

Women in the Holocaust: A Polyphony of Voices and Experiences

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Introduction

This collection of articles and educational suggestions is the result of a year-long online workshop involving several multidisciplinary scholars, which culminated in a seminar at the Mauthausen Memorial. The volume is the work of three interdisciplinary teams that explore female experiences during the Holocaust in a three-dimensional way:

- Sexual Violence during the Holocaust
- Women Visual Artists in the Ghettos
- Resistance: Physical and Metaphysical.

This program is for High School and Academia (Undergraduate or Graduate) students. The purpose of this collection is to offer a unique interdisciplinary approach about women's fate during the Holocaust, both in theory and practice.



Sexual Violence in the Holocaust

An Educator's Guide

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Objectives

Teaching about sexual abuse in the Holocaust is challenging. The subject is not often addressed, is scarcely covered in most books written about the Holocaust, and is criticized, ignored, and excluded from many teaching curricula. This paper addresses these issues, provides an introduction to the scope and extent of sexual abuse during the Holocaust, and provides resources for educators and students that are helpful for those wishing to understand the nuances of this important but neglected subject.

Understanding Neglect of Sexual Abuse

Sexual abuse has long been excluded from the story of the Holocaust in spite of its ubiquity in this genocide. This omission is not unique to the Holocaust or to other genocides. In more recent times the egregious omission of any mention of sexual abuse during the October 7 attacks on Jews in Israel by Hamas is a recent case in point that highlights just how reluctant our world is to expose, discuss, investigate and acknowledge the use of sexual violence by perpetrators during genocidal and/or military onslaughts. In this case it was many months before these types of attacks were acknowledged by international bodies, including those organizations specifically concerned with women's rights. In the case of the Holocaust, the silence surrounding sexuality, sex, and sexual abuse or violence in the Holocaust has taken multiple decades to be brought to light.

There are many possible reasons for maintaining silence about sexual abuse in the Holocaust. Some reasons for this include:

- **The taboo nature of the topic** of sex, sexuality, and sexual abuse in society prevents the study of this subject. Clearly some audiences are still uncomfortable reading about this topic. So too are some archivists when asked to reveal testimonies reporting these types of events.¹

¹ Beverley Chalmers, *Betrayed: Child Sex Abuse in the Holocaust* (UK: Grosvenor House Publishers, 2020), 181-4.

- **Concern for maintaining privacy** for the victims and their surviving relatives.
- **The temptation for society to blame the victim** for their abuse as is common when dealing with many forms of sexual violence in today's world; the idea that the victim 'must have asked for it' in some way. Stigma is commonly associated with the victims of sexual violence rather than with the perpetrators, even today, and prevents open discussion and acknowledgement of the victims' experiences. We may hypothesize that many survivors stay silent about their experiences.²
- **The marginalization of women** and women's voices in our more male dominant society until recently. Even the topic of women in the Holocaust was neglected until the 1980s when the first conferences on women's experiences were held, in all likelihood stimulated by the rise of feminism at around that time.
- **Gendered Perspective:** There have been debates in Holocaust studies about the value of a gendered perspective and focus on women's particular experiences. This was tied into concern that singling out Jewish women's sexual abuse might detract from the broader issue of Jewish victimization in Holocaust studies.
- **Sexual abuse in testimonies** is often recorded as occurring at a distance from the survivor: e.g. it happened to another woman, or that they had heard about it, but more rarely that it occurred to them.
- **Interviewers** were either restricted from asking about, or were too reluctant to ask about sexual abuse, leaving the subject less well explored in testimonies than it might have been had we been more directive in our interviews/questioning of survivors. In addition, as survivors might have been concerned about revealing such experiences to family members, their children or grandchildren, they were reluctant to expand on such events.
- **Value of Testimonies:** Historians were long doubtful about the utility of testimonies for historical research on the Holocaust, preferring "official" sources, like those found in archives. This excluded important sources of information on sexual violence, which were often to be found only in primary sources like memoirs and testimonies.

² Beverley Chalmers, *Child Sex Abuse: Power, Profit, Perversion* (UK: Grosvenor House Publishers 2022), 148-55.

- **Fears About Degrading Memory:** Concerns that such issues are degrading to the memory of Jewish women if not the Jewish experience in total: The question “Is it really necessary to talk about such things?” is often asked.³

Relevance for Today

Despite these concerns it remains important to study this aspect of the Holocaust experience. We need to acknowledge the full Holocaust experience to provide as accurate an account of this history as we can, and to give voice to women’s stories. We also need to acknowledge that sexual violence is not only a significant part of genocide and war, but of crime in general, on a global scale.⁴ Sexual abuse is prolific in today’s society facilitated by the exploitation of the internet and the widespread creation of a global appetite for sexually explicit images which, especially when utilizing child victims, is a global crime.⁵

Rape continues to be a weapon of war today as was so clearly evidenced during the Hamas attack on Israel on October 7, 2023, and as currently being experienced in Russia’s war on Ukraine. So too are restrictions on reproductive behaviours utilized to implement national and state policies such as in China’s One Child Policy implemented for decades until recently and currently still in place against Uyghurs. Sexually targeted abuse is still one of today’s arsenals of war. We need to study and understand it if we are to recognise its dangers and seek ways to prevent it.

What Happened?

Sexual abuse of women, men, and children occurred in multiple settings and at various times throughout the Nazi era. Some of the most well-known incidents of sexual violence occurred in:

³ Chalmers, *Betrayed: Child Sex Abuse in the Holocaust*, 181-98.

⁴ Chalmers, *Child Sex Abuse: Power, Profit, Perversion*.

⁵ Chalmers, *Child Sex Abuse: Power, Profit, Perversion*.

- German society during the Nazi era and before the onset of WWII among all segments of society including among so called “Aryan” women, Jewish women, Roma and Sinti, the disabled, homosexuals and children. Two of the Nuremberg Laws – the *Reich Citizenship Law*, and the *Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honour* adopted on 15 September 1935 – were part of a series of racial-hygiene laws that prevented “contamination” of “pure” German blood. The latter stipulated that Jews were forbidden to have sexual relations with “persons of German blood” and that marriages could not be contracted if “offspring likely to be prejudicial to the purity of German blood” were likely to result. During the pre-war period, Nazi ideology focused on ridding the German world of those it did not view as “worthy of life” through the Eugenics and later Euthanasia programs.⁶ These programs targeted all German women who fell into designated categories of those whose lives were either not worthy of life, or who should be denied the possibility of procreating through mass sterilization programs. These programs were directed towards all segments of German society and not only Jews, although Jews did comprise a significant segment of those whose lives were terminated.⁷ Abortion and contraception among “Aryan” women was forbidden but facilitated among Jews and others deemed not worthy of life. Any variations from heterosexual relationships among Aryans were unacceptable although homosexual relationships were specifically targeted for “reform” or elimination. In contrast, “Aryan” women were regarded with veneration as Mothers, and were encouraged to, and rewarded for, having multiple babies for the Reich, even outside of marriage.⁸
- In ghettos, for instance in the Nazi-occupied Baltic states of Lithuania and Latvia, women were sexually abused through draconian restrictions on pregnancy and birth, with the threat of their family’s murder when women disobeyed restrictions on childbearing. Abortions were urged, or forced, in these ghettos. Women and young girls were often subjected to body cavity searches performed under humiliating and unhygienic

⁶ Beverley Chalmers, *Birth, Sex and Abuse: Women's Voices under Nazi Rule* (UK: Grosvenor House Publishers, 2015), 23-40.

⁷ Chalmers, *Birth, Sex and Abuse: Women's Voices under Nazi Rule*, 1-19.

⁸ Chalmers, *Birth, Sex and Abuse: Women's Voices under Nazi Rule*, 41-64.

circumstances. In addition, sexual abuse by German and local perpetrators occurred, as well as by some Jews.⁹

- Sexual abuse of women took place in camps, although often - but not only - in the context of sexual barter. With no other goods to exchange for life saving items such as medicines, food, shoes, or clothing, women were reduced to offering their bodies in sexual exchange to help them or their loved ones survive.¹⁰ Sexual abuse also took place in prisons, on transport trains, in resistance groups, and amongst those in hiding, or passing for “Aryan”.
- Sexual abuse of boys in some camps is well documented. The use of what are known as “dolly boys” or “piepels” has been recorded. These were young boys kept as slaves by Kapos, who used them to care for their personal and sexual needs until such time as they tired of them.¹¹ Homosexuals were also sexually and physically violently abused, especially in some camps such as Flossenber.¹²
- Sexual abuse of women by rescuers also occurred. Some hidden Jews and particularly hidden children were abused by their so-called rescuers.¹³ Sexual abuse of women by liberators of camps and in DP camps towards the end of the war also occurred. Widespread rape of both Holocaust survivors and German women occurred, frequently perpetrated by members of the Soviet Army. Liberator violence has been documented in and around the camps and death marches in the East.¹⁴ For example, numerous testimonies and memoirs attest to the incidence of rape by Soviet liberators of Stutthof, Auschwitz-Birkenau, Ravensbrück, and other Eastern camps.¹⁵

⁹ Chalmers, *Birth, Sex and Abuse: Women's Voices under Nazi Rule*, 71-81, Daina Eglitis, "Women's Experiences of Life Force Atrocities in the Baltic Ghettos, 1941–1944. 1(2), 521-549," *Eastern European Holocaust Studies*, 1, no. 2 (2023), <https://dx.doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1515/eehs-2023-0013>.

¹⁰ Chalmers, *Birth, Sex and Abuse: Women's Voices under Nazi Rule*, 95-115, 221-6.

¹¹ Chalmers, *Betrayed: Child Sex Abuse in the Holocaust*, 88-94.

¹² Heinz Heger, *The Men with the Pink Triangle* (New York: Alyson Books, 1980).

¹³ Chalmers, *Betrayed: Child Sex Abuse in the Holocaust*, 116-46.

¹⁴ Chalmers, *Birth, Sex and Abuse: Women's Voices under Nazi Rule*, 163-7.

¹⁵ Daina S. Eglitis, "Silences of Memory: Liberator Sexual Assault in the East at the End of World War II " *Journal of Holocaust Research* 38, no. 3-4 (2024), Ghetto Fighters House. "Victimization of Jewish Women Survivors by Their Soviet Liberators", 26 March YouTube, 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=R-ZRghK7h5Y>

Understanding Why

While sexual abuse happens at all levels of society in peace time, it also happens in times of war and genocide. In the Holocaust, Nazi ideology played a role. Interestingly, Nazi ideology discouraged sexual relationships between Germans/"Aryans" and Jews with the *Rassenschande* laws specifically forbidding even social interactions with Jews in addition to sexual contact with them.¹⁶ Given the considerable documentation of sexual abuse of Jewish women these laws did not always prevent Jewish women from being sexually assaulted. What is often noted, however, is that those who were sexually abused were also killed, to prevent them identifying the perpetrator with the likely consequence of him being punished.

Nazi attitudes to sexuality in general might have contributed to sexual abuse. While the interwar period – the Weimar Republic days prior to WWII – were notable for their liberal views towards sexuality, these freedoms were quickly disbanded once Hitler came to power. Instead a more puritanical view of appropriate sexual behaviour came into being with the liberating views of Magnus Hirschfeld and his Institute for Sexual Science being eliminated.¹⁷ The Nazis did, however, recognize that sexual need among soldiers who were separated from their families for extended periods of time needed to be addressed and managed to prevent widespread sexually transmitted infections. The result was the development of an expansive system of brothels in camps and in society. This, in addition to an associated attitude of misogyny, gendered victimization and racist values, probably contributed to sexual behaviours that suited the perpetrators.¹⁸

Case Studies

Numerous case studies could be included when exposing students to the topic of sexual abuse in the Holocaust. Only a few have been included here. These illustrate some of the situations where sexual abuse of women occurred as discussed above.

¹⁶ Chalmers, *Birth, Sex and Abuse: Women's Voices under Nazi Rule*, 14-9.

¹⁷ Chalmers, *Birth, Sex and Abuse: Women's Voices under Nazi Rule*, 143-5.

¹⁸ Chalmers, *Birth, Sex and Abuse: Women's Voices under Nazi Rule*, 154-67.

Case Study: Attitudes to Sexuality in the Early Years of Nazi Rule

The following extract is taken from *Birth, Sex and Abuse: Women's Voices Under Nazi Rule*.¹⁹

In 1919 Magnus Hirschfeld was given a large grant to develop his informal Scientific Humanitarian Committee into a state funded Institute for Sexual Science[...] In 1929, Hirschfeld's Berlin clinic was the first to focus on sexual deviation [...] In the Weimar Republic, he and his institute became the leading force behind the spread of public and private birth control and sex counseling clinics. Hirschfeld's Institute was known in Berlin, not only for championing the legalization of homosexuality and abortion, and for its popular evening classes in sexual education, but also for its enormous collection of books and manuscripts on sexual topics. By 1933, it housed between 12,000 and 20,000 books – estimates vary – and an even larger collection of photographs of sexual subjects.

Once the Nazis came to power, the trend towards more liberal views regarding sexuality and homosexuality, seen as a Jewish movement to subvert the German family, ended. Hirschfeld's group had made significant progress on liberalizing laws against homosexuality with Reichstag recommendations, on 16 October 1929, to legalize homosexuality among consenting adults. Reforming paragraph 175 of the Reich Criminal Code condemning homosexuality had, however, been strongly opposed by the Nazi party. An article in the *Völkischer Beobachter* on 2 August 1930 had said, "We congratulate you Herr Kahl and Herr Hirschfeld, on this success! But don't you believe that we Germans will allow such a law to exist for one day when we have succeeded in coming to power." True to these words, on 6th May 1933, students from the Berlin School and members of the National Socialist German Students' League raided the Institute for Sexual Science for Physical Education. They drew up in military formation, took out their trumpets and tubas and started to play patriotic music, while others marched into the building. The Nazi students who stormed into the Institute poured red ink over books and manuscripts, played football with framed photographs, and ransacked the cupboards and drawers, throwing their contents onto the floor. Four days later stormtroopers arrived carrying baskets, into which they piled as many books and manuscripts as they could and took them out into the Opera Square where they set fire to them. About 10,000-12,000 books contained in this collection are said to have been destroyed. Hirschfeld himself was both Jewish and homosexual, factors probably lending weight to the Nazi's opposition to his work. While destruction of Hirschfeld's institute reflected

¹⁹ Chalmers, *Birth, Sex and Abuse: Women's Voices under Nazi Rule*, 154-67.

Nazi disapproval of sexual liberation and homosexuality in particular, it was also part of the larger Nazi program targeting 'Jewish intellectualism,' 'decadence' and 'moral corruption.' In all, upwards of 25,000 books were burned on 10 May 1933 in the Bücherverbrennung (book burning) instigated by the Propaganda Ministry and implemented by the National Student's Union that destroyed so-called 'un-German' writing.²⁰

Case Study: The Baltic Ghettos

Women were not shielded from sexual abuse in any situations, even, and perhaps especially, in the far reaches of the Nazi empire. Ghettos in the Baltic states were particularly renowned for incidents of violent and sadistic sexual abuse, perhaps because they were less subject to the direct scrutiny of Nazi authorities. This quote is taken from a 2023 article by Daina Eglitis titled *Women's Experiences of Life Force Atrocities in the Baltic Ghettos*.²¹

Some survivors describe the heinous crimes of Latvia's notorious Nazi killing unit, the Arājs Commando. [...] the Commando's leader, Viktors Arājs, and other members of the group [...] tortured and murdered Jews for sport and kept Jewish women for sexual entertainment" Latvian-born Zelda-Rivka Heit [...] recalls [...].

All [the men] were drunk, all had pistols in their hands. The so-called officer facing me said 'upstairs,' and I did go upstairs because there was no other way out. It was in his office, he raped me, he humiliated me, he tortured me sexually ... I wouldn't have known but when I was crying and weeping and asking for mercy he said, 'you bitch, don't you know who is standing before you?' He said 'I am Viktors Arājs, the boss of this place.' I was taken downstairs, we were all sitting, all the girls were weeping, looked terrible, some had torn clothes, dresses.

Heit's survival is an exception, though it seems to have been the result of intervention by a German officer: 'Suddenly the door opened [...] German officer Ervin Henkemann, [...] saved me from the Latvians, he had saved my life. My nanny had seen me join a group, she had been following us, she saw that we had been taken to this headquarters so she had rushed to Henkemann [...] he tried to save my life and he succeeded.

The ghettos were sites of acute sexual danger. A male survivor's diary from Kaunas recalls a ritual termed "going to peel potatoes," which was practiced by the guards: "Night after night, the Lithuanian henchmen would

²⁰ Chalmers, *Birth, Sex and Abuse: Women's Voices under Nazi Rule*, 154-67.

²¹ Eglitis 521-49.

proceed to select their victims: the young, the pretty. First, they would rape them, then torture them, and finally murder them” [...] Women’s stories suggest that the threat was pervasive. Latvian-born Sia Hertsberg, who was 14 when her family was forced into the Riga ghetto remembers that her family’s room was visited by three Latvian militiamen, one of whom she knew from before the war. The officer threw Hertsberg on a bed, declaring, “I like this girl. I will have her.” Her mother begged the officer to take her instead. Hertsberg was helped by the young man she knew, who distracted the officer by drawing his attention to some ostensible shooting outside and the men left.²²

Case Study: Gisella Perl: A Doctor in Auschwitz

The extract below is taken from *Birth, Sex and Abuse: Women’s Voices Under Nazi Rule*²³ and is also available in Gisella Perl’s book *I was a Doctor in Auschwitz*.²⁴

One of the SS chiefs would address the women, encouraging the pregnant ones to step forward, because they would be taken to another camp where living conditions were better. He also promised them double bread rations so as to be strong and healthy when the hour of delivery came. Group after group of pregnant women left Camp C. Even I was naïve enough, at that time, to believe the Germans, until one day I happened to have an errand near the crematories and saw with my own eyes what was being done to these women.

They were surrounded by a group of SS men and women, who amused these helpless creatures by giving them a taste of hell, after which death was a welcome friend. They were beaten with clubs and whips, torn by dogs, dragged around by the hair and kicked in the stomach with heavy German boots. Then, when they collapsed, they were thrown into the crematory – alive.²⁵

Perl was so horrified that she became determined to save pregnant women by helping them to abort their pregnancies.

I ran back to camp and going from block to block told the women what I had seen. Never again was anyone to betray their condition.

²² Eglitis 521-49.

²³ Chalmers, *Birth, Sex and Abuse: Women's Voices under Nazi Rule*, 100-1.

²⁴ Gisella Perl, *I Was a Doctor in Auschwitz*, Reprint edition 2007 ed. (North Stratford, NH: Ayer Company Publishers, 1948), 28.

²⁵ Chalmers, *Birth, Sex and Abuse: Women's Voices under Nazi Rule*, 100-1. Perl, 28.

First I took the ninth-month pregnancies, I accelerated the birth by the rupture of membranes, and usually within one or two days spontaneous birth took place without further intervention. Or I produced dilatation with my fingers, inverted the embryo and this brought it to life...After the child had been delivered, I quickly bandaged the mother's abdomen and sent her back to work. When possible, I placed her in my hospital, which was in reality just a grim joke...I delivered women in the eighth, seventh, sixth, fifth month, always in a hurry, always with my five fingers, in the dark, under terrible conditions...By a miracle, which to every doctor must sound like a fairy tale, every one of these women recovered and was able to work, which, at least for a while, saved her life.²⁶

Gisella Perl's story is well presented in the film *Out of the Ashes*²⁷ created in 2004. The film is an excellent teaching resource for both educators and students.

Case Study: Starving a Baby

Josef Mengele ordered Ruth Elias to bind her breasts after giving birth to a baby girl in Auschwitz in order to see how long it would take for a baby to die without its mother's milk. The extract below is taken from *Birth, Sex and Abuse: Women's Voices under Nazi Rule*.²⁸ This report is also provided in Ruth Elias' book *Triumph of Hope: From Theresienstadt and Auschwitz to Israel*.²⁹

My child you were born with such a lovely little body. Your legs are soft and pudgy, and they have tiny creases. What beautiful clear features you have. Dark hair and little fingers with such small fingernails. When you first saw the light of day you were a pretty baby. Now, for three days, your crying has not stopped. Your pale skin turns red when you scream, and your lovely little face is distorted. Am I imagining it or is your face getting smaller? Your legs thinner? Oh why, my child, are you not allowed to drink your mother's milk? If you could, you would fill out and not wither so quickly. Is your voice getting weaker, your crying and screaming gradually turning into a whimper? My child, how can I help you in your suffering? How can I keep you alive? Please don't leave me.

²⁶ Chalmers, *Birth, Sex and Abuse: Women's Voices under Nazi Rule*, 100-1. Perl, 28.

²⁷ *Out of the Ashes*, (Showtime Networks, 2004).

²⁸ Chalmers, *Birth, Sex and Abuse: Women's Voices under Nazi Rule*, 105-6.

²⁹ Ruth Elias, *Triumph of Hope: From Theresienstadt and Auschwitz to Israel*, trans. Margot Bettauer Dembo (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1988), 143-53.

[...] How can we put an end to this misery? Is there anything that I as your mother can do? Do I have the right to even think about ending both our lives? How can you and I live through this? When will the pain end?

Here, my child, take this pacifier made of bread soaked in coffee; maybe it will alleviate your hunger. You have scarcely any strength left to suck on it. You're already six days old, and still I see no way out of this terrible plight. Oh God, please let us both die.

My child, you've turned ashen-grey, just a tiny skeleton covered with skin. You can't even whimper anymore. And all those bedsores. Are you still breathing? Come, Mengele, examine my child. Feast your eyes on her! Is your medical curiosity finally satisfied? Now do you know how long a newborn child can live without food, you devil in human form!³⁰

Ultimately, Maca Steinberg, a Czech Jewish dentist and fellow prisoner, brought Ruth a syringe with morphine and instructed Ruth to inject it into her child. Maca's own Hippocratic Oath would not allow her to inject it for Ruth. Ruth did so: she killed her own child.

Case Study: Hidden Children

Molly Applebaum and her older cousin Helene were hidden underground for about two years and assisted by a farmer. They used sexual exchange to encourage the farmer to continue to hide them when his interest in their safety began to wane. This extract is taken from *Betrayed: Child Sex Abuse in the Holocaust*.³¹ Full details are provided in Molly Applebaum's diary *Buried Words*.³²

Sometime in late 1943 or early 1944, 13-year-old Molly's diary reveals that she started to have sex with the forty-year-old farmer who hid her and who was already engaging sexually with her much older cousin Helene. Both girls were half starved, afraid and totally dependent on the farmer Wiktor Wojcik (Victor in the diary) – whom they called Ciuruniu – and his sister Eugenia Kulaga.³³ The two girls were hidden in a box underground for two years. The box was the size of a double bed and just too short for them to stretch their legs. It was too shallow for them to sit up – they could only rest on their elbows. They only had a small hole through which to get air from outside although they could crawl into the stable at night for their

³⁰ Chalmers, *Birth, Sex and Abuse: Women's Voices under Nazi Rule*, 105-6. Elias, 143-53.

³¹ Chalmers, *Betrayed: Child Sex Abuse in the Holocaust*, 138-9.

³² Molly Applebaum, *Buried Words: The Diary of Molly Applebaum* (Canada: The Azrieli Foundation, 2017), 21-30.

³³ Applebaum, xxvi-xxvii.

‘natural functions’ and to glimpse the outside world through cracks in the stable door. They had an old curtain, used to cover the straw they lay on and shared one pillow and a feather-filled comforter. They also had a small jug to hold water, a knife for cutting bread, and two spoons that they licked clean.

At times the girls were fearful of being betrayed by Victor. To encourage Victor they schemed that offering him sex might keep him from betraying them. Molly’s diary entry reveals the start of this relationship:

Sunday October 10: Sex

December [no date specified]: We talk a lot about having sex and Kitten (Molly’s name for Helene) shows me exactly how it is done. I convince her to provoke Ciuruniu to let him know that she was also willing despite the cold. She listened to me and she approached him and it happened. And we have such a pleasant topic for another couple of days

Sunday, December 26: Sex again.³⁴

Case Study: Rescued Children

Susi (also called Grace by her rescuer) was a Kindertransport child who was sexually abused for years by her rescuer, the Reverend Mann, in the UK. As this case illustrates, rescuers were sometimes also victimizers, leaving long-lasting emotional scars on the children they abused. This extract is taken from *Betrayed: Child Sex Abuse in the Holocaust*³⁵ and is also reported in *Rosa’s Child*.³⁶

In 1988, Susi, while searching for her family of origin, entered into therapy, long after her sexual abuse had stopped. She was encouraged to write about any negative feelings that were still troubling her by her therapist. She did:

19.10.88: I was asked to express how I feel about you E.J.Mann – you were given a gift – a child to love – what you did was DESTROY – I FEEL DEEP BITTERNESS, RESENTMENT AND ANGER –the latter I am scared of. It might ERUPT and destroy all I have bravely fought to build.

³⁴ Applebaum, 21. Chalmers, *Betrayed: Child Sex Abuse in the Holocaust*, 138-9.

³⁵ Chalmers, *Betrayed: Child Sex Abuse in the Holocaust*, 158, Chalmers, *Betrayed: Child Sex Abuse in the Holocaust*.

³⁶ Jeremy Josephs, and Susi Bechhöfer, *Rosa’s Child: The True Story of One Woman’s Quest for a Lost Mother and a Vanished Past* (London: I B Tauris Publishers, 1996), 132.

And so I bury this emotion knowing that as I do this I am partly immobilized.

How did you DESTROY me? You abused me mentally and physically. A LEECH sucking my life blood. You chained my whole being. You are a DIRTY UNCLEAN HYPOCRITE PREACHING TO OTHERS – abusing me by ACTS OF CRUELTY.

How were these MANIFESTED? I will tell you – you bastard. You would creep into my bed at 10 years and insert your filthy p into my v. I WOULD HAVE FEELINGS OF HATE FOR YOU, but also FEELINGS OF INSECURITY LEST I DENY you what you wanted under the pseudo-excuse of THIS ACT MAKING ME YOUR FLESH AND BLOOD. YOU ARE SICK.³⁷ [Emphasis in original.]

Discussion Questions

In any class on sexual abuse during the Holocaust, a number of discussion questions might stimulate interest and debate. Some ideas for further student debate could include the following:

- What are the key challenges to studying sexual violence in the Holocaust and its immediate aftermath?
- Why do you think this topic has been little acknowledged in research and discussion of the Holocaust?
- Should sexual abuse of women and children in the Holocaust be studied? How can we ensure that it is studied ethically?
- How did the Nazis manipulate women's reproductive lives to achieve their goal of creating an Aryan "Master Race"?
- How were doctors and other medical professionals involved in supporting Nazi methods of achieving a "Master Race"?
- When and how did compensation schemes address the issue of forced sterilization? What kind of compensation was available in Western Europe and behind the Iron Curtain?

³⁷ Chalmers, *Betrayed: Child Sex Abuse in the Holocaust*, 158, Chalmers, *Betrayed: Child Sex Abuse in the Holocaust*. Josephs, and Bechhöfer, 132.

- To what extent did the *Rassenschande* Laws protect Jewish women from sexual abuse? Do you think that assumptions about “protection” affected research on this topic?
- What risks did liberator violence present to women and girls at the end of WWII and the Holocaust?
- Why do you think liberator violence against Jewish survivors has been little discussed in spite of evidence that it occurred, particularly in areas liberated by the Soviet Army?
- How different were the attitudes of the Nazis to alternate gender identities compared to those expressed today across many parts of the globe?
- Just how widespread is sexual abuse of women today? Of children? Of men? Do we even know?
- What are key obstacles to combating sexual abuse today, and what steps might we take to challenge its persistence?

Further Reading

Today, there are dozens of books and articles written about the many facets of sexual abuse mentioned in this paper. Some provide a comprehensive overview of the subject: others give a more in-depth examination of specific issues. Some of these are listed below for ease of reference:

Overviews

Beverley Chalmers. *Birth, Sex and Abuse: Women's Voices Under Nazi Rule*. Grosvenor House Publishers, UK, 2015

Beverley Chalmers. *Betrayed: Child Sex Abuse in the Holocaust*. Grosvenor House Publishers, UK, 2020

Beverley Chalmers. *Child Sex Abuse: Power, Profit, Perversion*. Grosvenor House, Publishers, UK, 2022.

Rochelle Saidel and Sonja Hedgpeth. *Sexual Violence Against Jewish Women in the Holocaust*. Brandeis University Press, USA, 2010.

Specific Topics

This is by no means an exhaustive list but only a selection of documents that are particularly relevant to the issues discussed in this paper.

Anonymous. *A Woman in Berlin: Eight Weeks in the Conquered City*. Picador, 2000.

Ayşe Gül Altınay and Andrea Pető (eds.): *Gendered Wars, Gendered Memories*. London–New York: Routledge, 2016. 29–54.

Annabelle Baldwin. ‘And What Happened Next?:’ *Emotions and Sexual Violence in Holocaust Interviews*. https://oralhistoryaustralia.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2019_journal_32-42_Baldwin.pdf

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Special Issue of the Journal of Holocaust Research.

In 2024, the *Journal of Holocaust Research* (Volume 38, Issue 3-4) dedicated a special issue to the question of Gender-Based and Sexual Violence in the Holocaust, lending weight to the importance of this topic in current Holocaust Studies. Some of the papers included in this issue are:

Dorota Glowacka & Regina Mühlhäuser. *Gender-Based and Sexual Violence in the Holocaust: On the Importance of Writing this History Today*. Pages: 173-180.

Kenny Fries, Dorota Glowacka, Atina Grossmann, Anna Hájková, Björn Krondorfer, Regina Mühlhäuser, Joanna Ostrowska & Zoë Waxman. *'I Still Struggle to Ensure that I am Truly Listening: ' Understanding Gender, Sexuality, and Sexual Violence During the Holocaust. A Conversation*. Pages: 181-205.

Carli Snyder. *Asking About the 'Unspeakable: ' Joan Ringelheim and Early Research on Sexual Violence and Same-Sex Practices among Women During the Holocaust*. Pages: 206-224

Pascale R. Bos. *Barter, Prostitution, Abuse? Reframing Experiences of Sexual Exchange during the Holocaust*. Pages: 225-252

William Ross Jones. *'You are going to be my Bettmann: ' Exploitative Sexual Relationships and the Lives of the Pipels in Nazi Concentration Camps*. Pages: 253-272.

Christin Zühlke. *'Shultsloze Ferpeynikte Neshomes' – 'Vulnerable, Tormented Souls: ' Gendered Wounds, Sexualized Violence, and Jewish Masculinity in the Yiddish Testimonies of the Sonderkommando in Auschwitz-Birkenau*. Pages: 273-291.

Justyna Matkowska. *Sexual and Gender-Based Violence Against Romani Women and Girls in Occupied Poland during World War II*. Pages: 292-315

Daina S. Eglitis. *Silences of Memory: Liberator Sexual Assault in the East at the End of World War II*. Pages: 316-335.

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