

Sex with a Purpose: Prostitution, Venereal Disease, and Militarized Masculinity in the Third Reich

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SEX IN THE THIRD REICH was for too long a virtual terra incognita for historians of Germany. There was an understandable desire to avoid providing titillating details about so murderous a regime. Still, the paucity of research on the subject meant that a rather one-sided understanding of Nazi attempts to harness the sexual energies of German citizens emerged, and that initial interpretation has only recently begun to be replaced with more complex analyses. This essay contributes to the effort by exploring how Nazi attitudes toward sexuality and masculinity were expressed in policies on prostitution and the control of venereal disease. This specific vantage point requires us to go beyond a simple argument that Nazism was sexually repressive. The totalitarian impulse to make even the most private of human activities serve national goals meant that Nazi leaders sought not only to define acceptable sexual behavior but to redefine sexual acts as acts with public—not simply private—significance. Sex and reproduction were crucial elements of population policy, indispensable in the formation of a strong state. This followed from the fear that a declining birth rate and the spread of congenital and endemic disease would weaken the nation, a fear compounded by Nazi racial ideology and German expansionist dreams.

On the surface, most National Socialist propaganda that bore any relationship to sexuality concerned itself with issues of reproduction. The advertised goal of health and welfare policy was to promote large Aryan families to ensure the survival of the racial state that the Nazis wished to create. However, while extolling the virtues of the chaste Aryan family, Nazi leaders simultaneously provided support (both verbal and financial) for various kinds of extramarital sex. Three examples come immediately to mind. First, sexual crimes were committed under military authority and in

the concentration camps during the war.¹ Second, in his October 1939 order, Himmler argued that truly patriotic and racially valuable Germans should produce illegitimate children to strengthen and replenish the warring nation. These two examples lie mostly outside the scope of this essay, which will focus instead on the third form of nonmarital sex condoned by the Nazi regime: prostitution. Having branded prostitutes as asocial, sending tens of thousands of them to concentration camps in the early 1930s for “conspicuously . . . inciting immoral acts,”² the regime eventually came to treat prostitution as a necessary sexual outlet for productive male citizens. Primarily under Himmler’s influence, the regime came to accept prostitution as necessary for satisfying male sexual drives, which, if left unsatisfied, would lead men into homosexuality, dampen their fighting spirit, or diminish their labor productivity. This logic led to the construction of brothels for soldiers and “ordinary” Germans and, by 1942, for slave laborers and concentration camp inmates. The regime’s sponsorship of prostitution greatly complicates the idealized imagery of Nazism’s support for a nation of chaste families.

This essay will discuss the apparently contradictory stances toward sexuality in the Third Reich by examining the regime’s policies on prostitution and venereal disease control and by presenting examples from a local case study of Berlin. A study of prostitution encourages a reconsideration of some common assumptions about National Socialist attitudes toward sexuality. On the surface, support for prostitution seems to conflict with the findings of voluminous historical research on Nazi propaganda about sanitizing family life and promoting policies designed to encourage German citizens to limit sexual activity to the production of as many “racially fit” children as possible.³ The regime’s public support for chastity, however, masked the intentions of several party leaders to put the sexual urges of the population to work for the national cause. One might argue that this contradiction simply reflects well-known tendencies within the Nazi Party of in-fighting and fiefdom building by well-placed individuals. Many of

¹See Birgit Beck, “Vergewaltigung von Frauen als Kriegsstrategie im Zweiten Weltkrieg,” in *Gewalt im Krieg: Ausübung, Erfahrung und Verweigerung von Gewalt in Kriegen des 20. Jahrhunderts*, ed. Andreas Gestrich (Münster, 1996), 34–51; and Freya Klier, *Die Kaninchen von Ravensbrück: Medizinische Versuche an Frauen in der NS-Zeit* (Munich, 1994).

²See the Decree for the Protection of the Volk and State (issued on February 28, 1933) and May 1933 revisions to the VD law and Clause 361 of the criminal code.

³The collection of literature on this subject is vast. Recent works include Irmgard Weyrather, *Muttertag und Mutterkreuz: Der Kult um die “deutsche Mutter” im Nationalsozialismus* (Frankfurt am Main, 1993); and Lisa Pine, *Nazi Family Policy, 1933–1945* (New York, 1997). My own dissertation also contributes to the line of argument that focuses attention on attempts to confine sexuality to marriage. See Annette F. Timm, “The Politics of Fertility: Bevölkerungspolitik and Health Care in Berlin, 1919–1972,” Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago, 1999. The present essay revises my initial arguments and is an attempt to take the attitude toward sexuality more seriously as an active force in the construction of reproductive health care policies.

the efforts to promote sex in the Third Reich were pet projects of the Reichsführer SS, Heinrich Himmler. The Lebensborn maternity homes for pregnant girlfriends and wives of SS soldiers and other “Aryans” provide one example of how Himmler sought to gain prominence in the field of population policy.⁴ But the assault on “bourgeois prudery” launched by Himmler and other Nazi leaders cannot be seen as a strange sideshow. As Dagmar Herzog has demonstrated, it is inaccurate to think of the Third Reich solely in terms of sexual repression. That view of the Nazi regime, she argues, is a creation of the 1960s and 1970s and owes much to the post–World War Two generation’s misunderstanding of their parents’ experience under Nazism and to the influence of Wilhelm Reich on progressive students in the 1960s and 1970s.⁵ Nevertheless, it would also be a simplification to argue that the Nazis were trying to cover all of the public opinion bases—playing to conservative, Christian opinion in their family policy while appealing to the less wholesome sexual cravings of the population with their support for prostitution.

The contradiction in official Nazi statements about sexuality was not simply a matter of pragmatism. It is possible to make sense of the seemingly contradictory positions if one recognizes the underlying consistency of policies that were all directed toward the same goal: the creation of a racially sanitized state with the power to rule Europe and beyond. Sexuality, in other words, was viewed as a means to an end. It was to be deployed within racially “desirable” families to produce future soldiers for the war machine and by individual men to strengthen their productive capacities and their fighting spirit. The goal was purposeful sexuality (sexual activity with a national purpose), not sex for the sake of individual pleasure.

Very much like the Victorians in Foucault’s *The History of Sexuality, Volume 1*, Nazi leaders did something other than simply repress sex. The Nazis fostered a system of policing sex and “regulating sex through useful public discourses” that included a preoccupation with perversity and fecundity.⁶ Although this essay will not attempt the analysis necessary to reconcile Foucault’s theory with the empirical case in question, the very

⁴Himmler was quick to warn others away from interfering in what he saw as his domain. He reacted angrily, for instance, when Leonardo Conti, the Reich director of health, wrote about “Raising the Birth-Rate by Marital Introduction, Marriage Guidance and Fostering.” See Hans Peter Bleuel, *Sex and Society in Nazi Germany*, ed. Heinrich Fraenkel, trans. J. Maxwell Brownjohn (Philadelphia, 1973), 170–71. The most authoritative book on the Lebensborn is Georg Lilienthal, *Der “Lebensborn e.V.”: Ein Instrument nationalsozialistischer Rassenpolitik* (Stuttgart, 1985).

⁵She points out that the SS newspaper *Das schwarze Korps* was full of explicit rejections of bourgeois prudery. See Dagmar Herzog, “Sexuelle Revolution und Vergangenheitsbewältigung,” *Zeitschrift für Sexualforschung* 13, no. 2 (2000): 87–103.

⁶Although Foucault alludes to race and tentatively ventures into the twentieth century, he does not deal with Nazism per se. See Michel Foucault, *History of Sexuality, Volume 1: An Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York, 1978), quote from 25.

terms of the present argument will resonate loudly enough with his work that it is worth recapping some of his main points in *The History of Sexuality*. Significantly, I consciously avoid applying to the subject at hand one of Foucault's key insights—that power mechanisms and discourses on sex do not simply repress but also create pleasures, since the persecution and discrimination associated with prostitution in the Third Reich would make this an ethically problematic task. Nevertheless, an engagement with Foucault's categories of modern sexuality informs my analysis. I make two key revisions to the Foucaultian model. First, I attempt to account (as Foucault does not, despite his allusions to twentieth-century racism) for the impact of twentieth-century militarism.⁷ Second, I add men to the list of iconic figures that populate Foucault's account of the creation of modern sexuality. To “the hysterical woman, the masturbating child, the Malthusian couple, and the perverse adult”⁸ I add the sexually satisfied male—or, perhaps more accurately, the presumed to be sexually satisfied male, since we must assume that at least some of the men pressured into visiting military brothels were less than enamored of the experience.⁹ As will become clear, one cannot understand constructions of sexuality in twentieth-century Germany (or anywhere else, for that matter) if one assumes masculinity to be unchanging, unconstructed, and easily normative. It is necessary to move outside Foucault's categories to understand the full salience of militarized masculinity in Nazi Germany.¹⁰

Nazi leaders believed that the state needed to intervene directly in the private sexual sphere to make sure that “valuable” male citizens (and other men temporarily useful as laborers) were sexually satisfied. To some degree, sex was a reward to be doled out to supporters of the regime, and the male's sexual gratification was deemed to take precedence over the female's.

⁷On the place of racism in Foucault's thought, see Ann Laura Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire: Foucault's History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (Durham, 1995).

⁸Foucault, 105.

⁹Of course, the sexually satisfied male did not produce “targets and anchorage points of the venture of knowledge” to the same degree that Foucault's four “objects of knowledge” did (quotes from *ibid.*). In this sense, Ann Laura Stoler's plea for adding the colonized subject to Foucault's list is perhaps more defensible than what I argue here, since the types of technologies and regimes of power associated with the colonial were more equivalent to Foucault's use of his four “targets.” But just as Foucault's four figures could not exist “without a racially erotic counterpoint, without reference to the libidinal energies of the savage, the primitive, the colonized” (Stoler, 6–7), they could also not exist without the anchor of normalized heterosexual male sexuality and male sexual dominance.

¹⁰I arrived at the formulation “the militarization of masculinity” before having read Eleanor Hancock's article on Ernst Röhm (see “‘Only the Real, the True, the Masculine Held Its Value’: Ernst Röhm, Masculinity, and Male Homosexuality,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 8, no. 4 [1998]: 616–41). Our two articles have much different starting points: I begin with heterosexual relationships and issues of fertility, while she writes about Röhm's

The view that male sexual urges were basically uncontrollable had long been a feature of anti-VD policies in Germany,¹¹ but National Socialism took this belief one step further, equating sexual gratification with masculine power to a degree unprecedented in Germany (though not unknown in Italy).¹² Soldiers, it was thought, drew strength from their sexual encounters with prostitutes that enabled them to fight with increased vigor. Himmler was convinced that the best soldiers—those most likely to require prostitutes for sexual relief because of their strong masculine energies—would also be the most prolific citizens once they returned to their wives. Even slave laborers would produce more material goods for the Reich if given sexual rewards. Masculine vitality was thus viewed as highly dependent upon sexual gratification. However, gratification in and of itself was not the goal. Himmler and other leading Nazis did not speak about sexual pleasure but about the power of sexual activity to rejuvenate the nation and achieve racial superiority. Masculine sexual drives, like feminine maternal instincts, were to be channeled into the purpose of achieving the racial state.¹³ The regulation of prostitution and the glorification of motherhood were both intended to strengthen military prowess, the former by offering sexual rewards to soldiers and war workers, the latter by creating a “fitter” and more numerous population from which to draw a fighting force. It is not enough, then, to set up dichotomies such as masculinity versus femininity or marriage versus promiscuity and then to explore the contradictions in National Socialist rhetoric and policy. Beneath the seeming contradictions was an underlying consistency of purpose.

One of the reasons why National Socialist attitudes toward sexuality seem contradictory is that the regime was always highly sensitive to the impact of its policies on public opinion. The promotion of sexuality was thus countered with active attempts to remove it from public view so as not to offend bourgeois sensibilities. In the first years of the regime, indi-

homosexuality and the complete absence—even the negation—of a feminine and reproductive aspect to his life. It is instructive, I think, that we wound up making similar arguments.

¹¹Timm, “The Politics of Fertility,” 106–17. The German word that I have translated as “urges” is *Geschlechtstrieb*, which one might more accurately (but less eloquently) translate as “sexual drive.” Elsewhere I use the words “desire,” “sexual need,” “pleasures,” “gratification,” and so on. While my terminology would not satisfy the stricter categorizations of today’s *Sexualwissenschaft*, I have tried to remain stylistically faithful to the colorful language used by Nazi politicians, who consciously rejected the inheritance of Weimar sexology. Sometimes, it must be noted, male sexual gratification was simply assumed or alluded to without giving it an explicit name or description.

¹²In the 1920s Italian eugenicists began to “depict Italian racial superiority in terms of innate sexual prowess, libidinousness and prolificity,” a claim later wholeheartedly endorsed by Mussolini. See Maria Sophia Quine, *Population Politics in Twentieth-Century Europe* (London, 1996), 27.

¹³The term “racial state” is from Michael Burleigh and Wolfgang Wippermann, *The Racial State: Germany, 1933–1945* (Cambridge, 1991).

viduals who were considered “sexually deviant,” including prostitutes, were confined to concentration camps, and leaders paid much lip service and attention to the “purification of the streetscape” [Säuberung des Straßenbildes].¹⁴ Before the war, this attempt to remove sexuality from the public sphere was particularly evident in the intensification of VD raids and controls on prostitutes during the 1936 Olympics. In subsequent years, particularly during the war, police and health authorities redoubled their efforts to eradicate streetwalking and confine prostitution to state-sanctioned brothels.

The development of prostitution policy was by no means internally consistent or uniform throughout the Reich. Nevertheless, it is useful to distinguish three elements within Nazi policy: (1) public endorsement of chastity while cracking down on asocial sexual behavior and defining prostitutes as legally marginal; (2) toleration of extramarital sex, particularly prostitution, as long as it did not offend “public sensibilities”; and (3) subordination of all policies on sexuality and prostitution to the war effort. Only the last of these represented a clear policy shift. During the course of the war, Nazi policy decisively turned its back on decades of officially sanctioned social hygienic practice, forsaking health concerns for the strategic goals of higher productivity and improved fighting spirit. After the autumn of 1939, venereal disease control in Germany became almost entirely an effort to regulate and control prostitution in the interests of providing soldiers and war workers with a “safe” outlet for their sexual energies.

THE APPEARANCE OF CHASTITY

In the first years of the Third Reich, the Nazi leadership cultivated the appearance of chastity, seeking to depict the new social system as one entirely devoted to the foundation and maintenance of healthy, racially fit families. The stated goal was to strengthen the German family as a bulwark against racial degeneration and miscegenation. Nazi marriage policy and most of the leaders’ official pronouncements about sexuality were meant to project an aura of respectability. George Mosse argues that after the violence and virtual anarchy of the early years of the National Socialist movement, its leaders recognized that bourgeois sensibilities would have to be addressed if the regime was to stabilize its position. This meant insisting on the absolute sanctity of marriage and vilifying deviations from the marital, heterosexual norm.¹⁵

¹⁴The term is from “Die Prostitutionsfrage,” *Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Volksgesundheit e. V.—Mitteilungen*, February 14, 1934, 1. The obsession with cleansing the streets of visible signs of prostitution was, however, very widespread. See also “Die Prostitution unter dem Geschlechtskrankengesetz,” *Deutsches Ärzteblatt* 62 (1933): 100; and Adolf Sellmann, *Der Kampf gegen die Prostitution und das Gesetz zur Bekämpfung der Geschlechtskrankheiten* (Schwelm, 1935), where the author writes of “Reinhaltung des Straßenbildes” (26).

¹⁵George L. Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality: Middle-Class Morality and Sexual Norms in Modern Europe* (New York, 1985), 158–59.

Publicly extolling the virtues of the pure and chaste German family, Nazi leaders misled many commentators into believing that the regime would repress overt displays of sexuality. In the early years of National Socialism, experts in public health and welfare who supported the regime reacted positively to the rhetoric endorsing chastity and decrying sexual license, and they expressed confidence that the “National Socialist spiritual direction,” with its emphasis on the family and its very strict definition of healthy sexuality, would be much more successful at combating prostitution and other sexual excesses than previous strategies.¹⁶ Articles in medical journals, newspapers, and educational literature stressed the positive benefits of eugenic controls (which, it was said, would eventually weed out “inferior” social elements like prostitutes) and organized youth activities, sponsored by organizations like the Hitler Youth, the League of German Girls (Bund deutscher Mädel), and the labor organization Strength through Joy (Kraft durch Freude). Channeling youthful energies into sports and outdoor activities, according to Johannes Breger, the Berlin head of the German Society for Combating Venereal Disease, would prevent exposure to deviant sexual behavior.¹⁷ The author of an article in the principal journal for female doctors wrote that males in particular could benefit from an education that stressed physical health and de-eroticized women. Femininity would then be appreciated for its link with motherhood rather than sex.¹⁸ This, at least, was the ideal. The classic image so common in Nazi propaganda depicted the dutiful German *Hausfrau*, a guardian of home and hearth, an attentive mother devoid of all erotic characteristics.

Experts in VD control contributed to this valorization of marriage. The director of the German Society for Combating Venereal Disease, Bodo Spiethoff, argued that sexual self-control served the interests of the state. He laid these views down in the creed of his organization, which read:

The Family is the nucleus of the state and of the state-conscious *Volk*.
 The essence of the family is a marriage founded on loyalty and faith.
 The wife has a particular duty in marriage to be the protector and educator of the young generation.
 The wife can only fulfill her duty if the husband is conscious of her calling and if the wife is supported by the respect of the husband.
 The husband should not only respect the woman [*Weib*], the mother of his children, he should also view every woman as the bearer of *völkischer* duties and stand before her chivalrously and protectively.

¹⁶Asta v. Mallinckrodt-Haupt, “Die Prostitution und ihre Bekämpfung,” *Die Ärztin* 14, no. 9 (September 1938): 250.

¹⁷Johannes Breger, *Die Geschlechtskrankheiten und ihre Gefahren für das Volk*, 2nd ed. (Berlin, 1937 [1926]), 23, 99–101. For similar arguments, see Mosse’s summary of Himmler’s Bad Tölz speech to the SS on sexuality (167) and his discussion of sport-inspired Nazi sculpture (170 ff.); Mallinckrodt-Haupt, 250; and Hermann Roeschmann, *Die Bedeutung der Geschlechtskrankheiten für Jünglinge und Männer* (Berlin, [1934]), 14.

¹⁸Mallinckrodt-Haupt, 250.

The behavior of the grown man should always and under all conditions be exemplary for male youth.

If the woman displays the demeanor worthy of her duty, then she will be a model for future mothers and will command the respect of the man.

The woman shall never allow herself to be demeaned or to be estranged from her duty by the man.

If the man dishonors the woman, he dishonors himself, since he disgraces the meaning of the family as an integral part of a healthy *Volk* with a secure future.

Young man and young girl, do not succumb to your urges, rather, command them. Know: your youth is not a time for carrying on but, rather, a time to slowly gather strength for your life's duties.

For this reason, chastity is the uppermost ethical command.

Fight to remain victor in the battle for this highest command.¹⁹

The fact that such a detailed stance on the ethics of marriage was issued by an organization dedicated to the control of venereal diseases should come as no surprise. The battle against VD, according to experts, was a battle against unhealthy, unethical sexual practices.

The commentators mentioned above were all prominent figures in the anti-VD campaigns of the Weimar Republic. Possibly their praise for the new ethical direction of the National Socialist movement was an attempt to ingratiate themselves with a regime that they thought would take a sexually repressive line in public policy. Perhaps Breger, Spiethoff, and others truly believed or hoped that the Nazis would bring about the reforms that they had long been working to achieve. Given their desire to maintain their standing in the new regime, it was in their interest to believe that these early pronouncements on prostitution were indicative of the Nazis' general attitude on sexuality and that the Third Reich would continue to uphold conventional norms of bourgeois respectability. The period's literature on VD control resolutely avoids any mention of the arguments against bourgeois sexual norms made by Joseph Goebbels and Ernst Röhm.²⁰ Medical experts and religious groups that endorsed the regime instead focused on policies and rhetoric that supported sexual purity.

¹⁹Quoted in Breger, *Die Geschlechtskrankheiten*, 27.

²⁰In January 1934 Goebbels railed against *Bettschnüffelei* in *Der Angriff* (the press organ of his Berlin *Gau*) and again, later that year, in the pages of the *Völkischer Beobachter*. He claimed to be a "champion of progressive sexual morality." See Bleuel, 75. (*Bettschnüffelei* can best be translated as "bed snooping," in other words, sniffing out the sexual histories/practices of others.) Ernst Röhm openly rejected bourgeois sexuality and its hypocrisies in his 1928 autobiography, *Die Geschichte eines Hochverrätters* (Munich, 1928). But, as Eleanor Hancock has argued, this position was always an uncomfortable one in the Nazi Party and "came into conflict with the more usual National Socialist view of sexuality, which saw its main purpose as reproduction" (623–24).

Soon after seizing power in 1933, the Nazis took steps to enshrine the principle that sexuality, reproduction, and marriage were virtually synonymous concepts under law. The Sterilization Law (*Erbgesundheitsgesetz*) of 1933 and the Marital Health Law (*Ehegesundheitsgesetz*) and Blood Protection Law (*Blutschutzgesetz*), both of 1935, were all aimed at this goal. A logical corollary of these policies was the beginning of discussions about making birth control illegal, a policy supported by Adolf Hitler himself.²¹ Opponents of birth control voiced concern about the continued distribution of prophylactics for VD prevention, since most of them, particularly condoms, could also be used as contraceptives. Vending machines selling condoms continued to be in use after 1933, and police did not charge vendors with “offending public morality and decency” as would have been possible under the 1927 VD law.²² The dilemma posed by anti-VD prophylactics was the subject of intense debate. Despite concerns about promiscuity, experts insisted that condoms had to remain available to fight VD, and they were successful in insuring public access to condoms throughout the Nazi era.²³ However, all creams, salves, tablets, and other medications or objects meant to prevent VD or pregnancy were considered medically dangerous (they might, for example, lead to damage of the male sperm [*Keimzelle*] or female reproductive capacities, which would cause congenital defects).²⁴ Consequently, on January 21, 1941, other forms of birth control except condoms were criminalized by Himmler.

²¹Minutes of meeting of Sachverständigen Beirat für Bevölkerungs und Rassenpolitik, August 3, 1933, in Bundesarchiv Berlin, hereafter BArch(B), R43 II/720a, 120ff.

²²The situation is summarized in J[ohannes] Breger, “Die Auswirkung des Reichsgesetzes zur Bekämpfung der Geschlechtskrankheiten vom gesundheitspolitischen Standpunkt,” *Deutsches Ärzteblatt*, May 11, 1933, 210.

²³Gabrielle Czarnowski writes that condoms were openly available for the duration of the Third Reich. “One medical officer noted that, especially after weekends, large numbers of them could be seen in the drains of the municipal sewage facilities.” See her article “Hereditary and Racial Welfare (*Erb- und Rassenpflege*): The Politics of Sexuality and Reproduction in Nazi Germany,” *Social Politics* 4 (1997): 129. Her source is Dr. Wollenweber, “Das Gesundheitsamt im Kampfe gegen den Geburtenschwand,” *Der öffentliche Gesundheitsdienst* 5 (1939–40): 447–59. Similar evidence for the widespread availability of condoms can be found in Pieter Lagrou, *The Legacy of Nazi Occupation: Patriotic Memory and National Recovery in Western Europe, 1945–1965* (Cambridge, 2000). Lagrou cites a report on conditions for French and Belgian workers in Nazi Germany, one of whom complains that the “abundance of contraceptive devices, available to all (there are vending machines on Metro and railway platforms, in public toilets), . . . creat[es] a climate of sexual excess, which surprises even many French workers” (145).

²⁴The idea that acquired deficiencies could be passed on was not unique to the field of venereal disease. See the discussion of *Keimschädigung* in Alfred Kühn, Martin Staemmler, and Friedrich Burgdörfer, *Erbkunde, Rassenpflege, Bevölkerungspolitik: Schicksalsfragen des deutschen Volkes* (Leipzig, 1935), 102–7. Among other things, the authors cite a study by A. (Agnes) Bluhm that claimed to demonstrate the genetic transmission of physical damage caused by the consumption of alcohol in mice. By 1935, however, the idea that VD could cause a *Keimschädigung* had been discounted. See Bodo Spiethoff, *Die Geschlechtskrankheiten im Lichte der Bevölkerungspolitik, Erbgesundheits- und Rassenpflege* (Berlin, [1934]), 13.

Although nonprophylactic birth-control materials continued to be widely available at least until Himmler's order,²⁵ there was an attempt to remove these items and behaviors associated with their use from public view. In 1933 new policies decreed that birth control and prophylactics other than condoms could only be sold in pharmacies and that—in the interests of protecting youth—no decorative packaging or advertising could be displayed.²⁶ These laws, and particularly the 1941 total ban on birth control, understandably led contemporary commentators to assume that the Nazis were attempting to discourage all extramarital and nonreproductive sexual intercourse. This impression was reinforced by the Nazi persecution of homosexuals and prostitutes.

The persecution of homosexuals is one of the few aspects of sexuality in the Third Reich that has received attention from historians and other scholars; even a brief analysis of this literature would take us very far beyond the bounds of this essay. But a quick summary of the legal position of homosexuality in the Third Reich and some mention of the reaction of religious groups to these laws is instructive here. A revision to Paragraph 175 of the criminal code, which prohibited male homosexual relations (and bestiality), seemed to indicate that the Nazi state would not tolerate extramarital, nonreproductive sex. In its original wording, Paragraph 175 called for punishment of sexual relations between men when violence, seduction of a minor, or “intercourse-like behavior” was involved.²⁷ However, the

²⁵Historians have not yet achieved consensus on the availability of birth control in the Third Reich. This is perhaps a problem of definition. The fact that condoms were excluded from laws outlawing birth control in the Third Reich meant that they were officially classified as prophylactics against venereal disease, despite the fact that they could also be used for birth control. Historians (not to mention their historical sources) have not always been specific enough about what they mean when they write about birth control. It is thus hard to know exactly how to evaluate statements like that of a British observer, writing just after the war, who argued that the Nazi laws had succeeded in decreasing knowledge about the use of birth control. See Vera Houghton, “Birth Control in Germany,” *Eugenics Review* 43, no. 4 (1951): 185. It seems unlikely that she could have been referring to condom use. See also Atina Grossmann, *Reforming Sex: The German Movement for Birth Control and Abortion Reform, 1920–1950* (Oxford, 1995), 151. Robert G. Waite, in contrast, has found evidence in local police files that even teenagers were “well acquainted with contraceptives” in the early 1940s and that teenage girls in Lüneburg, for instance, were using birth control regularly. What kind of contraceptives and what kind of birth control, one wonders. See Robert G. Waite, “Teenage Sexuality in Nazi Germany,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 8, no. 3 (1998): 434–76. It is necessary, in other words, to distinguish between prophylactic birth control (condoms), nonprophylactic birth control (which can include, of course, various forms of continence and “natural” methods), and nonprophylactic contraceptive devices.

²⁶Minutes of meeting of Sachverständigen Beirat für Bevölkerungs und Rassenpolitik, August 3, 1933.

²⁷For a brief discussion of the history of Paragraph 175 from 1871 into the postwar period, see Robert G. Moeller, “‘The Homosexual Man Is a “Man,” the Homosexual Woman Is a “Woman”’: Sex, Society, and the Law in Postwar West Germany,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 4, no. 3 (January 1994): 398.

wording of the law and policies for enforcement ensured that only denunciation or being caught in flagrante delicto was likely to lead to prosecution.²⁸ In 1935, a year after the Gestapo removed the embarrassment of having prominent homosexuals within the Nazi leadership by murdering SA leader Ernst Röhm and many of his associates in the Night of the Long Knives, June 30, 1934,²⁹ the National Socialist state revised Paragraph 175 and substantially strengthened both the criteria for and the consequences of arrest. As the ordinance stated:

A man who fornicates with another man or who allows himself to be abused for the purposes of fornication will be punished with a prison sentence.

If a participant has not yet reached the age of twenty-one at the time of the act, the court can refrain from imposing a sentence in particularly trifling cases.³⁰

The new law also added subsections outlining prison (*Zuchthaus*) sentences for men who used violence or a position of superiority to coerce another man into having sexual relations, for older men who seduced boys under twenty-one, and for male prostitutes. According to the Working Group for Promoting the Health of the *Volk*, a voluntary group closely associated with the Protestant churches, these provisions were conceived as part of a program to punish “offenses against marriage” and “attacks on marriage. . . . The goal of the law-makers . . . [was] the protection of sexual morality and the promotion of healthy sexual intercourse.”³¹ Clearly, Christian commentators believed that the attack on homosexuality was part of a larger strategy of purifying sexual behavior in the new regime, confining it, in other words, to marriage. This perception, however, was misguided.

As with homosexuality, the regime’s initial policy statements on prostitution seemed to suggest an intention to eradicate all forms of extramarital sex. In keeping with the general outward appearance of promoting chastity, prostitutes experienced an intense phase of legal marginalization.

²⁸Moeller cites the description of the law and its implementation from Jürgen Baumann, *Paragraph 175: Über die Möglichkeit die einfache, nichtjugendgefährdende und nicht öffentliche Homosexualität unter Erwachsenen straffrei zu lassen* (Berlin, 1968), 40–46.

²⁹Moeller describes the antihomosexuality context of this event in some detail; see *ibid.*, 400–401. See also Robert Gellately, *The Gestapo and German Society: Enforcing Racial Policy 1933–1945* (Don Mills, Ontario, 1990), 201–3.

³⁰Cited in Moeller.

³¹“Strafverschärfung der Unzucht zwischen Männern,” *Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Volksgesundheit e.V.—Mitteilungen*, August 8, 1935, 1–2. Jurists claimed that procreative power was completely destroyed in male homosexual relations (they could become “psychologically impotent”), but women were “always sexually prepared” and remained available for future motherhood duties (cited in Moeller, 403). Although much better off than the men, female homosexuals also faced persecution in the Third Reich. See Claudia Schoppmann, *Days of Masquerade: Life Stories of Lesbians during the Third Reich*, trans. Allison Brown (New York, 1996).

In 1933 tens of thousands of them were rounded up and sent to workhouses and concentration camps.³² These measures occurred under the authority of the Decree for the Protection of the *Volk* and State (issued on February 28, 1933) and the May 1933 revisions to the VD law and Clause 361 of the criminal code. Modifications to the law included provisions for punishing anyone “who publicly and conspicuously or in a manner *likely* to annoy the public incites immoral acts or offers immoral services.”³³ In 1935 the Racial Purity Law further delineated categories of acceptable sexual behavior by banning marriages and nonmarital sex between Jews and Gentiles. This created the legal category of “race defilement”—sexual contact that might lead to miscegenation.³⁴ Within two years of coming to power, then, the Nazis used the authority of law to label prostitution and “interracial” sexual activities as “asocial.” Female promiscuity too came within the purview of the law. “Asocial” behavior for women (though not for men) included such vague categories as becoming too easily sexually aroused (“sexuelle Erregbarkeit”) or creating a “strongly erotic impression.”³⁵ “Oversexed” women, along with those who infected soldiers with venereal disease, were immediately placed in one or more of three categories: promiscuous individual, prostitute, or sterilization candidate.³⁶

³²Gisela Bock, *Zwangsterilisation im Nationalsozialismus: Studien zur Rassenpolitik und Frauenpolitik* (Opladen, 1986), 417. Although I have taken issue with many of Bock’s arguments elsewhere (see Timm, “The Politics of Fertility,” 59, 322), I see no reason to doubt her statistical information.

³³The emphasis on *likely* is my own. (The German text, difficult to translate accurately, reads: “wer öffentlich in auffälliger Weise oder in einer Weise, die geeignet ist, Einzelne oder die Allgemeinheit zu belästigen, zur Unzucht auffordert oder sich dazu anbietet.”) One should note that this is a major change from previous laws, which made it necessary to prove that someone had actually been annoyed.

³⁴Patricia Szobar is currently writing a dissertation on this subject, forthcoming from Rutgers University.

³⁵Christa Paul, *Zwangsprostitution: Staatlich errichtete Bordelle im Nationalsozialismus* (Berlin, 1995), 18. She cites Bock, 401 ff.

³⁶The most detailed account of forced sterilization in the Third Reich is still Gisela Bock’s *Zwangsterilisation im Nationalsozialismus*, though the arguments in this book have come under fire, particularly from historians in the United States. For summaries of these trans-Atlantic debates, see Atina Grossmann, “Feminist Debates about Women and National Socialism,” *Gender & History* 3, no. 3 (1991): 350–58, and Adelheid von Saldern, “Victims or Perpetrators? Controversies about the Role of Women in the Nazi State,” in *Nazism and German Society, 1933–1945*, ed. David F. Crew (London, 1994), 141–65. Bock’s arguments that the main thrust of reproductive health care policies in the Third Reich were antinatalist and that these policies were both directed primarily toward and suffered by women are not very helpful for the kind of more nuanced gender analysis required of these subjects. Nonetheless, the book provides a useful presentation of historical research on the subject. For a local case study, see Monika Daum and Hans-Ulrich Deppe, *Zwangsterilisation in Frankfurt am Main 1933–1945* (Frankfurt, 1991); and for a bibliography of further sources, see Christoph Beck, *Sozialdarwinismus—Rassenhygiene—Zwangsterilisation und Vernichtung “Lebensunwerten” Lebens: Eine Bibliographie zum Umgang mit behinderten Menschen im “Dritten Reich”—und Heute* (Bonn, 1992).

The regime did not launch any concerted propaganda or educational campaigns aimed at the general population. Evidence of propaganda against VD and promiscuity in the Third Reich is very sparse. The few official educational materials available, such as the Ufa film *Geißel der Menschheit* (Scourge of humanity), were wholly concerned with medical descriptions of the disease. The Reich Working Group for Combating Venereal Disease in the Reich Subcommittee for the People's Health Service did organize lectures for students and Hitler Youth doctors. The Working Group for Injury Prevention in the Reich Ministry for Public Enlightenment and Propaganda also funded anti-VD efforts, such as short plays with titles like *German Woman, Protect Yourself from Contact with Foreign Workers* and *SOS Shipwreck of Life*.³⁷ But these pale in comparison to the anti-VD campaigns of the Weimar and postwar periods. Despite the attempts to establish respectability and Hitler's early pronouncements in *Mein Kampf* against the scourge of prostitution,³⁸ the Third Reich launched no concerted campaign against promiscuity. In general, the transition from the Weimar Republic to the Third Reich brought about a significant decrease in the amount of attention paid to VD in the medical and welfare literature.³⁹ The marginalization, persecution, deportation, and murder of large numbers of Socialist and Jewish doctors, sex reformers, and welfare workers was in part responsible for this.⁴⁰ But in 1935, the German Society for Combating Venereal Disease (Deutsche Gesellschaft zur Bekämpfung der Geschlechtskrankheiten, DGBG) had already reoriented its activities away from "mass public events for the unchanging audience of large cities" toward more concentrated efforts among "the smallest cells of the organizations, in the work camps, for the troops, etc."⁴¹

³⁷See BArch(B) R58/149, 135; BArch(B) R55/1221, 139–40.

³⁸For allusions to Hitler's pronouncements on prostitution, see "Die Prostitutionsfrage," 6; "Stellungnahme zur Prostitutionsfrage," *Christliche Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Volksgesundheit e. V.—Mitteilungen*, September 1, 1937, 1–3, which cites an article by Spiethoff quoting Hitler's call for a "battle against the spiritual [*seelischen*] preconditions for prostitution."

³⁹This is a somewhat subjective assessment formed in the course of my research on both periods, but it is confirmed by a simple statistical analysis of journal articles cited in the IBZ; for the Nazi years, this is F[elix] Dietrich et al., eds., *Bibliographie der deutschen Zeitschriftenliteratur: Mit Einschluß von Sammelwerken* (Osnabrück, 1897–1964). While the late 1920s saw a proliferation of articles in medical, welfare, and other journals on venereal diseases, reaching a peak of just over 140 a year in 1927 and 1928, the Nazi years witnessed a dramatic decline, with only 20–50 articles in the years 1933–38. A slight increase is evident at the beginning of the war (62 articles in 1940), though many of these are official pronouncements on the apparent lack of an increase in VD cases during the war. It is also significant that a large percentage of articles written on the subject in the Third Reich were authored by a small number of officially sanctioned experts, such as Bodo Spiethoff and Hans Gottschalk of the DGBG.

⁴⁰See Grossmann, 136–47.

⁴¹Florian Werr, "Professor Spiethoff—60 Jahre," *Dermatologische Wochenschrift*, nos. 5–6 (November 1935): 3.

Perhaps the most public effort to educate the population about the dangers of VD was the attempt to sanitize the streets of Berlin in preparation for the 1936 Olympics. The prospect of the arrival of thousands of international visitors for this event encouraged city and federal governments to contemplate the best ways of projecting a favorable image of the Nazi state. Aside from the more obvious and well-known attempts to glorify Aryan racial superiority in the games themselves, such as Leni Riefenstahl's officially commissioned propaganda film, *Olympia*, the Nazis made more mundane efforts to cleanse the streets of images that might disturb visitors. Anti-Semitic propaganda and racial segregation signs over park benches and public washrooms were temporarily removed, and Jewish residents generally experienced a brief respite from coercive measures. These measures have received attention in numerous historical accounts.

Less well known are the measures to purify the streets of asocial and deviant sexual behavior that might offend tourists or reveal the prevalence of VD in Berlin. Police conducted a round-up of "work-shy" and asocial residents, including the indigent, of Berlin and other German cities and sent them to the Dachau concentration camp.⁴² A special health committee for the Olympics within the Main Health Office was put in charge of making certain that the streets were free of VD-infected persons. This office ordered the hours in the central forced examination center (*Zwangsvorführungsstelle*) to be extended; between the end of July and the middle of September 1936 it was open from 7:30 A.M. to 9:00 P.M., seven days a week. Supervisors ordered the employees to work extra shifts.⁴³ Beginning in the middle of July, the Main Health Office required welfare workers in the VD clinics to assist the criminal police in conducting intensified surveillance to find as many infected individuals as possible.⁴⁴ The raids were intended to pick up any individuals who might provoke even the slightest suspicion that they carried a venereal disease. But the health authorities were also careful to establish procedures that would prompt as little public outcry as possible. A special quick examination center (*Schnelluntersuchungsstelle*) was set up in Charlottenburg to handle these extra cases, and an "expedited examination procedure" was established. Individuals whose VD tests came up negative were to be released immediately, "so that they do not suffer harm that would be difficult to redress as a consequence of extended detention."⁴⁵ "A needlessly heartless procedure to the detriment of the apprehended individual is not called for," warned the Main Health Office directive. Welfare workers were given a large degree of discretion in making their

⁴²Jeremy Noakes, "Social Outcasts in the Third Reich," in *Life in the Third Reich*, ed. Richard Bessel (New York, 1987), 93.

⁴³Hauptgesundheitsamt, hereafter HGA, to specialists, July 25, 1936, and August 22, 1936, in Landesarchiv Berlin, Ost, hereafter LAB East, Rep. 03-03/3, no. 36.

⁴⁴HGA (Spiewok) to specialists and VD clinics, July 10, 1936, in *ibid.*

⁴⁵HGA internal memo, July 9, 1936, in *ibid.*

decisions about who would be detained and forced into treatment. Nevertheless, the tone of the Main Health Office directive suggests that health authorities were planning to cast a very wide net in their pre-Olympics raids; consequently, they felt much more obligated than usual to warn their workers to make sure that innocent individuals would not be needlessly shamed or harmed. Patients were even given the opportunity to speak with a welfare worker “to express any suggestions and wishes that she [the implication being that most patients would be female] finds appropriate to limit the effects of the forced measures to that degree of harm that is unavoidable.”⁴⁶

The extreme sensitivity to public perceptions of these measures was a common feature of Nazi policy on sexuality. Although health officials were keen to erase the specter of VD from the image of the Nazi Olympics, they were also careful to conduct the intensified VD controls in a manner that denied any impression that the Third Reich condoned promiscuity. Clearly, policy makers feared that any hint of venereal disease lurking in the Third Reich’s capital city would seriously damage the regime’s international reputation. The *appearance* of sexual purity was uppermost in the minds of health authorities and their political superiors. The main concern of VD policies during the Olympics was to clean the streets of unsavory individuals likely to tarnish the image of the city and the Reich while keeping the crimes of the regime hidden from the international public.⁴⁷ Image, needless to say, had little to do with reality, and a pragmatic tolerance for prostitution as a practice always hid behind the public demonization and legal marginalization of prostitutes as individuals.

TOLERATING SEXUAL VICE

The effort to clean up the streets should not be confused with an attempt to eradicate prostitution. It is necessary to distinguish controls aimed at the streetwalker from those directed toward the prostitute working in a brothel. Streetwalkers were subject to very harsh penalties, particularly if they refused to comply with strict health guidelines and restrictions on their movements. A much more ambivalent policy developed toward brothels. Although the National Socialists did not repeal Paragraph 17 of the 1927 Law for Combating Venereal Diseases, which banned locked brothels and police-regulated prostitution, many city administrations took the Nazi

⁴⁶Ibid.

⁴⁷The very superficial and virtually undocumented book by Duff Hart-Davis, *Hitler’s Games: The 1936 Olympics* (London, 1986), contains a passage (139) citing the importation of *extra* prostitutes into the city of Berlin to service international guests. This point is not footnoted, and I have found nothing in the files of the Berlin health administration to support it. Confirmation or definitive refutation awaits further research in the police files.

crackdown on street prostitution as support for reinstating brothels and red light districts. Government officials rejected arguments from VD and welfare experts, who argued that confining prostitutes to locked brothels increased the risk of spreading VD.⁴⁸ In fact, they insisted that brothels were necessary to *protect* public health.⁴⁹ As Wolfgang Ayass has argued, the 1927 compromise between police regulation of prostitution and full legalization was overthrown in the Nazi era—the pendulum swung decisively back toward regulation.⁵⁰ In some cities, particularly in Essen, Hamburg, and Lübeck, confinement of prostitutes to brothels and red light districts occurred long before any legal basis for it had been enacted.⁵¹

The state-sponsored brothel system was solidified in February 1936, when the Supreme Command of the Wehrmacht declared the construction of military brothels to be “an urgent necessity” and insisted that health authorities should restrain themselves from arresting prostitutes who might be used for this purpose.⁵² In a speech to SS commanders in 1937, Himmler explicitly announced his intention to continue tolerating prostitution: “In this area [prostitution] we will be as tolerant as we can possibly be, since one cannot on the one hand wish to prevent the entire male youth from deviating into homosexuality and on the other hand leave them no alternative.”⁵³ The legal and social marginalization of prostitutes in civilian society contrasted, then, with their official toleration—even promotion—in military circles.

While praising the government’s cleansing of the streets, religious organizations and VD experts immediately voiced strong objections to official pronouncements expressing the need for more brothels or for the

⁴⁸Arguments against regulating prostitution dominated the discussion of the issue in the Weimar Republic. The most well known expert on prostitution in the Weimar Republic was Alfred Blaschko. His antiregulationist stance is outlined in detail in Alfred Blaschko, *Hygiene der Geschlechtskrankheiten*, 2nd ed. (Leipzig, 1920).

⁴⁹In response to individual petitions from members of the public complaining about the presence of brothels in their area, the Reichsministerium für Volksaufklärung und Propaganda argued that brothels were necessary to protect the public from venereal disease. See BArch(B) R55/1221, 123–24.

⁵⁰Wolfgang Ayass, “Asoziale” im Nationalsozialismus (Stuttgart, 1995), 185–86. I am grateful to the anonymous “Reader 2” of this essay for reminding me that control of prostitution in Berlin was by no means typical.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, 186. A detailed summary of the policies in Essen can be found in Sellmann. Authorities in Essen felt justified in establishing a red light district, because the Nazis had abolished Articles 114 and 115 of the constitution, which safeguarded “freedom of the person” and the inviolability of an individual’s residence from unjustified incursions. See also E. Müller, “Die Kasernierung der Dirnen in Essen,” *Die Polizei* 30, no. 19 (October 1933): 440–43.

⁵²Paul, 12. Cited from “Niederschrift der Sitzung des Wohlfahrtsausschusses des deutschen Gemeindetages zum Thema ‘Bewahrungsgesetz,’” February 27, 1936, in Detlev J. K. Peukert, *Grenzen der Sozialdisziplinierung: Aufstieg und Krise der deutschen Jugendfürsorge von 1878 bis 1932* (Cologne, 1986), 281.

⁵³Quoted in Paul, 12.

regulation of prostitution.⁵⁴ Drawing on decades of experience in the field of VD control and alluding to the concerns of religion-based welfare organizations that saw their task as the rehabilitation of prostitutes, VD expert Bodo Spiethoff argued that ethical considerations must take precedence over “purely organizational-technical” priorities.

The state cannot recognize a justification for extramarital intercourse or a right to extramarital intercourse if it wants to avoid infringing upon the foundations of the family. For this reason, it cannot be the duty of the state to create possibilities for extramarital sexual intercourse through the construction of brothels or to foster the practice of extramarital sexual intercourse through the granting of any type of concession or designation.

It is the duty of the state to call a halt to the appearance of prostitution in all its forms and particularly to protect children and youth from coming into contact with prostitution.

State-licensed brothels and red light districts are politically and ethically unbearable, but they are also to be rejected from another viewpoint, because the number of prostitutes housed in this way is never more than a small fraction of the prostitutes in a city, and this small fraction would not influence the city landscape in any way, so that no advantages can overcome the ethical, health, and economic disadvantages connected to any brothel-related business.⁵⁵

Spiethoff's arguments were cited in an internal communication of the Department for the Protection of Endangered Girls (Gefährdetenfürsorge), part of the Inner Mission, a welfare organization of the Protestant church, and they were reprinted in the journal of the Working Group for Promoting the Health of the *Volk*, a union of close to three hundred social welfare agencies, women's groups, religious welfare organizations, and prominent social hygienists that had been active in Berlin since the early years of the Weimar Republic.⁵⁶ Both groups heartily applauded Spiethoff's assessment

⁵⁴For a pamphlet-length example written from the Protestant perspective, see Sellmann.

⁵⁵Quoted in “Bekanntnis zur Sittlichkeit als Grundlage des Kampfes gegen die Geschlechtskrankheiten,” *Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Volksgesundheit e. V.—Mitteilungen*, June 15, 1935, 2.

⁵⁶The *Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Volksgesundheit* was one of the only organizations concerned with issues of eugenics and sexuality to have escaped the process of *Gleichschaltung*. All other such organizations, many of which had large representations of Socialist and Jewish members, were either disbanded or absorbed into national organs once the Nazis came to power. See, for example, Atina Grossmann's account of the destruction of the sex reform movement in *Reforming Sex*. The close connection of the *Arbeitsgemeinschaft* to the Protestant Inner Mission, which maintained a close working relationship to Nazi welfare organs throughout the Third Reich, and the charismatic leadership of Hans Harmsen (himself a member of the Inner Mission) may explain its staying power. On the Inner Mission in the Nazi years, see Sabine Schleiermacher, “Die Innere Mission und ihr bevölkerungspolitisches

of the dangers of the Nazi policy on prostitution.⁵⁷ The Working Group published several articles on the subject in 1934 and 1937, in which anonymous authors rejected state involvement in organized prostitution. Although the Working Group acknowledged the much “cleaner street picture” that the National Socialist clampdown on prostitutes had achieved, they insisted that the conscientious implementation of the 1927 VD law, without the reconstruction of brothels, would have achieved the same result.⁵⁸ Nevertheless, the Working Group supported the existence of discrete brothels, run by madams instead of police and situated in the less-populated financial districts of the city. This pragmatic willingness to accept the existence of prostitution, they argued, was preferable to having the state implicitly sanction extramarital intercourse by becoming involved in the actual administration of prostitution, and it would also achieve the apparent goal of the National Socialist state to remove this activity from public view.⁵⁹ Brothels and walled-off red light districts, they argued, actually encouraged and incited deviant sexual behavior: they were sites of curiosity for the young, who would often peek past the walls and ape the behavior they spied;⁶⁰ they encouraged deviant sexual acts through their effects on the mass psychology of their visitors;⁶¹ and they provided an incentive for the slave trade in women and children.⁶² On the basis of these arguments, the Working Group complained bitterly when the Nazi state expanded its support for brothels after 1934. In 1937 they repeated their arguments that registration of prostitutes only increased the spread of venereal disease and gave men the false impression that state-run brothels would protect them from VD.⁶³

The views expressed by the Working Group for Promoting the Health of the *Volk* were echoed in a report from the Group for the Protection of

Programm,” in *Der Griff nach der Bevölkerung: Aktualität und Kontinuität nazistischer Bevölkerungspolitik*, ed. Heidrun Kaupen-Haas (Nördlingen, 1986), 73–89.

⁵⁷See “Aus dem Jahresbericht 1935 über die Arbeit der evangelischen Konferenz für Gefährdetenfürsorge,” January 29–31, 1935, in Archiv des diakonischen Werkes (hereafter ADW), CA Gf/St 10; and “Stellungnahme des Central-Ausschusses für die Innere Mission der deutschen evangelischen Kirche zur Prostitutionsfrage,” in ADW, BP 1857.

⁵⁸This view is also expressed in “Die Prostitution unter dem Geschlechtskrankengesetz,” 100.

⁵⁹“Die Prostitutionsfrage,” 7–8.

⁶⁰“Ist die zunehmende Kasernierung der Prostitution eine Massnahme der Jugendschutzes?” *Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Volksgesundheit e.V.—Mitteilungen*, no. 16 (1934): 4.

⁶¹“Stellungnahme zur Prostitutionsfrage,” 3. “Just as the masses can, through leadership, be made capable of greatness, so too can the consciousness of their numbers encourage them to feel justified in the satisfaction of their most base desires and to free themselves of countervailing inhibitions.”

⁶²“Die Prostitution als internationale Frage,” *Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Volksgesundheit e.V.—Mitteilungen*, June 14, 1934, 1–5.

⁶³See “Kasernierung und Bordellierung,” *Christliche Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Volksgesundheit e.V.—Mitteilungen*, January 20, 1937, 1–5; “Stellungnahme zur Prostitutionsfrage,” 1–3.

Endangered Girls in the Association of Female Welfare Workers. The welfare workers argued that regulated brothels and the forced registration and confinement of prostitutes worsened rather than improved the conditions for combating VD. Regulating prostitutes only forced more of them to avoid all forms of health care and surveillance, making them even more dangerous to the public. Men who visited brothels were likely to assume that the services provided included an implicit guarantee of medical safety, when in fact confinement had no effect on rates of VD infection. But worst of all, the welfare workers argued, was the ethical message that state-run brothels sent to the general population:

The National Socialist state, which has given itself the duty to protect and support the family, whose youth should be trained in self-control and ethical responsibility for the next generation, would endanger its own educational goals through the toleration, even legalization, of particular places for extramarital sexual intercourse. When the police themselves confine women to certain streets to perform acts of prostitution, when they regulate, and, for instance, provide individuals who wish to engage in prostitution with a particular instructional pamphlet or even identification for which they have to pay, they are granting a concession to prostitution.⁶⁴

The welfare workers believed that existing laws, if properly applied and enforced with confinement in a work house, would be effective in controlling prostitution without resorting to police regulation of brothels. They expressed indignation that the state intended to remove prostitution from public view without attacking it at its roots. They accused the Nazi state of not putting its “strong impulse toward ethically renewing our *Volk*” into practice.⁶⁵

These protests were attempts to use the Nazi regime’s own rhetoric against it. Each of the protesting organizations described above had long operated under the assumption that prostitutes were thoroughly marginalized and that welfare measures must be directed toward them in the interests of both individual rehabilitation and the protection of the larger society. Weimar politicians and VD experts had accepted the inevitability of prostitution as an outlet for what they considered to be irrepressible male sexual urges (*Geschlechtstriebe*). But the impulse to protect the population from VD and an understanding of the limitations of medical diagnosis and treatment had combined to defeat any arguments about the relative safety of brothels.⁶⁶ Prostitutes had to be provided with incen-

⁶⁴Fachgruppe Gefährdetenfürsorge in der Fachschaft der Wohlfahrtspflegerinnen (no recipient named), July 12, 1934, in ADW, CA Gf/St 4.

⁶⁵Ibid.

⁶⁶Annette Timm, “Uncontrollable Urges and Diseased Bodies: Prophylactics and the Politics of Fertility in Weimar Germany,” paper presented at the German Studies Association,

tives to return to “normal” lifestyles. Under the Nazis, this option was increasingly closed off. Despite the rhetoric about the evils of prostitution and the “racial inferiority” of prostitutes, their position as outlets for male sexual energies was institutionalized. The military authority and the Ministry of the Interior argued that brothels served hygienic and military functions; brothels decreased the risk of venereal disease by controlling the otherwise dangerous activities of “asocial” prostitutes, and they provided rewards for hard-fighting soldiers and productive workers.⁶⁷ Prostitutes were henceforth available to any German man who found his way to a state-run brothel. Given the relative absence of further protests against brothels after 1937, it seems plausible to assume that a regime discomfited by the apparent contradictions and ambiguities of its own policies quietly put a stop to further discussions of the subject.

The tolerance of prostitution in the Third Reich required a new system of categorizing promiscuous sexual behavior and prompted the creation of an increasingly complex system of designation, which built upon categories inherited from the Weimar era. Since the 1920s, VD-control efforts in Germany had labeled promiscuous individuals hwGs (people with “häufig wechselnder Geschlechtsverkehr” [frequently changing sexual partners]), or habitually promiscuous individuals. The category of hwG was always ambiguous in that it sometimes was synonymous with prostitution but sometimes not. But National Socialist racial ideology and the regime’s desire to tolerate promiscuity in certain circumstances led to a proliferation of categories for sexual behavior that simultaneously criminalized and legitimized promiscuity and ended up leaving even more room for interpretation on the part of individual welfare workers and police officers than had previously been the case.

The proliferation of categories began with the legal codification of the definition of “asocial” in a directive from the Reich and Prussian Ministry of the Interior on December 14, 1937.⁶⁸ Known as the Preventive Detention Decree, this directive called for indefinite protective police custody for individuals who, while perhaps not career or habitual criminals, were endangering society through their behavior. “Asocials” were defined as

September 27, 1997, Washington, D.C. An example of the Weimar view of male sexual drives can be seen in Hertha Riese, *Geschlechtsleben und Gesundheit, Gesittung und Gesetz* (Berlin, 1932), 4.

⁶⁷For the Ministry of the Interior’s position on prostitution, see Conti to Landesregierungen, etc., September 18, 1939, in LAB C Rep. 03-03/3, no. 36; and the “Begründung” to the 1940 changes to the VD law in BArch(B) R43 II/725, 50–51. On the military’s attitude toward prostitution, see Peukert, 281. For a general summary of policy, see also Bleuel, 225–28.

⁶⁸For a summary of policies on asocials, see Jeremy Noakes, “Social Outcasts in the Third Reich,” in *Life in the Third Reich*, ed. Richard Bessel (New York, 1987), 83–96.

“people whose perpetration of trivial but constantly repeated infringements of the law show their unwillingness to integrate themselves into a system of order that is intrinsic to a National Socialist state (e.g., beggars, tramps [Gypsies], whores, alcoholics, those with contagious diseases, particularly people afflicted with venereal diseases, who remove themselves from the measures of health authorities).”⁶⁹ Escapees from institutions were candidates for protective custody, as were individuals whose asocial behavior had resulted in extraordinary hospital costs. According to a Berlin Main Health Office official, this measure particularly affected “healthy hwG individuals, who despite being repeatedly brought before the courts interrupt continued [medical] observation.”⁷⁰ In other words, individuals who might already have been known to welfare authorities in the Weimar Republic and categorized as hwG were now also given the additional label “asocial,” with its associated endangerment of their personal freedom. But the categorization could also work the other way around. Someone whose behavior was considered asocial, according to the standards of the Third Reich, could later also earn the label “hwG” or “prostitute” as a convenient way of justifying certain types of punishment. Gaby Zürn notes that married women in Hamburg who had illegitimate children while their husbands were off fighting the war were frequently labeled “hwG” or “prostitute” by welfare authorities in the Youth Office (Jugendamt) and were treated accordingly. Zürn astutely argues that this displays the degree to which “the designation ‘hwG-individual’ and particularly the category ‘prostitute’ were not simply job designations but were used by welfare workers to describe nonconforming social behavior.”⁷¹

The attempt to specify which types of behavior would qualify as asocial left much room for interpretation, depending upon the particular balance of power between medical, police, and welfare authorities in each region. A complex relationship between federal laws and local interpretations

⁶⁹HGA (Schwéers) to specialists in the Berlin health administration, September 22, 1938, LAB East, Rep. 03-03/3, no. 36. The word “Gypsies” appeared in parentheses in the original. The official title of the directive is “Polizeiliche Vorbeugungshaft für Personen, die sich den Maßnahmen der Gesundheitsbehörde entziehen,” Pol.s.Kr.3 Nr. 1682/37-2098-Abs. A II. On forced treatment of asocials, see also Landes-Wohlfahrts- und Jugendamt, Berlin to HGA, October 31, 1938; HGA internal memo, October 11, 1941, in LAB East, Rep. 03-03/3, no. 36. This correspondence discusses the administrative details of confining asocials who removed themselves from treatment in institutional custody.

⁷⁰The quote is from Dr. O. Schwéers in LAB East, Rep. 03-03/3, no. 36. See also Paul Werner, “Die vorbeugende Verbrechensbekämpfung durch die Polizei,” *Kriminalistik* 12 (1938): 60, cited in Paul, 13.

⁷¹Gaby Zürn, “‘A. ist Prostituiertentyp’: Zur Ausgrenzung und Vernichtung von Prostituierten und moralisch nicht-angepaßten Frauen im nationalsozialistischen Hamburg,” in *Verachtet—verfolgt—vernichtet: Zu den “vergessenen” Opfern des NS-Regimes*, ed. Projektgruppe für die vergessenen Opfer des NS-Regimes in Hamburg e.V. (Hamburg, 1988), 147.

guaranteed a haphazard and inconsistent implementation. In the case of prostitution, it had always been the case that laws were interpreted very differently in different parts of the Reich.⁷² But the law on asocials and other related policies increased the level of control ceded to individual doctors in determining how sexual behavior should be categorized.⁷³ Doctors were given a large degree of discretion in determining the course of treatment and in deciding the extent of surveillance under which an individual might be placed. In 1938, an Interior Ministry directive advised state and municipal health authorities that doctors should be directed to determine how regularly hwG individuals were to be examined on the basis of “personal cleanliness, their outward living conditions (age, degree of prostitution), and the frequency of sexual intercourse.”⁷⁴

This reliance on experts for subjective interpretations of individual behavior was evident in the increasingly specific categories for sexual deviance that Berlin health-care authorities used to guide decisions about the appropriate degree of surveillance. In the early years of the Nazi era, the very definitions of categories of promiscuity were disputed and ambiguously interpreted. In 1936 the Main Health Office in Berlin refused to provide its VD experts with an exact definition of the newly coined category of “alternating intercourse” (“wechselnder Geschlechtsverkehr,” or wG) used to describe occasionally promiscuous individuals whose behavior verged on but did not constitute prostitution or hwG. “The determination of ‘alternating intercourse’ can only be determined on an individual basis through discussions between the welfare worker and the patient,” a policy statement explained. The distinction between wG and hwG was crucial in determining the degree of surveillance imposed upon an individual. Nevertheless, government authorities left the exact definitions of these terms to local welfare workers, and the more designations available to health authorities, the more discretion they had in categorizing the exact degree of promiscuity. The effort to classify thus only succeeded in

⁷²For accounts of prostitution policy in Imperial Germany (mostly concentrating on Hamburg), see Richard J. Evans, “Prostitution, State, and Society in Imperial Germany,” *Past and Present* 70 (February 1976): 106–29, and Lynn Abrams, “Prostitutes in Imperial Germany, 1870–1918: Working Girls or Social Outcasts?” in *The German Underworld*, ed. Richard Evans (London, 1991), 189–209. Descriptions of how these policies continued into the Weimar and Nazi periods can be found in A. W., “Prostitution: Prostitutionshäuser in Hamburg-Altona,” *Die neue Generation* 22 (1926): 341; see also “Ist die zunehmende Kasernierung der Prostitution eine Massnahme der Jugendschutzes?” *Arbeitsgemeinschaft für Volksgesundheit e.V.—Mitteilungen*, no. 16 (1934): 1–4.

⁷³In Berlin, for example, an agreement between the medical profession and city health authorities, which took effect in July 1936, guaranteed that as many VD patients as possible were referred to doctors in private practice. See “Vereinbarungen zwischen der Stadt und der kassenärztlichen Vereinigung Deutschlands,” circa July 1936, in LAB East, Rep. 03-03/3, no. 36.

⁷⁴Reichs und preus. Ministerium des Innern to Landesregierungen (in Prussia directly to state and communal health bureaus), January 27, 1938, in LAB East, Rep. 03-03/3, no. 36.

blurring the boundaries, since what constituted immoral behavior was increasingly left to the lowest level of bureaucrat and/or welfare worker to decide. The results for the individual patient would have been extremely unpredictable. Treatment was wholly dependent upon the subjective interpretation of the attending welfare worker. Under the circumstances of Nazi Berlin, appearance, education, gender, job status, and “race” were all likely to have had a major impact on these evaluations. The subjective decision making involved in such evaluations had been further enshrined in a 1935 supplement to the civil penal code that stated: “Anyone shall be punished who commits an act that the law declares to be punishable or that merits punishment in accordance with the underlying idea of a penal law and with wholesome popular sentiment. Should no specific penal law be directly applicable to the act in question, it shall be punished according to the law whose intention most closely applies thereto.”⁷⁵ Moral and sexual offenses, Hans Peter Bleuel has argued, could thus be categorized in such a way as to warrant any level of punishment. This arbitrary system meant that the regime had moved one step closer to totalitarianism. In Bleuel’s words:

Here we encounter the magic touchstone known as “wholesome popular sentiment,” which transcends all legal codes and provides all totalitarian systems with a superlative pretext for their arbitrary acts. There are few sentiments more inhuman than the righteous indignation of the frustrated petty bourgeois who gives free rein to his outraged and virtuous sense of propriety. On this plane, the so-called decent average citizen can unhesitatingly identify himself with any government measure, however draconian and illegal.⁷⁶

The subjective judgments allowed in the system of classifying degrees of promiscuity were particularly influential in the Third Reich, since the emphasis was on segregating and punishing dangerous elements of society, not, as had been the case in the Weimar Republic, on rehabilitating and reintegrating “fallen” individuals.

Women were in more danger of falling victim to these arbitrary classifications than men. Nazi policies encouraged authorities in the Berlin Main Health Office to use a broad definition of what constituted dangerous sexual behavior on the part of women. They included “bar women, table women, and waitresses” in their surveillance efforts, and they interpreted the Ministry of the Interior directive to mean that “women were also to be monitored when hwG or wG is impossible to determine.”⁷⁷ Authorities assumed that mere presence in a certain bar indicated suspicious behavior. Despite

⁷⁵Quoted in Bleuel, 8.

⁷⁶Ibid.

⁷⁷HGA (Conti) to GSÄ in districts with VD clinics, December 3, 1937, in LAB East, Rep. 03-03/3, no. 36.

gender-neutral language, the health office reports suggest that surveillance efforts were primarily focused on women.⁷⁸ While promoting promiscuity with their support for brothels, Nazi leaders also punished women for any public displays of sexuality that were not directly linked either to the war effort or to the strengthening of families. The “sanitation of the street scene,” as this removal of prostitutes to brothels was often called, was meant to preserve the public facade of idyllic family life, to allow men a private release for their more base sexual “needs,” and to protect the image of woman as mother from the contradictory image of the public whore.

There thus emerged a contrast between acceptable and unacceptable sexual behavior for women—a contrast that contained an ambiguous and contradictory image of female sexuality but that in some sense also gave all women a similar role in Nazi society. True mothers of the *Volk* and members of the “national community,” so Nazi propaganda taught, contained their sexual expression entirely within the private realm. Their sexuality was inextricably linked to motherhood, and their sole public function was to act as educator and spiritual guide to their families—to produce, in other words, new citizens and soldiers.⁷⁹ The prostitute represented both a contrast and a mirror. She was defined as having abnormal sexual instincts that demanded her exclusion from the society at large. But, like “respectable” women, she was also prevented from expressing sexuality in public; she was confined to a brothel. And, like “respectable” women, her sexual services were also subjected to the demands of the state. Female sexuality was functionalized to serve the needs of the nation.

MILITARIZATION

The most famous attempt to harness women’s reproductive capacities, regardless of marital status, to the purpose of military victory was Himmler’s speech of October 1939, which called upon all racially “valuable” and patriotic Germans to produce children, even illegitimate ones, to fill the nation’s need for soldiers. This was a controversial stance, even within the party,⁸⁰ and its impact on actual practice has been vastly overblown, particularly by those who have used it to make the inaccurate claim that Himmler’s Lebensborn maternity homes were “breeding farms” where SS soldiers impregnated fertile Aryan women.⁸¹ A much more significant

⁷⁸This is clear in the occasional mention of an individual case and in an effort in 1937 to add up the actual financial costs that certain “female” practitioners of hwG had brought upon Berlin’s health care service. See Conti to health authorities, April 21, 1937, and similar requests to hospitals, same date, in *ibid.*

⁷⁹On the Nazi glorification of motherhood, see Claudia Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland: Woman, the Family, and Nazi Politics* (New York, 1987); Weyrather.

⁸⁰See Mosse, 166–67.

⁸¹Bleuel suggests that these rumors had some small basis in fact, at least to the degree that they reflected the fantasies of some Nazi leaders about policies that might be introduced in

event in terms of the number of people affected occurred a few weeks earlier, on September 9, 1939, eight days after the invasion of Poland, when a secret directive from the Reich Ministry of the Interior ordered the “reconstruction of brothels and barrack-like concentration of prostitutes.” This order foreshadowed a new orientation in VD and prostitution control.⁸² Originally, this directive applied only to the operational area of the German military; the goal was to provide prostitutes to German soldiers. Women who were considered prostitutes according to previously instituted definitions were registered and incarcerated in brothels. If they removed themselves from police or medical control, they were put into concentration camps. This group also included women who had committed “race defilement”: those who had broken the provisions of the 1935 Racial Purity Law by having sexual relations with men whose citizenship had been revoked for racial reasons.⁸³ Prostitutes and other “asocials” were placed at the bottom of the social hierarchy in the camps. In March 1942 Himmler ordered the construction of brothels in the concentration camps as well in order to provide “productivity” incentives for male inmates. Women incarcerated in the camps as prostitutes were the first to be chosen for employment in the camp brothels (the first of which was constructed at Mauthausen in the summer of 1942), though others were also forced into service, and some chose this option as a way to prolong their lives.⁸⁴

After the beginning of the war, brothels were constructed for foreign workers in Germany. The official justification for this policy was that providing foreign workers with prostitutes (particularly when the prostitutes were themselves foreigners or “Gypsies”) would protect German women from sexual danger and defilement.⁸⁵ By 1942 the criminal police, working

the future. He also describes the policy of providing soldiers on leave with pleasant female company with a view both to increasing the men’s support for the party and to creating social situations that might in the end have positive population political outcomes (169).

⁸²Paul, 13; HGA (Braemer) to GSÄ and VD clinics, September 21, 1942, in LAB East, Rep. 03-03/3, no. 36.

⁸³Paul, 14–18.

⁸⁴It is important to note, as Paul informs us, that many of them would have welcomed this opportunity, since conditions in the brothels were slightly better than in the camps at large and since working in the brothels guaranteed them at least a temporary reprieve from the gas chambers. Other inmates often expressed jealousy at the prostitutes’ privileged position (ibid., 134). According to Paul, Himmler first ordered the construction of a brothel in KZ-Mauthausen in June 1941, but various administrative problems delayed its construction. He then restated his demand for brothels, this time for all concentration camps, in March 1942. By the end of the war, Paul estimates, there were at least nine concentration-camp brothels (23, 131).

⁸⁵Ibid., 117. See also the concerns expressed about dangerous foreigners by members of the department for *Gefährdetenfürsorge* in the Inner Mission: “Tätigkeitsbericht der Bezirksstelle der Inneren Mission Kreuzberg für das Jahr 1943,” circa 1944, in ADW, BP 645.

under the authority of the secret directive, had created twenty-eight brothels in Berlin.⁸⁶ Any complaints about the effects of state-regulated prostitution on the ethical or physical health of the population were countered with the argument that this system was put in place “to defend members of the Wehrmacht and the civilian population from the threatening dangers of prostitution.”⁸⁷ Throughout the war years government officials argued that men could be better protected from venereal disease if prostitution were confined to state-run brothels.⁸⁸

Aside from these “secret” initiatives (which clearly could not have remained secret for long if the prostitutes were actually to attract customers), the Reich Ministry of the Interior also made public pronouncements on the direction of VD-control policies during the war. On September 18, 1939, the ministry circulated a directive stressing the likely impact of the war on the spread of venereal diseases.⁸⁹ All health authorities were directed to become even more alert about VD: they were to research infectious sources in every case and to request the police to detain forcibly anyone resisting VD controls. These measures represented only minor shifts in policy, simply emphasizing strategies already in place. More noteworthy was the directive to be particularly vigilant of all “women who frequent bars and similar facilities for the purpose of stimulating, entertaining, etc. (so-called table or entertainment women, dancers, etc.)” This represented a drastic expansion of the category for police surveillance, since it included women who did not sell sex and who did not necessarily show signs of having VD. Additionally, hwG individuals who were considered likely to spread VD and did not comply with orders to appear for examinations were henceforth placed under “protective custody.” This repeated what had previously been a secret policy sanctioned by the law on asocials of December 14, 1937. The regime made public its intention to treat all open displays of female sexuality as signs of asocial and health-threatening behavior.⁹⁰

After 1940 even stricter control of promiscuous individuals was instituted through modifications to the 1927 Reich Law for Combating Venereal Diseases. These modifications, in combination with the law on asocials of 1937,

⁸⁶VD experts in Berlin’s Main Health Office had been put in charge of monitoring the women installed in these brothels. HGA (Braemer) to GSÄ and VD clinics, September 21, 1942, in LAB East, Rep. 03-03/3, no. 36.

⁸⁷See the response from the Reichsministerium für Volksaufklärung und Propaganda to a lawyer from Heidelberg who complained about the increase in prostitution near military barracks, September 18, 1944, in BArch(B) R55/1221, 122.

⁸⁸See, for example, Oberbürgermeister der Reichshauptstadt Berlin, HGA (Schröder) to Oberregierungsrat Dr. Gußmann, Reichsministerium für Volksaufklärung und Propaganda, September 6, 1944, in BArch(B) R55/1221, 123–24.

⁸⁹RMI (Conti) to Landesregierungen, etc., September 18, 1939, in *ibid.*

⁹⁰The directive was published in *Der öffentliche Gesundheitsdienst*, October 5, 1939, 342–43.

allowed the National Socialist state to formulate increasingly harsh punishments for all forms of “sexual deviance.” In October 1940 Paragraph 17 of the VD law effectively legalized civilian brothels and cleared the way for what would become substantial state involvement in the business of prostitution. In comparison to this change, other amendments to the VD law instituted at this time that dealt with free treatment for the poor and with jurisdictional issues appear insignificant and were possibly intended to deflect attention from what the government knew to be a controversial policy.⁹¹ Officials justified their decision by stating: “The former Paragraph 17 [Verbot der Kasernierung der Prostituierten] does not reflect present needs and practical circumstances and will thus no longer be in force, as is already the case in the Reichsgauen Ostmark and the Sudetenland.”⁹² This rather bland statement foreshadowed a significant transformation of policies toward prostitution. Streetwalkers, for instance, who had once been punished with only short stays in jail, now fell under extremely strict police control and were often sent immediately to concentration camps.⁹³

The beginning of the war had a dramatic effect on VD-control and prostitution policies at the local level in the Third Reich. Given the social disruption of drafting young men into the army, incidences of extramarital intercourse multiplied, and paranoia about its effects escalated dramatically. Meanwhile, national policies that condoned and even organized prostitution complicated attempts to control VD at the local level, since it threw into question traditional methods of labeling promiscuity as asocial behavior. Particularly after the beginning of the war and the dramatic expansion of the civilian and military brothel system (which made it much more difficult for women to move in and out of the profession of prostitution), local officials in Berlin were at pains to make a distinction between the occasionally or the habitually promiscuous and the prostitute.⁹⁴ Implicit in the proliferation of categories for deviant sexual behavior was the realization that the consequences of being labeled a prostitute in the Third Reich had become much more serious and difficult to escape.

At a meeting on January 10, 1941, Berlin health authorities attempted to devise exact classifications for degrees of promiscuity. Dr. Paulstich, head of the Main Health Office, told his subordinates to be aware of a growing problem of promiscuity, particularly among domestic servants,

⁹¹Two other sections of the VD law were changed: Paragraph 2, which outlined free treatment for the poor, was reworded to be more general and all-inclusive; and Paragraph 18, which discussed the administrative responsibility of the individual states for carrying out the law, was supplemented with a statement about the Reich Ministry of the Interior’s responsibility for enacting appropriate laws and policies to aid in the fight against VD.

⁹²“Begründung,” n.d., in BArch(B) R43 II/725, 50–51.

⁹³Ayass, 72.

⁹⁴The head of Berlin’s Main Health Office (Dr. Paulstich of the Hauptgesundheitsamt) instructed his subordinates to make this distinction very clear. See Paulstich to specialists and counseling clinics for VD, April 30, 1941, in LAB East, Rep. 03-03/3, no. 36.

office workers, saleswomen, and female factory workers.⁹⁵ These groups were increasingly turning up in military VD reports as the sources of infection, and social workers noted a prevalence of women from these circles in dancing halls frequented by soldiers. More surveillance, Paulstich argued, was called for, as wGs (the occasionally promiscuous) were actually more dangerous in terms of spreading the disease than hwGs (the habitually promiscuous, presumed prostitutes, who by this time would have come under the direct surveillance of health and police authorities). This effort at more precise definition represents a break with previous practice. Asocial, deviant behavior required more specific delineation in a state that severely punished outsiders for nonconforming social behavior. Perhaps sensitive to this broader context, Paulstich insisted that the distinction between occasional and habitual promiscuity be strictly maintained. Not having descended to the depths of commercial sex, wGs still had some hope of returning to mainstream society.

As another official at the meeting put it, the main concern was the protection of society at large, because promiscuous individuals had too negative an impact on society to be ignored. "All of our experience has shown that this type of personal decline and incorrect choice of leisure activity very quickly leads to a neglect of employment duties, in particular work productivity. There can be no doubt that stubborn cases absolutely must be monitored."⁹⁶ Beyond simply posing a health danger, then, promiscuous persons were considered a threat to the productivity and social cohesiveness of the nation. Drastic measures, involving the cooperation of health, police, and welfare authorities, were necessary to prevent further degeneration. The discussions of promiscuity in this meeting also demonstrated that health officials accepted the danger of overzealously policing individuals who were not actually engaging in promiscuous behavior. They argued that during a "war like the present one," the possibility of an individual injustice was justified "to protect national strength . . . and prevent sexual epidemics from cropping up."⁹⁷ The very fact that Paulstich felt the need to encourage his subordinates to act more harshly, however, suggests that he was aware of their reticence to do so.

As the war progressed, various attempts to streamline and rationalize the process of finding and monitoring "dangerous" spreaders of VD were made. Anyone who admitted to changing sexual partners frequently was placed under the surveillance of health care authorities, forced to appear for weekly or more frequent health-care examinations, and provided with

⁹⁵Ibid.

⁹⁶Comment from St. I. Kördel in *ibid.*

⁹⁷The last comment was provided by Stadtdirektor Dr. Breitenfeld (*ibid.*).

counseling from welfare workers.⁹⁸ In many cases, Paulstich claimed, individuals voluntarily submitted themselves to these measures. In other cases, the health authorities had to resort to more intense methods of social control, including calling upon the police to place the individual under protective custody.⁹⁹ This system, of course, relied on cooperation between the various district clinics, the Main Health Office, and the police, a triangular relationship that became increasingly complex and difficult during the war. Government agencies informed health officials that all efforts must be drastically stepped up to meet wartime demands, but the limited resources of the district health offices led to inconsistencies in implementation. Administrators tried to counter these problems with longer working hours for clinic staff and authoritarian pronouncements about how clients should be treated. “Those individuals requested to appear in *our* offices,” Paulstich admonished, “will over time have to become accustomed to the fact that they cannot respond to orders from the authorities according to their own free will.”¹⁰⁰ But as the war dragged on, the attempt to create a seamless organizational structure for the administration of VD-control efforts in Berlin faltered. By late 1942 the Main Health Office was receiving constant complaints about various clinics’ and administrative offices’ unwillingness to cooperate.¹⁰¹

Despite the philosophy of unifying and streamlining the health care system at all levels (enshrined in the Law for the Standardization of the Health Care System of July 3, 1934), local health care ran up against the classic problems of a bureaucracy mired in red tape and governed by arbitrary and subjective decision making. Whether an individual was classified as being in need of public-health surveillance depended upon chance circumstances and the degree of ideological devotion of the individual welfare worker. In a system that forcibly confined prostitutes to state-run brothels and sent them to concentration camps, these subjective decisions had ominous consequences.

The internal contradictions of Nazi attitudes on prostitution were obvious even to contemporary observers. Policies were directed at reducing the visibility of prostitutes rather than at reducing their numbers. While extolling health, the Nazis promoted a form of activity that had always been considered the prime source of venereal infection. The rhetoric about “purification” forced health authorities to downplay the statistical realities

⁹⁸On October 18, 1937, the HGA reminded its subordinates not to undertake lengthy and complex investigations of a person’s sexual behavior if he or she already admitted to hwG. See memo signed by Schwéers in LAB East, Rep. 03-03/3, no. 36.

⁹⁹HGA (Paulstich) to specialists, January 17, 1940, in *ibid.*

¹⁰⁰*Ibid.*

¹⁰¹HGA (Paulstich) to specialists, October 7, 1942, in *ibid.*

of VD control. Objective evaluations of the extent of VD in the population are noticeably scarce in local and federal documents. Leonardo Conti, who had been appointed Reichsgesundheitsführer in October 1944,¹⁰² was forced to conduct his own unscientific survey of the chiefs of the district health offices in 1942. Seventy percent of those questioned admitted to having detected a slight increase in VD rates in the previous years. But further statistical evaluations were curtailed by the circumstances of war.¹⁰³ The lack of statistical evidence makes an assessment of the effect of National Socialist policies on VD rates virtually impossible. What is certain, however, is that the exigencies of war dramatically shifted priorities in VD control. The war focused health officials' preventive efforts on the "control" of prostitution. This represented a radical departure from Weimar attitudes. In the 1920s, VD control was conceived as a crucial component of population policy, since these afflictions threatened the fertility of future generations and posed a long-term threat to the birth rate. The ever-diminishing distinction between prostitution control and VD control in the Third Reich (evident in the relative lack of concern with statistical evaluations of VD in the population at large) demonstrates the degree to which hygienic and even political concerns were subsumed under the all-consuming interest in achieving short-term military goals. Prostitution was considered useful for the war effort. Recognizing that it was also the site of transmitting venereal infection, the Nazis implied that their comprehensive control of all prostitutes and brothels made any further discussion of the VD problem irrelevant.

An example from Berlin provides striking evidence that the National Socialist government sought to functionalize female and male sexuality for the purposes of war. In September 1944 an official in the Main Health Office, Schröder, wrote to the Reich Ministry for the Enlightenment of the *Volks* and Propaganda in response to a complaint about prostitutes in Berlin.¹⁰⁴ A Wehrmacht sergeant had expressed indignation at the price of Berlin prostitutes. Schröder agreed that the "extraordinarily high prices," particularly when charged to soldiers unfamiliar with the going rate in Berlin, were unconscionable. He informed his counterpart in the Propaganda Ministry that he had months ago expressed concern about this situation to the criminal police and instructed them to intervene. He suggested that women who charged extortionate rates for their services should be referred immediately to the Labor Ministry for employment assignment. To protect soldiers from these women, Schröder also instructed police to set up brothels near all the

¹⁰²Conti had far-reaching powers over all aspects of civilian health care. On his appointment as Reichsgesundheitsführer, see Führerhauptquartier, Bormann to Goebbels, October 3, 1944, BArch(B) R55/1221, 288.

¹⁰³Reichsgesundheitsführer to Goebbels, February 17, 1944, in BArch(B) R55/1222, 38–39.

¹⁰⁴Ibid., Bl. 124.

large train stations to serve soldiers exclusively during their temporary stays in Berlin. This intervention into one of the oldest relationships of supply and demand displays the degree to which public health officials had subordinated concerns about venereal disease to the particular demands of wartime Germany. The state's explicit aim to make prostitutes available to soldiers was so influential that local officials went far beyond controlling prostitution simply from a health perspective; they intervened in the actual commercial transaction between prostitutes and their customers. In doing so, they functionalized male sexuality to preserve the precarious social power system in times of war.¹⁰⁵ If male sexual urges could be channeled and provided for, the logic went, then workers would be more productive, soldiers would not lose their fighting spirit, and respectable women and families would be protected from a public confrontation with sex in the streets. The regime reconciled the contradiction between its claim to preserve family purity and the reality of its sponsoring prostitution with the argument that brothels served to keep prostitution off the streets and away from the curious eyes of children. Despite the fact that they had to be somewhat visible to attract customers, brothels were perceived as a discrete outlet for excess sexual energies. They were sites of private vice that could be deployed to help preserve order and conformity.

After 1939 health concerns that had long dictated attitudes toward prostitution in Germany were subordinated to the more pressing need to stabilize the Nazi regime in a time of war. Given this philosophy, it comes as no surprise that the Nazis rejected the arguments of VD experts and welfare advocates against state-run brothels. Although a feeble attempt was made to argue that brothels could better protect the population from VD since prostitution was inevitable and brothel inmates could be forced to undergo regular medical examinations, this was simply a smokescreen for a much more pressing concern with subordinating human sexuality to the needs of an aggressive, racist state. Men, it was thought, could only become effective soldiers if they were provided with sexual satisfaction.

It is important to note, however, that male sexual satisfaction was not viewed by the Nazis as a goal in itself. The expression of male sexuality was not a matter of individual pleasure but of the nation's military strength. The degree to which Nazi leaders viewed human sexuality as firmly linked to military strength is evident in discussions about whether sterilized individuals were fit to serve as soldiers. This issue was discussed in a meeting of top Nazi administrators from the Ministry of Justice, the Führer's office, the army and navy, the Health and Racial Political Offices, and the welfare administration in spring 1936. A military doctor from the War Ministry insisted that allowing sterilized individuals to become soldiers during peacetime was inadvisable, because they were not fit for service. Although some cases might be exceptions to this rule, he argued, the

¹⁰⁵I owe the formulation "functionalized male sexuality" to Paul, 135.

teasing that sterilized soldiers were sure to receive from their comrades would make service a torture for them. If war were to come, the doctor advised, these individuals could be designated fit for conscripted civilian work. These recommendations were accepted and later endorsed by the Führer himself.¹⁰⁶ At another meeting three days later, it was emphasized that although sterilization must not be considered discriminatory or “honor destroying,” those who had undergone the procedure were not “suited to service with weapons” partly because the individual’s medical situation was unlikely to remain secret and would be the source of much taunting.¹⁰⁷ Weeks before the invasion of Poland, a directive from the Führer stipulated that sterilized volunteers would be allowed to serve if they were found to be fit (*tauglich*). Others would be assigned civilian work duties.¹⁰⁸

This discussion tells us several interesting things about the place of sexuality in the thinking of the Nazi leadership. To them, sexuality was inseparably linked to fertility, which was itself a core feature of personhood and, particularly, of masculine identity. It was assumed that anyone could recognize a sterilized individual on sight and that this would make that individual’s performance in a military context next to impossible. The link between fertility and a particularly militarized understanding of masculine sexuality is apparent.

The militarization of masculine sexuality paralleled the glorification of chaste motherhood in civilian Nazi society. Women’s sexuality had long been seen as intimately linked to their reproductive capacities. But with the coming of World War Two, the Nazis also functionalized male sexuality, consciously and actively attempting to control male sexual energies for the purposes of war. Although Nazi rhetoric still insisted that VD policies were aimed at limiting fertility-destroying diseases, wartime policy sacrificed a concern with fecundity to the war effort, deploying female sexual services (in terms of both motherhood and prostitution) and male sexual energies to increase the regime’s military might. Sex was thus viewed as entirely purposeful. It was more than simply a reward for loyalty to the regime—though it was that too. It was the underlying fuel of the military machine.

Although seemingly contradictory, the simultaneous glorification of the family and the construction of brothels arose from the demands of the

¹⁰⁶“Rechtsbesprechung am 26. April d.Js. im Reichsministerium des Innern über die Durchführung des Gesetzes zur Verhütung erbkranken Nachwuchses,” minutes dated May 8, 1936, BArch(B) R43 II/721a, 78–85.

¹⁰⁷It should be noted that some exceptions were made for party members. In cases where “particularly reliable party members” had been recommended for sterilization, Hitler reserved the right to reverse the decision (*ibid.*, 81, 83).

¹⁰⁸Reichsamtseiter to Martin Bormann, August 10, 1939, in *ibid.*, 97–98.

Nazis' particular brand of population policy. While supporting increased fertility at home, the regime also pursued a relentlessly militaristic, expansionistic, and racist foreign policy that, combined with a particular understanding of male sexuality, justified both sexual violence on the front and the provision of sexual gratification as a reward for military service. The goal of both policies was the achievement of world domination on the basis of racial superiority. The contradiction of decrying promiscuity, on the one hand, and promoting sexual commerce, on the other, was justified with the argument that only the direct control of prostitution could stop the spread of venereal disease. National Socialist discussions of sexuality never escaped the strict confines of racial ideology and a highly masculinized militarism. Pleasure took on a very peculiar role in this worldview. In providing prostitutes for soldiers and workers, Himmler did not accept the human need for pleasure. Instead, he prioritized military victory, arguing, in effect, that male sexual drives needed to be satisfied to maximize military and industrial effectiveness.