

# **Sexuality under Nazi Germany**

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# Die Freundin

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(Das ideale Freundschaftsblatt)

Halbmonatschrift für Aufklärung über ideale Frauenfreundschaft

Aus dem Inhalt:

Die homosexuelle  
Frau und die  
Reichstagswahl

☆

Was ist  
Schund und Schmutz?

☆

Rauchende Frauen

☆

Der Klub der  
Freundinnen

☆



## Weimar Germany

- Weimar maintained Paragraph 175 of Criminal code – sexual contact between men was unnatural and criminal
- Any expression of transgenderism seen as gross public indecency
- Toleration in cities, and esp. in Northern Germany. Berlin becomes centre.
- Dedicated LGBT+ bars and nightclubs, Gay and Lesbian bar culture growing together.
- World's first lesbian newspaper – *Die Freundin*
- Famous bars held elaborate balls such as in the *Mali und Igel*.
- 1919 sees opening of *Institut für Sexualwissenschaft* (Institute for Sexology/Institute for Sexual Research) by Magnus Hirschfeld, Arthur Kronfeld, and Friedrich Wetheim



## *Institut für Sexualwissenschaft*

- Hirschfeld (on right opposite) led the institution.
- Provided a range of services to all people – marriage counselling, contraception, STD treatment
- Also developed expertise in handling trans people – pioneering surgeries for male to female transition.
- Provided safe space for trans and other LGBT+ people within institute, including employment
- Negotiated “transvestite passes” with Berlin police to avoid Gross Indecency charges for trans clients
- Created library of 20,000 books, including works of Hirschfeld which coined important terms in history of transgender studies and of bisexuality



## Nazi Germany – the Beginnings

- Himmler and Heydrich soon become key figures, esp. 1934
- 1933 we see LGBT+ bars shut down quickly
- Buildings seized and used by Nazis
- 6<sup>th</sup> May, 1933 – *Institut für Sexualwissenschaft* closed, building seized, and Hitler Youth burn all books
- Hirschfeld abroad at time, goes into exile.
- Attempt to set up similar group in France meets with failure and arrests
- Hirschfeld dies in exile in 1935, partner Karl Geise (Institute archivist) commits suicide on invasion of Czechoslovakia in 1938

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# Intersectionality

- Hirschfeld, several of his doctors were Jewish
- “Igel” of *Mali und Igel* was a Jewish lesbian named Elsa Conrad (pictured opposite)
- Became targets as examples of the threat the Nazis claimed exists, Jewish people trying to reduce Aryan birth rates with “degeneration”
- Closures of bars and institute signalled new campaign against LGBT+ communities and focus on demographic struggle
- Conrad arrested in 1935 for political charge, sent to Moringen Concentration Camp
- Released in 1938, on condition she emigrate immediately. Ended up in Tanzania and then to Nairobi, Kenya.



# Night of the Long Knives

- Accusations of homosexuality made against senior Nazis, many purged during Night of Long Knives
- Among them the SA leadership, who were blamed for the excessive street violence
- Partly blamed on their homosexual or decadent nature
- Fed into anti-fascist attacks that Nazis were run by a homosexual cabal
- Important to note how otherwise progressive or anti-Nazi forces would misuse LGBT+ identities



# Persecution Evolves

- P. 175 – Unnatural removed in June 1935, but acts covered gradually expands.
- By 1938 even a look could get a conviction under the law.
- No single path/experience
- Punishments ranged from prison, decade of hard labour, concentration camp or, for limited few, “euthanasia” centres
- 100,000 men charged during Nazi period
- 10,000 convictions a year, 500 arrests a week by 1939
- 60% of those sent to camps perish
- Voluntary sterilisation, with coercion, offered post 1935. 800 men, including as young as 16, accept.



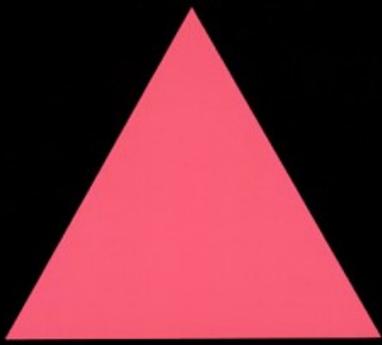
# War brings change

- War shifts focus of Himmler and Heydrich onto dealing with racial enemies coming under Nazi control
- LGBT+ communities fall back into responsibility of Criminal Police or the military (due to conscription)
- Military priorities were to maintain fighting force and avoid disruption
- Expanded definition ignored, law reverts purely to sexual contact between men.
- Punishments tend towards leniency, except in issues of lack of consent
- 90% of those convicted return to service in some way
- Shouldn't be seen as universally relaxed period – those already in system at Sachshausen or Ravensbruck, for example, executed in mid-1942
- Mid-1941 – SS men convicted face immediate death

# The wlw in Nazi Germany



- Important to also focus on continued persecution of women such as Elsa Conrad.
- Persecution of wlw not as systematic as persecution of mlm, but still serious
- Prosecution rates low, but accusation still meant Gestapo interrogation
- Often prosecuted against political criminals – used to gain harsher sentencing
- Due to less systematic approach, women often left out of histories and memorials, including at Ravensbruck where many died, and at Tiergartenstrasse
- Image: Mary Pünjer, a Jewish lesbian sent to Ravensbruck in 1940 and selected for death under the “Euthanasia” program, killed at Bernburg Sanatorium



## Conclusion - Legacy

- After the war, evangelical right in America latched onto myth of Nazis being run by Gay Cult to oppose LGBT+ rights in 50s and 60s
- LGBT+ groups take up the pink triangle used to mark homosexuals in the camps, proof of their victim status
- Becomes symbol of speaking out over LGBT+ issues (pictured opposite, used as part of a campaign criticising President Reagan for silence over AIDS)

**SILENCE=DEATH**

Why is Reagan silent about AIDS? What is really going on at the Center for Disease Control, the Federal Drug Administration, and the

Gays and lesbians are not expendable...Use your power...Vote...Boycott...Defend yourselves...Turn anger, fear, grief into