

City University of New York (CUNY)

CUNY Academic Works

Dissertations and Theses

City College of New York

2017

The Deployment of Psychiatrists and Psychotherapists to Control the Homosexual Problem in the Wehrmacht, Luftwaffe and SS

Gina Ippolito
CUNY City College

[How does access to this work benefit you? Let us know!](#)

More information about this work at: https://academicworks.cuny.edu/cc_etds_theses/693

Discover additional works at: <https://academicworks.cuny.edu>

This work is made publicly available by the City University of New York (CUNY).
Contact: AcademicWorks@cuny.edu

**The Deployment of Psychiatrists and Psychotherapists to
Control the Homosexual Problem in the Wehrmacht,
Luftwaffe and SS**

By: Gina Ippolito
Advisor: Dr. Andreas Killen

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Fine Arts of the
City College of the City University of New York

May 08, 2017

Table of Contents

Sexuality in the Third Reich: Historiography and Research Directions	2-4
Introduction	4-7
I. The Militarized Männerbund of Nazi Germany	7-10
II. Homoerotic Legacies and the Case of Ernst Röhm	10-15
III. The Medicalization of the Problem	15-18
IV. Psychiatrists and the Wehrmacht	18-23
V. Psychotherapists and the Luftwaffe	23-27
VI. The Goring Institute and the will of Heinrich Himmler	27-30
Conclusion	30-31
Bibliography	32

Sexuality in the Third Reich: Historiography and Research Directions

The sexual policies of the Third Reich have often been described by historians as a concerted effort to reestablish heterosexual norms and uphold traditional standards of respectability. One of the major contributors to this school of thought, George Mosse, noted that most of the policies that manipulated sexuality and the private lives of German citizens “were based upon the Nazi wish to be dynamic and virile, but also respectable, to attack the bourgeoisie for their formlessness and hypocrisy while nevertheless maintaining bourgeoisie values. There was to be no change in manners or morals despite certain attitudes that threatened to undermine respectability. Once again respectability held fast...”¹ To be sure, many policies enacted by the National Socialists were centered around the creation of families, incentives to have children, and coercing women out of the workplace. However, many historians in the last couple of decades have taken up the task of rewriting the history of sexuality in the Third Reich to reflect a more multidimensional approach. For example, historian Dagmar Herzog has demonstrated that the sexual policies of National Socialism were representative of a process of ‘incitement and disavowal.’ The National Socialists combined repressive litigation with incentives to pursue a fulfilled sex life and incorporate the pursuit of sexual pleasure into their paradigm of health and purity.

In a similar vein, recent research regarding the approach to same-sex incidents among the ranks of National Socialists has also demonstrated a more complex understanding of sexuality. Historian Geoffrey Giles indicates in “The Denial of Homosexuality: Same-Sex Incidents in Himmler’s SS and Police,” that despite establishing the death penalty for same-sex offenders, the

¹ George Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality: Respectability and Abnormal Sexuality in Modern Europe*, (University of Wisconsin Press, 1985) 180.

SS courts often granted exceptions to this rule and went to great lengths in order to separate incorrigible circumstances from isolated incidents. Harry Oosterhuis attributes the discrepancies between National Socialist policies and their implementation to a self-awareness regarding the homoerotic stigma attached to their *Männerbund* and party organizations. The bottom line of most of these arguments is that the sexual policies of the Third Reich demonstrated the capacity for ambiguity just as much as ideological conviction.²

Homosexuality was undesirable, but the National Socialists did not define it as a biological issue. Through an examination of the homoerotic legacies attached to the Nazi *Männerbund* and the political and bodily demise of Ernst Röhm, I aim to show how the concept of homophobia in the Third Reich was not simply based on biological degeneracy theories. Instead, most National Socialists believed homosexuality existed on a spectrum and was the product of a social disease, but they were unsure of how to identify and categorize certain levels of this spectrum. An exploration of the deployment of psychiatry and psychotherapy in regards to the problem of homosexuality among the military substantiates the claims that National Socialists recognized the complexity of the issue and did not always adhere to the standards of traditional morality and the polarized view of sexuality explicit in their propaganda. However, the involvement of the medical community was a flawed approach because the psychiatrists and psychotherapists could not reach a consensus regarding the genesis of the homosexual problem. Using a collection of documents submitted by the Reich Ministry of Justice, Secret State Police Bureau, the Reich Criminal Police Bureau and the Psychiatric Adviser of the Army Medical

² Harry Oosterhuis and Hubert Kennedy, *Homosexuality and Male Bonding in Pre-Nazi Germany* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

Inspectorate, this analysis explores the disparities in the different approaches to homosexuality caused by the professional disagreements between psychiatrists and psychotherapists. Comparing the different approaches taken among the Wehrmacht, Luftwaffe and SS outlined in these documents also shows the limitations of the medical community when working with organizations responsible for fighting the enemy and protecting the state.

Introduction

During the First World War and the years following, the patriarchal and conservative fibers tightly woven into the social and political fabric began to unravel. For the first time en masse, women challenged traditional gender roles by abandoning the domestic sphere for the workplace. Women demonstrated that the importance of marriage and bearing children had been eclipsed by the ability to be self-sufficient, independent and acquire the freedom to choose whether or not they wanted to embody the domestic role put forth for them by conservative society. In tandem with the liberalization of gender roles, men and women also started to question the polarized interpretation of their sexuality. In Weimar Germany, the fight for sexual rights came to a head in the form of a near successful campaign to repeal the laws of Paragraph 175. Officially in place in Germany since 1872, the provisions of Paragraph 175 made homosexuality between men illegal with the punishment of imprisonment and the loss of civil rights. During parliament sessions in 1929, the opponents of Paragraph 175 were able to obtain a majority vote that would eradicate the blanket criminalization of homosexual acts between men. However, this victory was short-lived due to the crisis of the Great Depression and the collapse of Weimar; the legislation was never formally signed into law.

Although Weimar was marked by the liberalization of women and campaigns for sexual freedom, the divisiveness among political factions and the crisis of economic depression initiated a conservative response among the people of Germany. On the precipice of economic disaster with ever-deepening rifts between social classes, many Germans were disillusioned with the liberal democracy that the Weimar Republic represented. When the National Socialists began campaigning for political dominance in Germany, their message revolved around authority, order and tradition. One of the ways in which the Nazis were able to achieve dominance was through their appeal to the security of a patriarchal and heteronormative society.

Within National Socialist ideology, the maintenance of a healthy sexuality was presented as a matter of life and death. In 1928, the National Socialists responded to the repeal of Paragraph 175 with the following condemnation:

It is not necessary that you and I live, but it is necessary that the German people live. And it can only live if it can fight, for life means fighting. And it can only fight if it maintains its masculinity. It can only maintain its masculinity if it exercises discipline, especially in matters of love...³

Population regeneration and the reproduction of racially viable stock were cornerstones of National Socialist ideology, and homosexuality was the antithesis to this mission. However, despite the vitriolic rhetoric regarding homosexuals and their status in the Third Reich, in practice the National Socialists demonstrated ambiguity more often than ideological conviction. In spite of the fact that he was a well-known homosexual, Ernst Röhm climbed the ranks of the

³ Eleanor Hancock, "Only the Real, the True, the Masculine Held Its Value: Ernst Röhm, Masculinity, and Male Homosexuality," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* vol. 8, no. 4 (1998).

Nazi party with Hitler's support before he was murdered during the Night of the Long Knives. Many historians have also revealed evidence of how the Nazis tolerated certain intimacies and physical aspects associated with the *Männerbund* and the process of male-bonding.⁴ Before the outbreak of war, the National Socialists tended to quell the homosexual threat among their organizations using the efficient methods of violence and imprisonment. However, once the war began and the homoeroticism associated with the male-bonding process increasingly threatened tight-knit groups of soldiers and SS troops, the National Socialists were willing to adopt an approach more sensitive to the goals of resource preservation. National Socialist ideology condemned homosexuality outright, but the unevenness and sporadic implementation of the regime's policies betrayed a sense of awareness regarding the complex spectrum of human sexuality.

Although the National Socialists justified the persecution of the majority of their enemies using biological racism, homosexuality was not considered an innate condition. Not every offender exhibited an incorrigible drive and it was a popular view that the problem among the youth was just a casualty of the process of male-bonding. In order to help identify and categorize the various levels of homosexual affliction among their own ranks, the National Socialists relied on the expertise of psychiatrists and psychotherapists. The advice of the medical community was supposed to provide the Nazis with a more clarity on the subject of homosexuality, but the psychiatrists and psychotherapists were at odds with each other over the assessment and diagnosis of the problem. The fundamental disagreement between the two was

⁴ Geoffrey Giles, "The Denial of Homosexuality: Same-Sex Incidents in Himmler's SS and Police," in *Sexuality and German Fascism*, ed. by Dagmar Herzog (University of Texas Press: 2002).

whether homosexuality had a biological component or if it was the result of myriad psychological factors. The psychiatrists relied on biological factors for most of their theories regarding the genesis of mental illness, sexual deviancy and other abnormalities, which led to a preference for the sort of fatalist policies demonstrated by the euthanasia programs. On the other hand, the psychotherapists believed there were sequences of many different factors other than biological ones which catalyzed same-sex incidents. In the absence of biological conviction, the psychotherapists' emphasized curative methods and believed the vast majority of homosexuals were capable of reintegration. As a result of this, the approach used to deal with same-sex incidents in the Wehrmacht, Luftwaffe and SS depended on which group, the psychiatrists or psychotherapists, held the dominant position. However, achieving professional dominance was further limited by the prior relationships cultivated by the medical community within the military, the predilections of individuals in leadership positions, and the tendency of military commanders to prioritize pragmatic decisions over scientific research and exploration.⁵

I. The Militarized Männerbund of Nazi Germany

After the catastrophic destruction of WWI, both for human life, and to an extent the dominant political and cultural systems of the 19th century, the National Socialists seized the opportunity to entice their audience with a chance to begin again. One of the main ways in which the Nazis chose to initiate their plan for German rejuvenation was to confront the issues of a depleted population and the degeneration of German society during the interwar period. In 1930, R.W. Darré, one of the leading “blood and soil” ideologists and Minister of Food and

⁵ Geoffrey Cocks, *Psychotherapy in the Third Reich*, (Transaction Publishers: 1997) 297-312.

Agriculture from 1933 to 1942, wrote “thus we are facing the realization that questions of breeding are not trivial for political thought, but that they have to be at the center of all considerations, and that their answers must follow from the spiritual, from the ideological attitude of the people.”⁶ The reproduction of racially pure German citizens could only occur if the National Socialists were able to increase the birthrate itself. Women needed to readjust their aspirations in life to include having as many children as possible in order to coordinate with the state’s views on population policy. Darré reflected these sentiments when he proposed,

let us return to the custom of our forefathers...let us re-educate our girls to a full understanding of the old German concept of *Züchtigkeit*. For our ancestors it was not that bashful girl who had no knowledge of the facts of her sex who was chaste, but she who was consciously prepared herself to become a mother and as a mother to rule over a large amount of children...they did not feel degraded to a “brood-mare,” as is the silly objection voiced today...instead it was the pride of these women to become the ancestress of a noble clan and to receive the confirmation of her own value in her noble son...⁷

It was clear that the new German state aimed to channel the social and political aspirations of women, which were widely enabled during the Great War and interwar period, into a national duty to remain at home and bear the future soldiers of the Third Reich.

Although, the National Socialists encouraged marriage and other measures to revitalize the birth rate, the crux of their new state relied on the idea that men needed to educate and

⁶ R.W.Darre, *Marriage Laws and the Principles of Breeding*, 1930, in *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook* ed. by Anton Kaes, Martin Jay and Edward Dimendberg (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 135.

⁷ *Ibid*, 136.

strengthen themselves primarily through bonds with other men. Alfred Bäumler, a Nazi political pedagogue, associated traditional relationships and friendship during the Weimar Republic with effeminacy and indulgence, and urged German men to prioritize male friendship in order to ensure the health and strength of the state.⁸ In an emotional speech, Bäumler cried “there is no friendship without a fatherland, but no fatherland either without friendship.”⁹ It was a common view that the role played by men within the cult of marriage and the family unit inhibited their intellectual and stately pursuits, whereas engrossment in friendship and communities among men facilitated the process of social and political self-actualization.¹⁰ Friedrich Georg Jünger, brother to WWI veteran Ernst Jünger, captured the sentiment of many men in post-war society when he decried that “masculine earnestness is dirtied by empty phrases; everything is befogged by the dense steam of corruption...universal suffrage is an ingenious sieve working in favor of bustling agitators and zealous blockheads. The assurance and righteousness with which it repels men of talent betray the hatred at the root of liberal thinking.”¹¹ As a complement to their scheme for the service of women in the new regime, the National Socialists endorsed the resumption of a male-dominated social, sexual and political structure, but not simply through the traditional authority of the marital and patriarchal unit.

Hitler and many of the other founders of National Socialism were influenced by their experiences in the Great War and inspired by the relationships forged with their comrades in the

⁸ Harry Oosterhuis and Hubert Kennedy, *Homosexuality and Male Bonding in Pre-Nazi Germany* (New York: Routledge, 2011).

⁹ *Ibid*, 254.

¹⁰ *Ibid*, 1-29.

¹¹ Friedrich Georg Junger, “The Cult of Blood, Soil and Action.” in *Sources of the Western Tradition* volume II by Marvin Perry (Wadsworth publishing, 2012) 345.

trenches. For these men, the ideals of friendship, loyalty and bravery exemplified by this microcosm represented the pinnacle of how state and society should be organized. For this reason, the groups tasked with the lofty goals of building the male-state and molding the new German man fell to military institutions like the Wehrmacht and SS. Karl Friedrich Sturm, a functionary of education and the youth movement claimed,

the Männerbund of the army and of the SA, the SS, and the Labor Service are all prolongations of the *Hitler-Jugend* into the years of manhood. Their central educational task is one and the same. In their ordering and through them is the political German man to be formed, and indeed above all along the path of practice and habit, with the help of methodological efforts which promote the frequently repeated act of use of strengths of body and character, and with emphasis on training for the ability to bear arms.’’¹²

Maintaining the male-state and fostering a militant masculinity were crucial processes to political and military success. Therefore, the National Socialists perceived anything that might expose points of vulnerability or weakness in the organizations central to the foundation of the male-state as a severe threat to the health of the nation.

II. Homoerotic Legacies and the Case of Ernst Röhm

Indeed, the male-state (or *Männerbund*) that the National Socialists envisioned for the new Germany was already in a precarious position. The National Socialists used many of the male organizations and communities popularized during the 19th century as inspiration for their own militarized *Männerbund*. However, these groups were also linked to legacies of

¹² Harry Oosterhuis and Hubert Kennedy, *Homosexuality and Male Bonding in Pre-Nazi Germany*, 253.

homoeroticism and suspected of creating an atmosphere conducive to homosexuality. Hans Blüher, a member and one of the first historians of the *Männerbund*, argued that “homoeroticism and even explicit homosexuality were fundamental and natural features of the youth movement, and by extension, of the *Männerbund*” and that the “super-virile homosexual was not abnormal and was, moreover, an absolute and essential feature of any successful civilization.”¹³ In addition, Blüher rejected that the greatest form of love was between man and woman because “with that there are children; that is something animalistic.”¹⁴ Without the emphasis on reproduction and the distractions associated with children and wives, Blüher argued that “the greatest form is the sublimated love between man and man. It is only from this that the greatest things in world history have come about.”¹⁵ In publications like *Der Eigene*, one of the first gay journals in the world, men contributed their opinions regarding homosexuality, state-building and the military. G. P. Pfeiffer, a contributor to *Der Eigene*, postulated that “war and camaraderie are inseparable concepts! War educates to camaraderie, i.e., it releases often slumbering characteristics of man, the ability for devoted friendship with the comrades of tent and battle. It does not seduce to ‘homosexuality,’ but it brings a basic human drive, physiological friendship, to operation...Only the super-virile superman, whose nature it is to also possess female characteristics and above all the drive toward physiological friendship...towers so high above the masses that he creatively brings to light their best qualities...”¹⁶ The tension

¹³ Robert Beachy, *Gay Berlin: Birthplace of a Modern Identity* (New York: Vintage Books, 2015), 152.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, 152.

¹⁵ *Ibid*, 152.

¹⁶G. P. Pfeiffer, an excerpt from the publication *Männerheldentum und Kamaradenliebe im Krieg*. In Harry Oosterhuis and Hubert Kennedy, *Homosexuality and Male Bonding in Pre-Nazi Germany*, 230.

created by some of these homoerotic interpretations of the *Männerbund* reached a breaking point due to the increasing publicity surrounding a homosexual, elite member of the Nazi party: Ernst Röhm.

As a decorated war veteran who believed that Germany's return to greatness depended on the reinstatement of the *Männerbund*, Röhm embodied the type of militant masculinity the Nazis had envisioned for the new German man. However, Röhm also identified as a homosexual. In private letters to Dr. Karl-Günther Heimsoth, Röhm admitted "I pride myself on being homosexual...for my part, I am absolutely not unhappy about my inclination, even though it has brought considerable difficulties from time to time; on the contrary, I am even inwardly proud of it."¹⁷ Although Röhm was initially supported by Hitler despite rumors and allegations in the press regarding his sexuality, his personal inclinations had serious repercussions for the National Socialist male-state. Adolf Brand, founder of the gay journal *Der Eigene*, argued that, "men such as Captain Röhm, whose personal interest in the fight that we are leading for the repeal of §175 was probably first publicly stated in the *Münchener Post*, are, to our knowledge, no rarity at all in the National Socialist party. It rather teems there with homosexuals of all kinds."¹⁸ Brand further described the early attempts to threaten and persecute homosexuals with violence and death as ironic because "a quite considerable number of National Socialists and likewise an even greater group of young party comrades, who enthusiastically flock to the born leaders and heroes of men could today already be carrying their hangman's rope in their pockets, since they are all

¹⁷ Eleanor Hancock, "Only the Real, the True, the Masculine Held Its Value": Ernst Röhm, Masculinity, and Male Homosexuality," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* vol. 8, no. 4 (1998).

¹⁸ Adolf Brand, "Political Criminals: A Word About the Rohm Case," in Harry Oosterhuis and Hubert Kennedy, *Homosexuality and Male Bonding in Pre-Nazi Germany*, 236.

completely ripe for the hangman.”¹⁹ There was some debate even among the harshest critics of National Socialism regarding the use of Röhm’s sexuality as ammunition against the movement. In a protest against the persecution of Röhm for his sexual orientation, human-rights advocate Kurt Tucholsky contended that, “his inclination does nothing to undermine the man...If Goebbels screeches or Hitler thunders about the moral decay of modern times, then it should be pointed out that there are obviously homosexuals among the Nazi troops.”²⁰ The support rallied for Röhm within parts of the gay community and the publicity generated by the Röhm affair in general began to compromise the heterosexual standards of masculinity promoted by National Socialism. In 1934, Röhm was one of the main targets during the purge known as the Night of the Long Knives or Operation Hummingbird. In a speech to the public with reference to the purge and Röhm’s execution, Hitler commented that “the life which the Chief of Staff and a certain circle around him began to lead, was intolerable from any National Socialist viewpoint.”

²¹ The emphasis on homosexuality as the main motivation behind the purge was meant to counteract the homoerotic stigma attached to the male-dominated traditions and organizations that were the foundations of National Socialism.

Although Röhm was tolerated for a time within the Nazi party, the official response to homosexuality was that “anyone who aims at male-male or female-female sex is our enemy. We reject everything that emasculates our people and puts it at the mercy of its enemies...Today we are the weaker ones. Let us make sure that we again become the stronger! We can only do that if

¹⁹Ibid, 237.

²⁰ Kurt Tucholsky, “Röhm” April 26, 1932, in *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook* ed. by Anton Kaes, Martin Jay and Edward Dimendberg (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 135.

²¹ Jan Bank, *Churches and Religion in the Second World War* (Bloomsbury publishing: 2016), 93.

we exercise discipline. We therefore reject any sexual deviation, particularly between man and man, because it robs us of the last possibility of freeing our people from the slave-chains in which it is now forced to toil.”²² Especially after the publicity surrounding the Röhm affair, the presence of same-sex incidents among the ideological elite of the Third Reich deeply troubled the sensibilities of SS commander Heinrich Himmler. Himmler believed that the Nazi *Männerbund* represented “an excessive masculinization and in this masculinization the seedbed for homosexuality.”²³ In a speech to the *SS-Gruppenführers* at Bad Tölz in 1937, Himmler contended, “we are still getting one case of homosexuality a month in the SS...”²⁴ and he promised that men convicted of these crimes were to be “taken on my orders to a concentration camp and there shot while attempting to escape.”²⁵ However, despite the hateful and murderous rhetoric, Himmler and other influential National Socialists were reluctant to condemn every instance of homoerotic or homosexual behavior as an indication of an innate inclination worthy of imprisonment or death. This reluctance was propelled by a resentment towards the dominant theories of the origins of homosexuality put forth by German intellectuals in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.

²² Declaration by the National Leadership of the NSDAP in a response to a question on the occasion of the 1928 Reichstag elections. Quoted from R. Klare *Homosexualität und Strafrecht*, Hamburg 1937, p. 149. In Gunter Grau, *Hidden Holocaust* (Taylor and Francis, 1995), 25.

²³ Heinrich Himmler, speech given to SS members regarding homosexual problem. <https://nseuropa.wordpress.com/2013/04/11/heinrich-himmler-speech-about-homosexuality-to-the-ss-group-leaders/>

²⁴ Heinrich Himmler, quoted from B. F. Smith and A. F. Peterson eds., *Heinrich Himmler: Geheimreden 1933-1945 und andere Ansprachen*, Frankfurt/Main 1974, pp 93-104. In Gunter Grau, *Hidden Holocaust*, 196

²⁵ *Ibid*, 196.

In 1919, Magnus Hirschfeld established the first institute for sexology (*Institut für Sexualwissenschaft*), which offered informational and medical services to people regarding their sexuality. In *Sexual Catastrophe* (1926) Hirschfeld noted that, “In every living being born of the union of two sexes, the characteristics of one sex are to be identified to varying degrees alongside those of the other...It is therefore a fact that homosexuality is an inborn condition, that is, a matter of constitution. Typical initial symptoms are demonstrable in homosexuals as early as the seventh and eighth, indeed, even in the third and fourth year of life.”²⁶ The symptoms of homosexuality were commonly recognized as the appearance of an effeminate nature. Applied to same-sex incidents among their military ranks, this interpretation complicated the National Socialist construction of a heteronormative masculinity crucial to military strength and success in combat. Instead, most National Socialists viewed homosexuality as a social disease, which threatened the hierarchy and unity of their organizations. In order to reconcile the strict vetting process for members of the party with the ongoing discoveries of same-sex incidents among their own ranks, the leaders of the crusade against sexual deviancy emphasized that there was a distinction between inborn and acquired homosexuality. Himmler and other military leaders employed the expertise of the medical community to help establish a standardized process for making these distinctions and to provide a pathway towards reintegration for the men categorized as redeemable.

III. The Medicalization of the Problem

²⁶ Magnus Hirschfeld, *Sexual-Katastrophen. Bilder aus dem modernen Geschlechts- und Eheleben* (Leipzig: A.H. Payne, 1926), 40-42. In *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook* ed. by Anton Kaes, Martin Jay and Edward Dimendberg (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 135.

The National Socialists dispatched two major factions of the medical community in order to address the severe threat homosexuality posed to the military and SS: the Society of German Neurologists and Psychiatrists and the recently established authority of psychotherapists operating under the Goring Institute. However, these two groups had opposing views regarding the origins and treatment of homosexuality. The views of psychiatrists tended to correlate with racial hygienists and hereditary biologists. In the opinion of the psychiatric advisor at the Army Medical Inspectorate, “any conviction for unnatural sexual practices (even in a drunken stupor) indicated with a greater or lesser degree of certainty the presence of an unnatural inclination...It would not occur to an adult male with normal feelings, even when blind drunk, to engage in unnatural activity.” The psychiatrists based their approach to same-sex incidents on the theory that the majority of offenders possessed a genetic disposition and could not be cured through treatment. The views of the psychotherapists relating to the possibility of curative treatment were more favorable.

Psychotherapists argued that the root of the homosexual problem was psychological in origin and the men caught in these scandals could be cured and reintegrated into society.²⁷ For example, the Reich Criminal Police Bureau, which cooperated and worked with the Goring Institute, claimed that they distinguished,

between environmentally determined and predisposed cases of unnatural sexual practices. In practice it works in accordance with the following guidelines. One-time misbehavers are at first placed under supervision. If there are repeated convictions or seduction of several partners, an order is made for preventative police detention...Major Dr. Göring at

²⁷ Geoffrey Cocks, *Psychotherapy in the Third Reich*, (Transaction Publishers: 1997) 297-312.

the Reich Ministry for Air Travel is using psychotherapeutic research to attempt the reintegration of such people into the national community and he has had some good results.²⁸

Psychotherapists believed most men were not incorrigible and that they were willing to engage with different therapeutic techniques to treat soldiers. However, even among the psychotherapists there was some ambiguity regarding what types of treatment to administer and the most accurate ways to identify and categorize the problem. In a circular issued by the German Institute for Psychological Research and Psychotherapy, one of the leading psychotherapists attached to the organization, Felix Boehm, implored his colleagues to, “kindly give me more precise details about the treatments you are conducting...in short, everything which may have struck or especially interested you in your treatments, or which you think may be of value for a thorough compilation project on this question in our research department.”²⁹ Although the psychotherapists aimed to rehabilitate homosexuals rather than condemn them as incorrigible, there was no consensus on a preferred method of treatment. The debate between psychiatrists and psychotherapists (and the disputes within each group) inhibited the formation of a uniform policy concerning same-sex incidents.

What did these ambiguities mean for the state-sponsored crusade against same-sex incidents among soldiers? The effect was that the specific goals and interests associated with respective factions of the military heavily tempered the approach that was used to grapple with same-sex incidents. The National Socialist state was not a monolithic machine; it was a nation

²⁸ Dr. Lehmann for the Field Marshal, Head of the Wehrmacht, 12 August 1942, the decision on a plea for clemency and its consequences. In Gunter Grau, *Hidden Holocaust* (Taylor and Francis, 1995), 169.

²⁹ Felix Boehm, circular issued by the German Institute for Psychological Research and Psychotherapy, In Gunter Grau, *Hidden Holocaust* (Taylor and Francis, 1995), 130.

comprised of many different organizations with competing interests and one that tempted those in leadership positions to seize opportunities to gain overriding power and push certain agendas. Even though the Wehrmacht, the Luftwaffe and the SS looked to the authority of the psychiatrists and psychotherapists in their quest to eradicate homosexuality, the traditions of these military organizations and the leadership involved muddled the process. In the case of the Wehrmacht, a prior legacy and an emphasis on pragmatism helped to shape the approach used to deal with same-sex incidents. For cases in the Luftwaffe and SS, the ambition and personal predilections of individuals in leadership positions were the influential factors in molding the response to homosexuality. The tentative research and theories provided by psychiatrists and psychotherapists combined with the unique character of each organization resulted in an uneven approach across the board.

IV. Psychiatrists and the Wehrmacht

The psychiatric community in Germany had already cultivated a strong presence within the military through their involvement in the First World War. Faced with an influx of soldiers suffering from mental distress and thus unfit to continue to serve in the war, the German army relied on psychiatrists to provide a standardized method for diagnosing and treating those afflicted. Due to the worsening war situation, one of the main concerns for the Empire was the preservation of financial resources and the manpower of the military and industrial sectors. In 1915, leading psychiatrist Robert Gaupp declared, “I hold it for the most important duty of the neurologist and psychiatrist to protect the Reich from a proliferation of mental invalids and war pension recipients.”³⁰ In pursuit of this goal, psychiatrists incorporated productivity and work

³⁰ Paul Lerner, “Psychiatry and Casualties of War in Germany, 1914-1918,” *Journal of Contemporary History* vol. 35 no. 1, 13-28 (Sage Publications, 2017) 18.

into their processes for therapeutic treatment. Although the mental distress inflicted by the war might have inhibited soldiers from reassuming their duties at the front, the psychiatric community believed these men could be filtered into other services suited to their mental state. For example, historian Paul Lerner suggests that, “such work was made possible in some cases by adding workshops (for carpentry, wickerwork, shoemaking etc.) to the neurosis stations, where, in contract with *Kriegsämtter*, soldier-patients were paid for producing necessary goods.”

³¹ In this way, psychiatrists avoided granting pensions and handicaps that would drain economic and labor resources reserved for the war effort. Other techniques used by military psychiatrists were also reflective of the urgency for speed and expediency. Many psychiatrists experienced success with “active treatment,” which focused on the healing ability of the doctor himself through powers of suggestion and control over the will of the patient. Treatment ranged from hypnotism to faux operations, but they were all considered ‘miracle methods’ that demonstrated instant results. With active treatment, psychiatrists were able to hasten the turnover rate of soldiers recuperating in hospital wards and revisit many of the cases that were previously categorized as incurable. The legacy of psychiatry during the First World War was marked by a willingness to coordinate with state and military goals.

The psychiatric community continued the relationship they had cultivated with the military during the First World War and established their predominance under the tutelage of the Wehrmacht. Relative to the goals of expediency, efficiency and preservation of resources during WWI, the approach to same-sex incidents among soldiers followed a similar trajectory in WWII.

³¹ Lerner, “Psychiatry and Casualties of War in Germany,” 21.

Towards the beginning of the war, Reinhard Heydrich (Head of the Security Police under Himmler's jurisdiction) provided a questionnaire to the Army Health Inspectorate in order to support research efforts "to clarify the nature of homosexuality." According to the directive, "the questionnaires should be completed in respect of each newly emerging homosexual serviceman."³² A short sample of the 35 descriptive categories include: born out of wedlock, number of siblings, which number child in the family, criminal record in the family, mental subnormals in the family, weakly, rentboys, corrupter of youth, habitual homosexual etc. The Army Health Inspectorate, Med. Colonel Prof. O Wuth, used the questionnaire in his research and requested further information relating to an alleged 25 'corrupters of youth and 42 'rentboys' from the Army Supreme Command. Despite requests from both the Head of Security Police and the Army Health Inspectorate, the commander in charge refused to supply the information.³³ The task to recruit sufficient manpower in order to meet the challenges of war was difficult enough without additional bureaucratic measures stalling the process. In an objection to these measures, the army commander complained that "if the lists were to be kept up to date, the registration would itself mean an extra burden of work for the recruitment agencies, and given that the recruitment agencies have more important tasks to perform, the end would in no way square with the labour-time put into it."³⁴ It was clear that psychiatrists and medical officers

³² Questionnaire for homosexual servicemen- Instruction from Heydrich to Gestapo Headquarters, 24 December 1937. In Gunter Grau, *Hidden Holocaust* (Taylor and Francis, 1995), 124.

³³ Research regarding the questionnaire provided by the Gestapo Headquarters, submitted to the army command by Medical Inspector Otto Wuth. In Gunter Grau, *Hidden Holocaust* (Taylor and Francis, 1995), 125.

³⁴ Response of the Army Command under Field Marshal Keitel to the Medical Inspector Otto Wuth. In Gunter Grau, *Hidden Holocaust* (Taylor and Francis, 1995), 127.

needed to be more mindful of wartime goals, especially the preservation of manpower and the minimization of complicated bureaucratic procedures, when they explored different approaches to identifying and subduing the homosexual problem.

As the need to preserve manpower grew increasingly dire, the Wehrmacht psychiatrists provided theories and methods more sensitive to these concerns. In 1943, military psychiatrist Otto Wuth summarized the findings from his data on same-sex incidents with the argument that, “medically speaking, it must be stressed that homosexuality, like other sexual perversions, does not have an affect on the military fitness rating, except in the case of acts committed in the state defined in §51.1 or 51.2, when the fitness rating should take into account the underlying disorder (e.g. manic depressive psychosis).”³⁵ If soldiers accused of homosexual behavior were still capable of fighting the enemy, then a large-scale invasive inquest into every individual and incident was not the most productive method. In light of this argument, the army psychiatrists devised a more streamlined approach to the categorization of same-sex offenders. The Wehrmacht psychiatrists used the following guidelines when confronted with same-sex incidents: “offenders who have acted out of a predisposition or an acquired and clearly incorrigible drive; offenders who have strayed on only one occasion, especially if they were seduced; and offenders in whom a tendency remains a matter of doubt.”³⁶ The frequency with which the accused committed same-sex transgressions was the main factor in the decision of whether or not a soldier possessed the ability to serve effectively. Psychiatrists spared valuable

³⁵ Aide-Mémoire: Offences under Paragraph 175 of the Penal Code. Military Psychiatrist Otto Wuth to the Wehrmacht command, 24 February 1943. In Gunter Grau, *Hidden Holocaust* (Taylor and Francis, 1995), 174.

³⁶ *Ibid*, 174.

time and manpower by paring down the equation for proper identification to just a couple of variables.

Another way the psychiatrists worked in tandem with the goals of the Wehrmacht was through their influence on the duration of punishment for soldiers identified as habitual offenders. Psychiatrists stressed the evidence that a homosexual inclination had no bearing on fitness or the ability to fight and remain loyal in battle, and thus convicted soldiers were able to cycle back into normal military service rather quickly. Men accused of frequent displays of homosexual behavior often received light sentences, and most of the time they only served a fraction of their punishment. For example, Private Paul H., who already had a record for homosexual activity in civilian court, was convicted of four violations of Paragraph 175 during military service and was sentenced to 18 months in a mobile prison unit. However, after only a few months in the penal unit, the commander deemed that Paul H. “could again be a useable soldier” and he “lauded the prisoner’s efforts to make up for his failure.”³⁷ After two separate commanders attested to Paul H.’s military capabilities and willingness to follow orders, the Wehrmacht decided to grant clemency and cycle Paul H. back into his regular unit. Although Paul H. clearly had a long history of homosexual transgressions, he served less than half of his eighteen-month sentence.³⁸

The short duration of penal sentences normalized by army psychiatrists served an additional pragmatic goal. In the views of the psychiatric community, transferring soldiers from

³⁷ David Raub Snyder, *Sex Crimes under the Wehrmacht*, University of Nebraska Press 2009, 113.

³⁸ *Ibid*, 114.

the front to a penal unit presented the “danger that soldiers whose position in civilian life carried no particular obligations would commit a homosexual act against their own nature so as to gain a discharge following completion of a short sentence.”³⁹ Desertion was a problem compounding the already serious lack of manpower and resources. As a result, the psychiatrists adjusted their standards of judgement and punishment in order to diminish the threat homosexuality posed to the military.

V. Psychotherapists and the Luftwaffe

Although the backbone of the German military was dominated by the psychiatrists, the psychotherapists were able to establish an authoritative position among the newest sector of the military- the Luftwaffe. One of the main reasons the psychotherapists were able to achieve this was because of the familial connection between Luftwaffe commander, Hermann Göring, and the director of the Göring Institute, Matthias Heinrich Göring. In addition, the Luftwaffe was a relatively new branch of the military and it did not harbor prior loyalties to the psychiatric community. Since the psychotherapists disagreed with the psychiatrists regarding the aetiology and treatment of homosexuality, the approach used to deal with same-sex incidents in the Luftwaffe differed greatly from the approach used in the Wehrmacht.

In the instructions for Luftwaffe medical officers for the assessment of same-sex incidents, the psychotherapists advocated for treatment and reintegration for almost every level of homosexual inclination. Men born as homosexuals were understood as “essentially incorrigible in respect of their instinct, but not in respect of their behavior. An attempt must be

³⁹ Dr. Lehmann for the Field Marshal, Head of the Wehrmacht, 12 August 1942, the decision on a plea for clemency and its consequences. In Gunter Grau, *Hidden Holocaust* (Taylor and Francis, 1995), 169.

made to teach them self-control and responsibility. Emasculation is in order for behavioral defectives, recidivists, and individuals without a sense of responsibility.”⁴⁰ Although the psychotherapists advocated a hard-line for “individuals without a sense of responsibility,” their emphasis on the potential of curative treatment meant that they were willing to spend an enormous amount of time and energy to properly distinguish between responsible and irresponsible offenders. For men who were viewed as victims of circumstance, the guidelines instructed that, “those who have become homosexuals should essentially be regarded as curable. Specialist psychotherapeutic is necessary. In their case, a court sentence has the educative purpose of making them aware of the necessity of treatment and strengthening their will to recover. Emasculation is biologically pointless and eugenically questionable for those who are capable of being cured.”⁴¹ Castration, hormonal injections and other quick-fix methods were dismissed in favor of clinical observation and methods that required a great deal of time and commitment to the belief in redemption. The guidelines used by the psychiatrists in the Wehrmacht revealed a more polarized view of the individuals involved in same-sex incidents. Although men were able to reintegrate back into their ranks more often than not, the Wehrmacht preferred punishment over reeducation.

The Luftwaffe guidelines established by the psychotherapists aimed to put almost every aspect of a soldier’s routine and relationships under the microscope. Beginning with the basic issue of communicating the dangers of homosexuality to soldiers with the correct form of

⁴⁰ Instructions for medical officers on the assessment of homosexual acts. Separate guidelines for the Luftwaffe. In Gunter Grau, *Hidden Holocaust* (Taylor and Francis, 1995), 181.

⁴¹ *Ibid*, 181.

language, the guidelines impressed upon army commanders and medical officers that, “things must be called clearly and simply by their right name, without prudishness and without sensational flourishes...It must be made clear to them that expressions such as ‘pansy’, ‘homo’ or ‘arsefucker’ are not allowed when speaking of sexual matters. That kind of slang is poisonous precisely for young soldiers.”⁴² The specific discourse used by medical professionals for soldiers’ sexual education was interpreted as a potential factor in the emergence of same-sex incidents. The guidelines went on to make a number of suggestions, such as “a healthy sense of shame is just as necessary as a healthy lack of inhibition. Provocative nudity is not a necessary condition for sport and physical exercise, any more than flirting with ‘sporty’ trousers and shirts. Care should be taken that styles of dress and undress are plain and practical.”⁴³ Even the various types of media circulated through the camps were put under pressure not to offend the sensibilities of soldiers. For example, the psychotherapists warned against theater performances because, “not only is healthy love life cynically stripped of illusions; but double-entendres with a homosexual content, spread under the cover of art, enter the soldiers’ stock of anecdotes and persist even outside the performance hall. There can be no doubt that many a young soldier has more easily fallen victim to homosexual enticement because it came after a ‘queer cabaret’ performance.”⁴⁴ Unlike the psychiatrists who tended to have a more fatalistic view of homosexuality, psychotherapists spent their resources trying to identify and control the plethora of variables they believed were involved in the equation for human sexuality.

⁴² Ibid, 182.

⁴³ Ibid, 183.

⁴⁴ Ibid, 185.

One of the most striking differences between the Luftwaffe and Wehrmacht approach to homosexuality was the level of toleration and trust for men known to have harbored a same-sex inclination. Psychiatrists in the Wehrmacht believed it was unnatural, unacceptable and disruptive on all accounts for adult men to show interest in homoerotic behavior, let alone the full blown homosexual experience. However, psychotherapists in the Luftwaffe included provisions in their guidelines which absolved soldiers of blame in some same-sex situations, and instead faulted the commanders and medical officers for the ways in which they organized and surveyed communal life. The guidelines advised commanders, “it should never be forgotten that to sleep in close physical companionship is just as difficult for a man with homosexual tendencies as the corresponding arrangement with a woman is for a man with normal feelings. In both cases, it would be asking too much to demand complete self-control. Illusory homosexuals, and homosexuals who basically don’t want to give in to their instincts, would inevitably go astray in such a situation...”⁴⁵ Special measures needed to be taken with men that might otherwise be able to maintain self-control. The three factor checklist implemented by the Wehrmacht made no exceptions for special circumstances and did not encourage a personalized approach to every same-sex incident.

The Luftwaffe psychotherapists realized the work involved in the amount of observation and instruction necessary to identify the aetiological of same-sex incidents. The guidelines admitted, “the medical officer must be clear in his own mind that the same behavior should be assessed in very different ways according to the culprit’s personality...the correct diagnosis is

⁴⁵ Ibid, 183.

often difficult to make... to know all the possibilities is a great step closer to the truth.”⁴⁶ The manpower, time and effort it would take to implement these guidelines were in conflict with the overall goals of the military at this stage in the war. Although the psychotherapists in the Luftwaffe had been able to practice some of their curative techniques and rehabilitate many convicted soldiers, things were not going well for the Nazis on either front and the military needed to use every last resource available. As a result, the reign of psychotherapy in the Luftwaffe met an abrupt end towards the end of 1944. In response to the guidelines formatted by the psychotherapists, The Psychiatric Adviser of the Army Medical Inspector remarked, “wider distribution of the instructions cannot be recommended, since the views set down within them are very controversial. Among other things, they make use of the insights of depth analysis and psychotherapy. Besides, attempts are currently under way-starting from psychiatrists in military district III...to develop a uniform forensic position on homosexuals.”⁴⁷ Ultimately the encroachment of the allies on both fronts and the deterioration of Germany’s fighting force impeded the psychotherapists’ efforts to examine soldiers and conduct their research.

VI. The Goring Institute and the will of Heinrich Himmler

The attitude persecutory attitude towards homosexuality was the most straight-forward among the elite organization of the SS. The guidelines for confronting the issue of homosexuality in the SS were as follows:

⁴⁶ Ibid, 186.

⁴⁷ Letter dated 9 December 1944 from the Psychiatric Adviser of the Army Medical Inspector/Military Academy Office to the Army Medical Inspector/WIG1b. In Gunter Grau, *Hidden Holocaust* (Taylor and Francis, 1995), 186.

In order to keep the SS and Police clean of vermin with homosexual inclinations, the Führer has resolved by a decree of 15 November 1941 that a member of the SS or Police who commits sex offences with another man or lets himself be abused for sex offences shall be punished with death, regardless of his age. In less serious cases penal servitude or imprisonment of not less than six months may be imposed.⁴⁸

For the “less serious cases” of same-sex behavior, who would be in charge of identifying the levels of complicity and the standards by which the court granted an acquittal or allowed the accused to escape the death penalty? Who would provide the framework to distinguish between the incorrigible and the acquired? In the case of the SS, there was no dominant player in the quest for the solution to the homosexual problem- except for Heinrich Himmler. The SS had associations with various groups in the medical community, including physicians, psychiatrists and psychotherapists, but every relationship began and ended at the personal behest of the vigilante SS leader. Himmler’s views on the psychological community were fraught with contradictions. For example, at the same time that Himmler denounced the psychotherapists as, “a trade union for pulling people’s souls to pieces,”⁴⁹ he also commissioned some of its members for projects connected to the SS, such as the SS-Lebensborn. However, despite his public hesitancy with respect to the effectiveness of psychiatry and psychotherapy, these two groups were summoned by the Himmler and the SS for the purposes of conducting research on the homosexual issue. For example, Dr. Carl Vaernet was employed by the SS to test the efficacy of

⁴⁸ Letter from the Reichsführer-SS to the Head of the Reich Chancellery, Dr. Lammers, 16 December 1941, in Gunter Grau, *Hidden Holocaust* (Taylor and Francis, 1995), 194.

⁴⁹ Geoffrey Cocks, *Psychotherapy in the Third Reich*, 301.

his proposed treatment to cure homosexuality, which involved the implantation of artificial sex glands. In another example, Himmler allowed a group of psychotherapists attached to the Göring Institute to study the sexual disposition of an SS member suspected of homosexual behavior by having the accused perform sexual intercourse with a prostitute in front of a panel of experts.⁵⁰ Although the SS collaborated with different groups for assistance with the homosexual problem, the brash and impetuous nature of Heinrich Himmler and his anxiety over the wartime situation limited the involvement of psychiatrists and psychotherapists.

Psychotherapists from the Goring Institute were given the task of assessing SS members accused of incorrigibility and who had been charged with the death penalty. There were various occasions where psychotherapists attempted to assert their authority and reverse the death penalty through the promise of rehabilitation, but Himmler more often than not derailed these attempts in the interests of wartime expediency. For example, Dr. Brustmann (a psychotherapist from the Goring Institute) intervened in a case of homosexual conduct that received the death penalty by insisting the soldier, “was both mentally and physically underdeveloped” and provided the concurrence of a second opinion that labeled the soldier as “feeble-minded.”⁵¹ In response to Dr. Brustmann’s disagreement with the court ruling, Himmler wrote a letter to Dr. Brustmann admonishing him for his interference and “forbidding him from contradicting the verdicts of the SS court in the future.”⁵² Although Himmler understood the value of the medical community and its theories relative to some of the major goals for the Nazi state, if their process

⁵⁰ Ibid, 306-307.

⁵¹ Giles, “The Denial of Same-Sex Incidents,” 285.

⁵² Ibid, 285.

interfered with the overarching goals of the military and overall safety of the state, than limitations on their authority and influence had to be put into place. Himmler believed that, “leniency can only apply in those cases in which it is really a question of the seduction of an unambiguously normal youth...the war is taking away hundreds of thousands of normal people still in their youth. But that makes it a duty for us not to shy away from the extermination of abnormal people who are admittedly the victims of seduction but are damaging the troops.”⁵³ The freedoms of the psychological community in their assessment and approach to the homosexual issue were limited by the death penalty implemented for members of the SS and through Himmler’s own ambiguity regarding the origins of the homosexual problem and the merit of the medical community tasked with its regulation.

Conclusion

The National Socialists proved that their views regarding human sexuality were more complicated than the polarized understanding espoused by their ideology. The commission of psychiatrists and psychotherapists demonstrated that the Nazis believed homosexuality existed on a spectrum; the psychiatrists and psychotherapists worked tirelessly to introduce guidelines that would assist in the assessment of the level of complicity involved in the transgression. Of course, the efforts of the psychiatrists and psychotherapists were hindered by their own professional disagreements as well as by the ambitions of individuals in leadership and the importance of military pragmatism in the throes of battle. In these circumstances, the methods used to identify and control the homosexual problem depended on many different theories and

⁵³ Ibid, 272.

factors, which were further tapered and manipulated by the specific interests and goals of the separate sections of the military.

When discovering the complexities of sexuality in the Third Reich, most historians have emphasized how National Socialist policies created a vacuum for exceptions, extenuating circumstances and a level of tolerance. Although the National Socialists were willing to tolerate or dismiss certain types of inclinations, their efforts to find clarity in these distinctions provided just as many avenues for exclusion and harm to soldiers as it did pathways to reintegration and redemption. The competition among the medical community and the pressures of war constantly revised and manipulated the approach to homosexuality, which always had the effect of providing more stipulations for redemption, punishment, imprisonment or death. The number of soldiers spared by the theory that homosexuality existed on spectrum needs to be countered by the number of soldiers who were excluded through the Nazis' attempt to try and format this spectrum. Ultimately, just because the National Socialists betrayed a seemingly more progressive understanding of human sexuality does not mean that they were any less intimidated by this knowledge and how it might affect the strength of the military. Facing military defeat and national destruction, the National Socialists were unable to allow anything to weaken their soldiers and homosexuality was perceived as a dire threat.

Bibliography

- Bank, Jan, *Churches and Religion in the Second World War* (Bloomsbury publishing: 2016).
- Beachy, Robert, *Gay Berlin: Birthplace of a Modern Identity* (New York: Vintage Books, 2015).
- Cocks, Geoffrey, *Psychotherapy in the Third Reich*, (Transaction Publishers: 1997).
- Dimendberg, Edward, Jay, Martin, Kaes, Anton, *The Weimar Republic Sourcebook*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995).
- Giles, Geoffrey, "The Denial of Homosexuality: Same-Sex Incidents in Himmler's SS and Police," in *Sexuality and German Fascism*, ed. by Dagmar Herzog (University of Texas Press: 2002).
- Grau, Gunter, *Hidden Holocaust* (Taylor and Francis, 1995).
- Hancock, Eleanor, "Only the Real, the True, the Masculine Held Its Value": Ernst Röhm, Masculinity, and Male Homosexuality," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* vol. 8, no. 4 (1998).
- Himmler, Heinrich, speech given to SS members regarding homosexual problem.
<https://nseuropa.wordpress.com/2013/04/11/heinrich-himmler-speech-about-homosexuality-to-the-ss-group-leaders/>
- Kennedy, Hubert, Oosterhuis, Harry, *Homosexuality and Male Bonding in Pre-Nazi Germany*, (New York: Routledge, 2011).
- Lerner, Paul, "Psychiatry and Casualties of War in Germany, 1914-1918," *Journal of Contemporary History* vol. 35 no. 1, 13-28 (Sage Publications, 2017).
- Snyder, David Raub, *Sex Crimes under the Wehrmacht*, (University of Nebraska Press 2009).

