, see Hull’s forthcoming book.

¹¹Ferdinand Hoffmann, *Sittliche Entartung und Geburtenschwund*, 2nd ed. (Munich, 1938), 13, 21, 24–25, 34.

Hoffmann proposed that it was Jews who had led Germans astray. In his eagerness to persuade Germans of the value of more conservative mores—chastity before marriage, a single standard of premarital abstinence and marital fidelity for both women and men, and an end to “preventive intercourse” (i.e., the use of birth control)—Hoffmann sought to link liberated heterosexuality with Jewishness. For example, he declared that “the demand for the full living-out of sexuality is a typical Jewish-liberalistic one, and the news should gradually have gotten around, that everything which on the Jewish side has become a battle cry, solely serves disintegrative and not constructive aims. The Jew has never talked us into something that could help us.” The trouble was that although the populace had largely converted to Nazism in political terms and Germans were appropriately anti-Semitic in most parts of their lives, they were loath to let go of their emancipated sexual habits. Hoffmann raged against the Jewish doctors who, during the years of the Weimar Republic, had had the audacity not only to provide birth control information and equipment but also to publish books that advanced the proposition that “the purpose of sexual activity is pleasure,” “nothing more and nothing less.” Hoffmann challenged his fellow Nazis to explain how they could reconcile “their enthusiastically presented National Socialist worldview” with their ongoing “sexual Bolshevism” and declared it “incomprehensible” that the press in the Third Reich continued to be lax in advocating stricter mores, occasionally even “prettifying adultery as a naturally occurring masculine way to be.” Trying to pin on Jews what he simultaneously admitted was a pandemic phenomenon, Hoffmann tried to reconcile his own contradictions by surmising that, due to the machinations of Jewish doctors, pop-song writers, and filmmakers, individualism and materialism had come to “saturate the personality of the individual not only through to his economic interests, but through to his erotic deep structure [*erotische Tiefenschicht*].” As a result, numerous people believed that one could be a “good citizen of the Third Reich, if one is simply a good political soldier, and for the rest one can organize one’s love-life . . . in accordance with the previous liberalistic perspectives.” Few things could be further from the truth, Hoffmann warned his readers. “Jewish literature peddlers” had worked “for decades” to convince people that chastity was an unnecessary weakness, and “when we today, as people of the Third Reich, still cling to their erotic slogans, we only prove pathetically that we have understood nothing of the idea of the Third Reich.”¹² Hoffmann was certainly not alone in his views. There were other commentators—in population policy, medicine, and military leadership—who also insisted that Jews were the

¹²Ibid., 16, 29–30, 40, 49–51, 55. The doctor who suggested that the purpose of sex was pleasure was Max Marcuse, in his *Der Präventivverkehr in der medizinischen Lehre und ärztlichen Praxis* (Stuttgart, 1931).

ones who tended to engage in the “glorification of adultery and sexual uninhibitedness,” who worried about how Nazis “thoughtlessly repeat the Jewish or Jewish-influenced vulgarities concerning the relations of the two sexes,” and who admonished any German man still attached to a sexual double standard to expel the “poisonous substances of the Jewish moral perspective . . . sitting in his bones. Out with them!”¹³

Yet there was also another strand of Nazi argumentation about sex, one that was far more deliberately inciting and that explicitly aimed at encouraging joyful heterosexuality among those ideologically and “racially” approved by the regime. Importantly, however, anti-Semitism saturated this second strand of argumentation as well. For these prosex advocates, references to the supposed shamelessness and impropriety of “Jewish” versions of sexuality functioned preeminently as a technique of disavowal—a strategy for distracting attention away from Nazism’s own inducements to sexual activity. Although in countless instances, above all in its thorough racialization of sex and in its heightened homophobia, the Third Reich represented a brutal backlash against the progressivism of Weimar, Nazism brought with it not only a redefinition but also an expansion of pre-existing liberalizing trends.

Nazi spokespeople expounded on their own particular prosex vision, especially in attacks on the Christian churches. As Dr. Hans Endres, a leading Nazi race theorist, told an audience of high-ranking Nazis and their guests in 1941, “We have been raised in criminal bigotry, because the Oriental Christian mentality has suppressed our healthy Germanic instincts in sexual matters. Our younger generations . . . must become proud of their bodies and enjoy the natural pleasures of sex without being ashamed.”¹⁴ In a widely discussed 1936 essay, the physician Walter Gmelin reported that in his work evaluating couples’ “racial” and “hereditary” suitability for marriage, less than 5 percent of the men and women he

¹³Paul Danzer, “Die Haltung zum anderen Geschlecht als unentbehrliche Grundlage völkischen Aufbaus,” in *Streiflichter ins Völkische: Ausgewählte Lesestücke für deutsche Menschen aus dem “Völkischen Willen”* (Berlin, 1936), 5–6; Dr. Knorr, “Eine noch nicht genügend beachtete weltanschauliche und bevölkerungspolitische Gefahr,” *Ziel und Weg: Organ des nationalsozialistischen deutschen Aerztebundes* 7, no. 22 (November 1937): 570; Maj. Dr. Ellenbeck, “Der deutsche Unteroffizier und das Thema ‘Frauen und Mädchen,’” *Die Zivilversorgung*, October 15, 1942, 281–82. Along related lines, one physician, a Dr. P. Orłowski in Berlin, in decrying what he saw as an unfortunate pressure on men to please women sexually, in racially coded language blamed this pressure on Jewish doctors and psychoanalysts who had put the idea that they were capable of orgasm into women’s heads. Orłowski recommended to men a return to “‘automatic-egotistical’ sexual intercourse,” warning that solicitous concern for the woman would only lead to erectile dysfunction and prostate problems (“Zur Frage der Pathogenese und der modernen Therapie der sexuellen Störungen beim Manne,” *Zeitschrift für Urologie* 31, no. 6 [1937]: 383).

¹⁴Endres quoted in George W. Herald, “Sex Is a Nazi Weapon,” *American Mercury* 54, no. 222 (June 1942): 661.

interviewed turned out to have been virgins. Most had begun to have intercourse in their late teens and early twenties, approximately seven years before they married. Although Gmelin worried a bit that the majority had had more than one premarital partner, he nonetheless suggested that premarital experience was positive, “a healthy reaction against the social inhibitions and against morality preachers,” a sign that “also today—in spite of everything—people at the age of sexual maturity satisfy the drive given them by nature!” Indeed, Gmelin also remarked that those few who denied having had premarital experience “certainly did not display above-average hereditary resources [*Erbgut*].”¹⁵ Also in 1936, the jurist Rudolf Bechert defended extramarital affairs as well. In the context of explaining a proposed new law that would give illegitimate children the father’s name and equal rights with legitimate children to financial support, Bechert ventured the opinion that

nonmarital bonds are superior to marriages in many ways. It is not just life experience that proves that nonmarital connections rooted in sexual love are an unchangeable fact; rather, all of human culture teaches that they can represent the highest moral and aesthetic value. Without sexual love there is no poetry, no painting, indeed, no music! In all cultured nations concubinage is *not criminalized*, with churchy Italy ahead of all the rest. . . . Never can nonmarital sexual intercourse be prevented.

In fact, Bechert concluded effusively, “Love is the only true religious experience in the world.”¹⁶

These kinds of ideas—about the reprehensibility and unnaturalness of prudery and the transcendental, quasi-spiritual qualities of human sexuality—were made generally available not least through the official SS journal, *Das schwarze Korps*, one of the most popular weeklies of the Third Reich, printed in hundreds of thousands of copies and enthusiastically endorsed by the regime. Through its entertaining style, acerbic humor, and self-reflexive argumentative techniques, *Das schwarze Korps* advanced its recipe for sexual happiness and national health. The cheerful tongue-in-cheek approach could not disguise the savagery of the paper’s attacks on Jews, the handicapped, homosexuals, “asocial” criminals, and critics of the regime (all were recurrently thematized), but certainly it contributed mightily to the paper’s morally disorienting effect. *Das schwarze Korps* brazenly mocked Christian efforts to defend the sanctity of marriage and

¹⁵Excerpts from Medizinalrat Dr. Walter Gmelin’s essay “Bevölkerungspolitik und Frühehe” (published in the *Deutsche Aerztezeitung*) in “Mütterheim Steinhöring,” *Das schwarze Korps* (hereafter *DSK*), January 7, 1937, 13–14.

¹⁶Excerpt of Rudolf Bechert’s essay from *Deutsches Recht*, December 15, 1936, in “Mütterheim Steinhöring,” 14.

aligned itself with young people's impatience with traditional bourgeois mores. "Eager clerical 'moralists'" were accused of having "pathetic complexes"; "*original sin*" was presented as a "foreign" and "oriental" idea; medieval Christianity's dogmatism was described as having been designed to bring down the "vibrant" and "life-affirming" Germanic and Nordic peoples.¹⁷ When a female author remonstrated in another Nazi journal about the way men treated women as objects and tried to argue that Germanic tradition demanded that men be respectful of an unmarried woman's chastity, *Das schwarze Korps* rebuked her and rebutted her version of history. The paper declared that what she thought to be Germanic tradition was nothing but another example of "the pathological tendency to Catholic virginalism."¹⁸ In no uncertain terms, *Das schwarze Korps* attacked "the denominational morality . . . that sees in the body something to be despised, and wants to interpret what are natural processes as *sinful drives*."¹⁹ Although vociferously denying that it advocated "free love" (a notion it associated with the "Marxism" of the Weimar years) and recurrently insisting that Nazism was restoring marriage and family to their proper dignity (in opposition to what it described as "Jewish" attacks on the family), the paper repeatedly and openly defended both illegitimacy and nonreproductive premarital heterosexual intercourse. It also printed numerous pictures of nudes—paintings, statues, and photographs—and defended nudity as pure and life-enhancing.²⁰

Just as sexually conservative Nazi mores were expressed through anti-Semitism, so were the Nazis' particular versions of sexually emancipatory ideas. Repeatedly, *Das schwarze Korps*'s strategy was to contrast the kind of "propaganda for nudism" evident during the Weimar era (or, as *Das schwarze Korps* put it in 1935, during "the years of Jewish domination," when "the Semitic manipulators" were busy working to undermine "every natural order, such as marriage and family") with the aims of National Socialism, which were to resist "that prudery . . . which has contributed to destroying the instinct for bodily nobility and its beauty in our *Volk*," and to "represent the noble body in its natural shape" (for "the pure and the

¹⁷"Anstössig?" *DSK*, April 16, 1936, 13. Although *Das schwarze Korps* reserved special disdain for Catholics, this particular article involved an attack on a Protestant pastor for complaining about a picture of a naked woman in the Nazi paper *Völkischer Beobachter* (special issue of March 1936).

¹⁸Dr. Hans Lüdemann, "Neues Stadium der Frauenbewegung?" *DSK*, June 19, 1935, 10. Lüdemann is criticizing Marie Joachimi-Dege's essay in Will Vesper's journal *Neue Literatur*.

¹⁹" . . . Unzucht in der Soldatenzeit," *DSK*, March 5, 1936, 6.

²⁰For a fascinating analysis of the racial implications of nudism in Weimar and Nazi Germany (a phenomenon that also repeatedly challenges our usual categories of sexualization and desexualization), see Chad Ross, "Building a Better Body: The German Nudist Movement, 1900–1950," Ph.D. diss., University of Missouri, forthcoming.

beautiful were for the uncorrupted German never a sin”).²¹ Along related lines, in 1938, in two full-page photo spreads, *Das schwarze Korps* showcased the “beautiful and pure” nudity advocated by Nazism (exemplified by pulchritudinous naked women luxuriating in sun, sand, and sea) and juxtaposed this with the “shameless money making” of the previous “cultural epoch” (illustrated by photos of titillatingly half-clothed and excessively made-up women from what look to be Weimar dance halls).²² Not only the continual self-labeling as “pure” and “clean,” then, but also the fiercely hyperbolic attacks on Jews, Marxists, and Weimar-era cultural arbiters for their purported advocacy of extramarital sex, pornography, and nakedness served to distract attention from the Nazis’ advocacy of those very same things. *Das schwarze Korps*, in short, did precisely that which it said it was not doing.²³

Christian writers frequently attacked Nazism’s defenses of disrobement and of pre- and extramarital sexual activity. Catholic writers in particular noted with regularity that the Third Reich had disappointed them in the realm of sexual mores. One Catholic editor in Württemberg charged that “*fleshly lust*” and a “*spirit of uncleanness*” were at work in the Third Reich and bemoaned the fact that although “at first we believed that morality would improve in the Third Reich—today *this hope* reveals itself *more and more as false*.”²⁴ The Catholic priest Mathias Laros, author of the 1936 advice book, *Die Beziehungen der Geschlechter* (The relations of the sexes), praised the Nazis for their dedication to race and *Volk*, but he also held Nazism directly responsible for escalating the loosening of sexual mores:

²¹“Ist das Nacktkultur? Herr Stapel entrüstet sich!” *DSK*, April 24, 1935, 12.

²²“Schön und Rein” and “Geschäft ohne Scham,” *DSK*, October 20, 1938, 10, 12.

²³While *Das schwarze Korps* was the most overtly open of the Nazi newspapers in presenting a sexualized message, its strategies were actually complemented more than contradicted by the techniques of that other most influential anti-Semitic Nazi newspaper, *Der Stürmer*. *Der Stürmer* ranted repetitively about male Jews’ supposed compulsion toward sexual criminality (including rape, pedophilia, and systematic seduction of “German” girls into prostitution), and reading it could easily convey the impression that non-Jews never had sex with each other. Yet at the same time, it is clear that in its narrative pacing, its description of sex crimes, and its pictures of naked blondes defiled by big-nosed Jews, *Der Stürmer* itself served as a kind of pornography. In a way, then, like *DSK*, *Der Stürmer*’s constant announcements that Nazism was battling filth provided the opportunity to appeal to what Ferdinand Hoffmann labeled “dirty desires,” whether those desires were understood as sexual (for we have no way of knowing with which characters in *Der Stürmer*’s scenarios readers identified) or whether the longing being stoked was the longing to hate without guilt. For revealing examples, see “Die blonde Hilde: Der Jude Ernst Landau in Düsseldorf vernichtet blonde deutsche Mädchen,” *Der Stürmer* 11, no. 1 (January 1933): 1–2; “Jüdische Mädchenjäger: Rasseschänder Samuel Maier zu 1 1/2 Jahren Zuchthaus verurteilt,” *Der Stürmer* 13, no. 17 (April 1935): 8; “Max Strauss: Der Kinderschänder von Karlstadt und Urspringen,” *Der Stürmer* 13, no. 29 (July 1935): 1–2; and “Leo Weil: Der Kinderverführer von Karlsruhe,” *Der Stürmer* 14, no. 7 (February 1936): 7.

²⁴Krupka’s remarks in *Weg zum Ziel*, no. 18 (1935), quoted and discussed in “Pikanterien im Beichtstuhl,” *DSK*, June 26, 1935, 5.

“The era has succumbed to a horrifying barbarism and overstimulation of the sexual drive, especially since all inhibiting barriers of tradition have been trampled.” Laros further observed that the new Nazi encouragement of coed sports at the workplace was not exactly innocent. As male and female coworkers did their morning exercises together in a half-clothed state, women and girls were forced “to reveal their female secrets to a great extent”: “All talk of naturalness and the beauty of the body cannot do away with the consequence, that on the male side an intensified sex drive results, and on the female side, if she has retained her true femininity, the most delicate bodily shame has been damaged and moral feeling deadened.” Laros challenged readers to resist such “methods of the culture of nudism.”²⁵ Meanwhile, Protestants too complained that the new Nazi paganism involved a “tendency towards nudism.”²⁶ Protestants repeatedly expressed confusion about how best to respond to the quasi-spirituality of Nazism, with its “romantic idealistic” search for God in “the language of flowers and sounds or the wealth of our spiritual innerness”; put on the defensive, they rushed to prove that Christianity was not antisex, celebrating “the gift that God has given us in the powers of sex” and arguing self-critically that “the isolating of sexual problems has brought much harm and cramped-up-ness into Christianity.”²⁷

What is difficult to bring together into the same interpretive frame is this wealth of evidence for Nazism’s breezily upbeat defense of heterosexual enjoyment with the terror and mass murder that were Nazism’s most defining features and its *raison d’être*. The issue that requires emphasis here is that all the ugly aspects of Nazi sexual politics and other politics were not embedded in a broader antisexual attitude, as so many scholars have surmised, but, rather, coexisted with (however conventional and conformity-inducing) injunctions and encouragements to the majority of Germans to seek and experience sexual pleasure.

The work of Dr. Johannes H. Schultz provides an instructive case in point. Schultz was and still is most famous for being the inventor in 1920 of “Autogenic Training,” a system of self-hypnosis, relaxation, and breathing techniques to enhance overall well-being that has been exceedingly popular in Germany and eventually found adherents the world over. During the Third Reich, Schultz also became a well-known sex advice writer. In a 1937 essay, Schultz elaborated on the kinds of liberal antiguilt views that were to become a hallmark of his work. Among other things, he not only defended child and adolescent masturbation as “a necessary transitional phase of

²⁵Mathias Laros, *Die Beziehungen der Geschlechter* (Cologne, 1936), 166–67.

²⁶Wilhelm Stapel, “‘Neuheidentum’: Ein Brief und eine Antwort,” *Deutsches Volkstum: Monatschrift für das deutsche Geistesleben* (April 1935): 293.

²⁷Adolf Köberle, “Unter den Studenten,” in Hans Dannenbaum, ed., *Christus lebt!: Ein Buch von fruchtbarem Dienst in Lehre und Leben* (Berlin, 1939), 325; Theodor Haug, “Die sexuelle Frage in der Seelsorge,” *Zeitwende* 15 (1938–39): 542.

youthful life searching” with no negative physical consequences whatsoever and raged against the “crippling in their love lives of quite numerous valuable people” by “punishment-threatening, cold-hearted,” antimasturbation “tyrants.” He also lamented the disheartening state of affairs wherein the vast majority of women of all social strata received almost no sexual enlightenment whatsoever and hence continued to be vulnerable to frigidity. Pleased that the worst suffering was over (“with profound gratitude every older physician will celebrate the fact that a ghost of his youth, the ‘daughter of the upper bourgeoisie’ with corset, hypocrisy, and lasciviousness, belongs to the past”), Schultz nonetheless worried that not enough women had overcome the damage of a repressive education and found their way through to the “vibrant humanness” they so richly deserved. And he stressed again to his readers that sexual desire and pleasure in women was absolutely normal and desirable: to encourage fear of sex in girls or to treat sex as something indecent was to have “sinned” against female youth. “A mature woman with a normal body, healthy organ function and proper development is without question always fully love-capable.”²⁸

Through this kind of reassuring, no-nonsense sex advice and his deep-breathing techniques (both of which bear some disconcerting similarities to advice and techniques advanced by the anti-Nazi, left-wing sex radical Wilhelm Reich), Schultz could fairly portray himself as a man not only committed to but also succeeding in enhancing heterosexuals’ sex lives in multiple ways. Yet behind closed doors, Schultz choreographed torture. Many psychiatrists and psychologists in Germany in the 1990s still defended Schultz as “apolitical.”²⁹ But during the Third Reich he not only endorsed the “extermination” (*Vernichtung*) of the handicapped, expressing the hope “that the institutions for idiots will soon in this sense be emptied.”³⁰ He was also personally involved in making concrete decisions about which of those men accused of homosexuality would be set free and which would be sent to a concentration camp (and hence often also to death). Schultz theorized that there were two kinds of homosexuals. Some he considered “hereditarily ill” and therefore unredeemable; others he designated as “dear little brother” (*liebes Brüderchen*) types whom he thought could benefit from help. In Schultz’s own words, “a thoughtful psychotherapist” like himself could transform such a man into a heterosexual. How did he arrive

²⁸J. H. Schultz, “Nervöse Sexualstörungen und ihre Behandlung in der allgemeinen Praxis,” *Therapie der Gegenwart: Medizinisch-chirurgische Rundschau für praktische Ärzte* 78 (June 1937): 252–55. See also Schultz’s definitive Nazi sex advice book, *Geschlecht-Liebe-Ehe: Die Grundtatsachen des Liebes- und Geschlechtslebens in ihrer Bedeutung für Einzel- und Volksdasein* (Munich, 1940).

²⁹See “Bluthaftes Verständnis,” *Der Spiegel*, June 27, 1994, 183–86.

³⁰J. H. Schultz’s comments were printed in the *Zentralblatt für Psychotherapie*, no. 12 (1940): 113, quoted in Ulrich Schultz, “Autogenes Training und Gleichschaltung aller Sinne,” *Die Tageszeitung*, June 20, 1984.

at a diagnosis in each individual's case? At the German Institute for Psychological Research and Psychotherapy, since 1936 under the direction of Mathias Heinrich Göring (cousin of Hermann Göring, one of the leading figures in the Nazi regime), Schultz and a commission of coworkers forced accused homosexuals to perform coitus with a female prostitute while the commission watched. Whoever performed heterosexually to their satisfaction under these conditions was set free; whoever did not, and hence had revealed his incurability, was sent to a concentration camp.³¹

The last five years have seen a dramatic increase in scholarship on Nazism and the Holocaust. It has become routine to note that the literature is beyond overwhelming in its scope; nobody can keep up with all of it. And yet this abundance has been singularly important in revising long-standing misconceptions and in filling in considerably what were still large gaps in our comprehension. Student interest in the Third Reich and in the Holocaust is at an unprecedented high; college and university teachers wishing to provide students with a broad range of translated primary source materials, superb secondary scholarship on specialized subtopics, and thoughtful and up-to-date textbook accounts now have many options from among which to choose. We now understand far more about the perspectives and experiences of victims, perpetrators, collaborators, and bystanders; the relationships between consent and coercion under the terror regime; the connections and disjunctions between regime and popular anti-Semitism and the regime's remarkable popular appeal; individual and group behavior at the grass roots in the expanded German Reich and in the occupied territories and the ways these grassroots behaviors complicated but also reinforced or even exacerbated the effects of government policies; the mutually related but also distinct dynamics of anti-Semitism and other forms of prejudice and cruelty toward those designated outsiders and enemies; and the roles of institutions like the churches and professional castes like those of jurists and medical doctors.³² Once again, however, the very theoretical and empirical richness of this recent outpouring has also brought to the fore more new questions, both about the fabric of social and political life in the Third Reich and about the workings of ideology. And these in turn are areas in

³¹J. H. Schultz quoted in "Bluthaftes Verständnis," 185, and in U. Schultz. The exposé of J. H. Schultz's role in the Third Reich that appeared in *Der Spiegel* in 1994 seems largely to have been based on the pioneering polemic by Ulrich Schultz (now Schultz-Venrath, no relation to the Nazi Schultz) that was published in *TAZ* in 1984; Schultz-Venrath built on the important foundational research done by Regine Locket in her dissertation, which was published as *Erinnern und Durcharbeiten: Zur Geschichte der Psychoanalyse und Psychotherapie im Nationalsozialismus* (Frankfurt am Main, 1985).

³²Some of the most significant English-language publications of the last few years include Omer Bartov, *The Holocaust: Origins, Implementation, Aftermath* (New York, 2000); Saul Friedländer, *Nazi Germany and the Jews* (New York, 1997); Michael Burleigh, *The Third Reich: A New History* (New York, 2000); Ian Kershaw, *Hitler* (New York, 2000); Robert Gellately, *Backing Hitler* (New York, 2001); Marion A. Kaplan, *Between Dignity*

which investigations into various aspects of the history of sexuality can offer numerous new insights.³³

This special issue of the *Journal of the History of Sexuality* marks an initial attempt to bring into focus a research agenda that is just starting to cohere. For years, as Elizabeth Heineman notes in her critical survey of the ongoing scholarship on Nazism and sexuality, scholars of Nazism and the Holocaust treated matters pertaining to sexuality as either too trivial or potentially too inappropriately titillating to study systematically. And yet the evidence that there was not just one but a myriad of ways that the study of the history of sexuality could deepen our understanding of both Nazism and the Holocaust kept pushing itself into the interstices of other projects. And, simultaneously, over the years a corpus of serious scholarship on some aspects of the history of sexuality in the Third Reich did start to accumulate. Heineman's essay offers an overview of the results of these early forays into the field as well as an assessment of some of the most important work presently under way. Heineman pays special attention to the literature on Nazism's purported seductiveness, the persecution of homosexual men and of heterosexual women labeled "promiscuous," and the racial implications of Nazism's reproductive politics. Heineman also offers a reassessment of sexual violence and makes an argument for the imperative of considering how sexuality figured in the context of the Holocaust, both for its victims and for its perpetrators.

Julia Roos's essay demonstrates by example how a focus on the history of sexuality helps us to rewrite political history. Roos investigates the evolution of Nazi policy on prostitution, charting the way that a right-wing

and Despair: Jewish Life in Nazi Germany (New York, 1998); Robert Gellately and Nathan Stoltzfuss, eds., *Social Outsiders in Nazi Germany* (Princeton, 2001); Eric Johnson, *Nazi Terror: The Gestapo, Jews, and Ordinary Germans* (New York, 1999); Robert Ericksen and Susannah Heschel, eds., *Betrayal: German Churches and the Holocaust* (Minneapolis, 1999).

³³A pertinent example of the way attention to developments germane to the history of sexuality helps us reframe extant assumptions about the relationship between regime and populace is offered by Irene Guenther's current work on fashion in the Third Reich. Among the many revealing and depressing stories she has carefully reconstructed, Guenther also notes the fact—all the more painfully relevant against the background of our knowledge that the majority of Germans did not in any way protest the burning of synagogues and the trashing and looting of Jewish stores during Kristallnacht in November 1938—that government leaders were so worried about the potential unrest they would provoke among German women if they were to close down beauty salons during the war years in order to preserve chemicals for the war effort that they reversed their initial decision to ban the use of permanents and hair dyes. Despite the demand for total war mobilization, looking good was still important to many women. As Propaganda Chief Joseph Goebbels lamented in 1943, "Women, after all, constitute a tremendous power, and as soon as you dare touch their beauty parlors, they are your enemies." The salons stayed open. See Irene Guenther, "Fashioning Women in the Third Reich," paper presented at the Young Scholars Forum on "Gender, Power, Religion: Forces in Cultural History," German Historical Institute, Washington, D.C., March 31, 2001.

party and regime that initially styled themselves as committed to eradicating prostitution ended up turning prostitution into a massive state-run enterprise. One of Roos's most significant contributions is to situate Nazi-era developments within the context of political and religious conflicts already occurring during the Weimar era, and she documents the rise of a sexually conservative agenda *before* the Third Reich began. Roos convincingly shows that the backlash against the partial empowerment of prostitutes brought about by the 1927 Law for Combating Venereal Diseases helps to explain key political configurations that facilitated the Nazis' acquisition of the reins of state.

Stefan Micheler explores the relationship between the Nazi regime's deliberate escalation of homophobic propaganda and ordinary citizens' increasing willingness to denounce men (and some women) to the Gestapo for homosexual activity. Like Roos, Micheler portrays the Weimar years as characterized not solely by sexual liberalism but, rather, by the coexistence of liberalizing and repressive trends. Micheler also offers a revision of the standard periodization of homophobic campaigns in the first half of the Third Reich while bringing into focus the specific tropes used to denigrate those accused of homosexuality and analyzing a series of compelling case studies from Hamburg. These studies illuminate the conditions and consequences of denunciations, and they also reveal the ways in which regime-articulated homophobia was picked up and put to use at the local level.

Patricia Szobar turns to the policing and prosecution of romantic and sexual relationships between Jews and gentiles in the wake of the 1935 Nuremberg Laws, which criminalized both intercourse and marriage between Jews and non-Jews. Like Micheler, Szobar finds a striking amount of eager voyeurism among those who denounced couples to the Gestapo, but she also finds the courtroom space itself, for those cases that went to trial, utterly saturated by voyeurism. Police and judges demanded far more information, in far more detail, than could possibly be necessary for prosecution. Szobar conveys the wrenching impact of the laws on individual relationships and lives. She also analyzes the paradoxical effect of the policing of sexual practices and even feelings, showing that the very processes designed to put an end to so-called interracial sex proliferated the possibilities of what sex was and could be.

As the regime was violently abusing, monitoring, and imprisoning many categories of human beings, the population was also provided with beautiful distractions. Terri Gordon turns our attention to visual culture and to the display of female bodies in Nazi-era films. Returning to the question of continuities and discontinuities with the Weimar era, Gordon's essay looks at Nazi adaptations and transformations of two characteristic Weimar art forms: the chorus girl kick line and expressionist dance. Both cases exemplify how Nazism at once deployed female sexuality and contained it. Closely analyzing the narrative and visual techniques employed in two very widely viewed films, Gordon demonstrates that the use of these genres

under Nazism was not about the suppression of nudity and eroticism but, rather, about the redirection of both toward fascistic aims.

Three essays concern the repression, persistence, and promotion of sexuality during World War II. Birthe Kundrus's essay focuses on the home front during the war years. She analyzes Gestapo and court records and government pronouncements concerning German women's (and some German men's) sexual and romantic relationships with foreign forced laborers and prisoners of war. The regime was tremendously anxious about such relationships and punished them severely; they were nonetheless extraordinarily prevalent. Kundrus uncovers remarkable evidence of German women's sexual agency and sense of entitlement. She also documents the savagery of the regime's racism, even as she shows as well how, at the grass roots, intimate relationships undermined racist stereotypes.

Annette Timm traverses both home and battle front, assessing the vagaries of venereal disease control during the Third Reich and analyzing the struggles between VD control and health care experts, on the one hand, and political and military authorities, on the other. Positioning her findings in the context of a broader conceptual argument concerning the limitations of conventional scholarly assumptions about Nazism's sexual repressiveness, Timm makes a case for the singular significance of heterosexual male sexual satisfaction under Nazism. Curbing the spread of disease, it turns out, was of little interest to Nazi leaders; they were far more concerned to offer brothel visits as rewards to men for working and fighting on behalf of the fatherland. Even population policy was not the priority the Nazis pretended it was; providing (what in wartime was very frequently extramarital) sexual satisfaction to men was paramount. In an echo of the dystopian vision already so eloquently adumbrated by Roos, Timm describes prostitutes as providing a prophylactic not against disease but against potential male political discontent.

Geoffrey Giles explores the striking unevenness in the policing of homosexuality among members of the SS and the military men whose cases were brought before the special SS courts, and he uncovers the constitutive incoherence at the heart of antihomosexual policy within elite Nazi institutions. As Giles has aptly remarked in an essay published elsewhere, the Nazis "institutionaliz[ed] . . . homosexual panic."³⁴ Elite institutions like the SS depended on male bonding, but the homoerotic elements of that bonding could not be permitted to turn into homosexual activity; taken aback by considerable evidence of homosexual activity within such an institution, a decidedly homophobic Nazi leader like Heinrich Himmler, head of the SS, struggled to sort out whether homosexuality might not after all be "curable." In view of Himmler's own obsession with the etiology and

³⁴Geoffrey J. Giles, "The Institutionalization of Homosexual Panic in the Third Reich," in Gellately and Stoltzfuss, eds., *Social Outsiders in Nazi Germany*.

remediability of homosexuality, coupled with both his and his underlings' numerous pragmatic considerations, inconsistency of sentencing was the norm. In the essay presented here, Giles analyzes the handful of cases brought before the SS special courts that are still preserved, and in the process he offers fascinating glimpses into contemporaries' assumptions about such notions as sexual need, "sexual deprivation," the disinhibiting effects of alcohol, and what kinds of behaviors were "normal" for men in wartime.

Two essays concern the post-Nazi era. In contrast to many of the other contributions, Atina Grossmann's essay puts the subject of reproductive sex at its center. Analyzing the perceptions and self-perceptions of Jewish displaced persons living on German soil in the second half of the 1940s, Grossmann argues that Jewish reproduction in the wake of genocide was not just "a personal decision" but represented a form of biological revenge. Her essay raises powerful questions about identity, trauma, and the meaning of survival and about the relationships between group identifications and individual sexual choices. Feminist scholars have often been uneasy about the topic of motherhood, fearing that emphasis on maternal roles before and after birth compromises the still-fragile status of women as autonomous human beings; Holocaust scholars have often been hesitant to tackle questions of gender and sexuality at all.³⁵ Grossmann foregrounds the excruciating intensity of reproductive issues for her subjects without falling into easy essentialist assumptions about either motherhood or survival of horror.

Erik Jensen's essay raises yet another set of challenging questions about the relationships, or lack thereof, between sexual desires and political commitments. Jensen charts the invocations of Nazi persecution and murder of homosexuals within the gay and lesbian communities of the United States and West (and now reunited) Germany from the 1970s to the present. Beginning from the paradoxes of the pink triangle's iconic status (potently evocative in emotional and political terms yet at times emptied of meaning due to the ubiquity of its circulation, while at other times overfilled with inaccurate meaning because of inadequate historical knowledge, and above all bearing the traces of complex negotiations among victim groups striving for recognition of the distinctive hurts they have sustained), Jensen tracks the changing contents of the pink triangle's significance as these took shape in the quite divergent contexts of Jewish Holocaust commemoration in the United States and the West German

³⁵See on these points Carol Stable, "Shooting the Mother: Fetal Photography and the Politics of Disappearance," *Camera Obscura* 28 (January 1992); Denise Riley, "Some Peculiarities of Social Policy Concerning Women in Wartime and Postwar Britain," in Margaret Randolph Higonnet et al., eds., *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars* (New Haven, 1987); and Atina Grossmann's review essay on recent books about women and the Holocaust for *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* (forthcoming).

New Left's emphasis on the Nazi persecution of Communists and Socialists. His discussion of German gays and lesbians' struggle to reconcile dual memories of German perpetration and homosexual victimization exposes the fault lines that exist more generally in all attempts to solidify identifications with individuals and groups in the past.³⁶ His analysis of more recent efforts to combine the stories of terror that defined homosexual lives during the Third Reich with stories of the pleasures that were also pursued and experienced has broad relevance for others seeking to understand the usability of the past for political and personal struggles in the evolving present.

The essays collected in this special issue give ample evidence of the value *and* recalcitrance of sexuality as a focus of historical inquiry. Many of the essays testify to the inextricability of repression and liberalization. As is suggested by the title of this essay, with its deliberate borrowing and juxtaposition of terms taken from what are often considered to be incompatible interpretive paradigms (theological, secular-liberal, Foucaultian, and Freudian), the history of sexuality under and after Nazism does not fit into any easily available explanatory framework. The interpretive dilemmas raised by the empirical traces left behind by the Third Reich in both its ordinary and its grotesque manifestations, however, may also provide the beginnings of some answers to issues that trouble us now as we struggle to understand the significance of these defining events of the twentieth century from the perspective of an already traumatized start of a new millennium.

For example, did sexual detabooization further the social and political control of those not directly victimized by the Nazi regime? Or is it more accurate, and perhaps also more chilling, to think of some individuals more fully realizing themselves while others suffered profoundly? The apparent undecidability here may be precisely the point. Second, the destabilizing resemblances between knowledges sought after under liberal regimes, then and still now, and insights into bodies and psyches produced under conditions of horror and terror may also be exactly what we need to confront.³⁷ But third, and just as significant, the often surprising differences between conceptualizations of aspects of sexuality under Nazism from ways sexuality was thought about in the 1930s and 1940s United States may also offer us unexpected critical vantage points on sexual conflicts in our

³⁶See on this point especially Joan W. Scott, "Fantasy Echo: History and the Construction of Identity," *Critical Inquiry* 27, no. 2 (winter 2001).

³⁷For example, we are still lacking a comprehensive history of gynecology under Nazism, one that explores the double truth of, on the one hand, the hideous hubris and scientific uselessness of so many of the torturous so-called reproductive experiments conducted under Nazism (with due attention to those physicians who utilized the concentration and death camps to transfer their research focus from chicken, rabbits, and mice to humans) and, on the other, the disconcertingly protopostmodern successes achieved by German physicians in such areas as artificial vagina construction and the use of hormones to treat sexual dysfunction.

present.³⁸ Attending to the history of sexuality, then, allows us not only to approach longstanding historiographical controversies over such matters as Germany's divergence from the West or Nazism's role in trajectories of modernization in new ways. It can also, we hope, point the way out of some of our current emotional and political impasses.

³⁸For instance, one remarkably understudied aspect of Nazi attitudes about homosexuality is the conviction articulated that homosexuality was very much a possibility lurking within the majority of men and even a phase that many men literally went through. This perspective, which could have been used for antihomophobic purposes, instead was—quite self-reflexively—deployed to fuel the regime's punitive homophobic radicalism. The very existence of this theoretical perspective, however, both calls attention to interesting beliefs about the fragility of heterosexuality and highlights the differences between cultural understandings in the United States and Germany in the same era. While scholars of the United States have emphasized that men in the 1930s and 1940s could engage in same-sex behavior without shaking their self-concept as heterosexuals, Germans stressed how hard it was for many men to develop desire for women and openly and self-consciously thematized the way Nazi single-sex organizations provided a worryingly conducive environment for homosexual relations and the development of homosexual self-concepts.