“When I Resisted Him, I Didn’t Know What He’s Going to Do to Me”: Jewish Resistance to Sexualized Violence in Nazi Forced Labour, Concentration, and Death Camps

by

Kästle Van Der Meer

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We acknowledge and respect the lək^{w}əŋən peoples on whose traditional territory the university stands and the Songhees, Esquimalt and W̱SÁNEĆ peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.

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ABSTRACT

Despite the recent rise in research concerning sexualized violence in the Holocaust, virtually no studies exist concerning the ways in which those who experienced sexualized violence in Nazi camps resisted such abuse. That so little has been written about this topic means that many questions are left unanswered: Who resisted such violence? How did they do so? What factors impacted one's ability to resist? What punishments did prisoners experience if they resisted a camp authority figure? In an attempt to answer some of these questions, this study looks at Jewish experiences of sexualized violence by Nazis in forced labour camps, concentration camps, and death camps and investigates how such violence was resisted. An analysis of survivor testimony shows that sexualized violence was resisted vigorously and in a variety of ways, the result of prisoners utilizing both their agency and luck. This study demonstrates that resistance did not always end in death; it was possible to resist sexualized violence and survive. This is critical, because in the face of genocide, survival was the ultimate act of defiance. Indeed, survivors' own testimonies seem to suggest that those who resisted often went unpunished for resisting, even while perpetrators themselves faced consequences. Yet, even if attempts at resistance were unsuccessful or resulted in one's death, they challenged the power structure that the camp system relied on, exemplifying the importance of individual resistance in the survival strategies of prisoners.

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GLOSSARY OF ABBREVIATIONS AND TERMS

Blockälteste (block leader)

Blockova (female block leader)

Gestapo (Secret Political Police)

Judenrat (Jewish council)

Kapo (prisoner functionary)

Kommando (work squad)

Notzucht (sexual assault)

Rassenschande (race shame or defilement)

Reichsführer (chief)

SA (*Sturmabteilung* or Storm Division, i.e. Stormtroopers or Brownshirts)

SS (*Schutzstaffel*, Protection Squad)

SS-*Hauptsturmführer* (Head Storm Leader)

Wehrmacht (Armed Forces)

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INTRODUCTION

Maria Scheffer was a Hungarian Jewish survivor of the Holocaust who experienced horrific sexualized violence at Auschwitz-Birkenau, a Nazi death camp in Poland. Speaking of that violence in 1995, she admitted, "to tell you the honest truth, I have never talked about it. I have never— I don't think I've ever mentioned it to anyone, really."[1] Maria's words provide an explanation as to why, despite the magnitude of research on the Holocaust, scholars largely neglected sexualized violence in the genocide until the 1990s; even when survivors began to tell their stories, researchers were hesitant to examine this history. A lack of primary sources, in part due to the stigma often associated with victims of sexualized violence, and the belief that Nazi racial laws precluded sexual encounters between Jews and "Aryans" (a pseudo-scientific "racial" category held up by Adolf Hitler's Nazi Party as superior to all other "races"), resulted in the near invisibility of this subject within the historical record for decades. This neglect has resulted in an insufficient understanding of how sexualized violence functioned in the genocide, including the ways in which those who experienced it challenged their abuse.

This thesis attempts to remedy this gap. It looks at how Jews experienced and resisted sexualized violence perpetrated by Nazi authorities, primarily belonging to the SS ("*Schutzstaffel,"* Protection Squad, an organization that controlled the police, the concentration and death camps, and various other terror organizations across the Third Reich), *Wehrmacht* ("Armed Forces," the German army), and Gestapo ("Secret political police," Nazi Germany's secret police force), in forced labour camps, concentration camps, and death camps. Before I begin my analysis, however, I will provide a definition of sexualized violence and an overview

[1] Maria Scheffer, interview by Barbara Linz, *USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive,* University of Southern California, Los Angeles; Coromandel Valley, South Australia, Australia, July 21, 1995, Interview Code 4187, Tape 3, Segment 73.

of historiography that shapes my work: works dealing with sexualized violence in the Holocaust, beginning with a discussion of male victims, and Jewish resistance in the Holocaust, with an emphasis on gendered forms of resistance. I move onto a discussion of my methodology and definition of resistance before closing this introduction with an overview of the thesis' two chapters.

What is 'Sexualized Violence'?

In my work, I use the term 'sexualized violence' rather than 'sexual violence.' This is because acts of rape or other violence of a sexual nature are not simply about satisfying sexual desire. Rather, in instances of sexualized violence, sex is forcibly used as a method of power by which perpetrators demean and humiliate victims in order to exert control. Sexualized violence is thus less of a sexual outlet and primarily about dominance. In many cases, it is also an act of hatred. The defining feature of sexualized violence is that it is carried out on a person against their will and without their consent. It is thus not a sexual act, but a form of violence that is sexualized.[2] As Helene Sinnreich argues, "forced sex should not be mistaken for violent sex but rather as violence… perpetrated in a sexual manner."[3] I base my definition of the term on work by Brigitte Halbmayr, an Austrian sociologist and political scientist, who argues that:

> [V]iolent acts can be understood as sexualized if they are directed at the most intimate part of a person and, as such, against that person's physical, emotional, and spiritual integrity. It must be stressed that the goal of all forms of sexualized violence is the

[2] Ruth Seifert, "The Second Front: The Logic of Sexual Violence in Wars," *Women's Studies International Forum* 19, no. 1 (1996): 36.
[3] Helene Sinnreich, "'And It Was Something We Didn't Talk About': Rape of Jewish Women During the Holocaust" *Holocaust Studies* 14, no. 2 (2008): 2.

> demonstration of power and dominance through the humiliation and degradation of the other.[4]

Under this definition, sexualized violence in the camps included rape and sexual assaults, but also verbal and physical sexual harassment, the forcible shaving of body hair, the violent searching of body cavities, and other humiliating methods of physical examination, as well as sexual slavery, forced sex work, compulsory sterilization, compulsory abortion, and medical experiments. As this list suggests, rape was by no means the only form of sexualized violence that occurred during the Holocaust. Importantly, under this definition, acts that do not involve physical contact can still constitute sexualized violence.[5] They also include what Halbmayr calls "indirect, often emotional expressions of violence" such as physical examinations intended to humiliate, awful hygienic conditions, forced public nakedness, and suggestive stares and jeers.[6] This list is by no means exhaustive, but provides insight into the many ways in which sexualized violence was carried out against female and male prisoners in the camp system.

Sexualized Violence in the Holocaust: Where are the Men?

Men endured sexualized violence in the Holocaust. However, scholarship on this topic remains minimal. In the context of this and other genocides, women have been considered the sole victims of sexualized violence for a variety of reasons, including constructed societal notions associating femininity with fragility and vulnerability. Men have largely been ignored as victims because of the stigma that surrounds male survivors of sexualized violence and the

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[4] Brigitte Halbmayr, "Sexualized Violence against Women during Nazi 'Racial' Persecution," in *Sexual Violence Against Jewish Women during the Holocaust*, eds. Sonja M. Hedgepeth and Rochelle G. Saidel (Waltham, Mass: Brandeis University Press, 2010), 38-39.
[5] Seifert, "The Second Front: The Logic of Sexual Violence in Wars," 36.
[6] Halbmayr, "Sexualized Violence against Women during Nazi 'Racial' Persecution," 38-39.

absurd belief that masculinity somehow protected men from this type of abuse.[7] As a result, earlier scholars writing about sexualized violence in the Holocaust largely left out the fact that men, too, experienced such violence.[8]

Although the research remains limited, some scholars have begun to consider the ways in which men experienced sexual abuse in the camps. Beverley Chalmers' 2015 *Birth, Sex, and Abuse: Women's Voices Under Nazi Rule* offers an overview of the sexualized violence endured by women and men, both Jewish and gentile, during the Holocaust.[9] Although she places an emphasis on women's experiences, in looking at the various ways in which abuse was carried out on "non-Aryans" in Nazi Germany Chalmers sheds light on how the Nazis took advantage of men's and women's sexualities and reproductive capabilities to achieve their goal of creating a "master race."[10] By recognizing men as victims of sexualized violence, Chalmers helps to reframe the traditional conception of the victim of sexualized violence in this context.

Dorota Glowacka's 2020 "Sexual Violence against Men and Boys during the Holocaust: A Genealogy of (Not-so-Silent) Silence" is a critical addition to the field. Glowacka examines oral testimonies from the USC Shoah Foundation Institute's Visual History Archive by heterosexual-identifying Jewish male survivors of Nazi concentration and death camps to determine the shape and scope of sexualized violence against Jewish men in the Holocaust. In order to better understand how the stigma associated with both male-on-male sexualized violence and homosexuality — because men were almost always the perpetrators — plays into male

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[7] Tommy J. Curry, "Thinking through the Silence: Theorizing the Rape of Jewish Males During the Holocaust through Survivor Testimonies," *Holocaust Studies* 27, no. 4 (2021): 450-452.
[8] Doris L. Bergen, "Sexual Violence in the Holocaust: Unique or Typical?" in *Lessons and Legacies VII: The Holocaust in International Perspective*, ed. Dagmar Herzog (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 2006), 182-183; Myrna Goldenberg and Elizabeth Roberts Baer, *Experience and Expression: Women, the Nazis, and the Holocaust* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2003).
[9] Beverley Chalmers, *Birth, Sex, and Abuse: Women's Voices Under Nazi Rule* (Guildford, Surrey: Grosvenor House Publishing Limited, 2015), viii.
[10] Chalmers, *Birth, Sex, and Abuse: Women's Voices Under Nazi Rule*, 2, 5-6.

sexualized violence, Glowacka also examines the shame that these men attribute to their experiences.[11] Given the lack of research on the topic, Glowacka was surprised to find ample evidence of sexualized violence against men in the archive, including many first-person accounts. Such evidence, as she points out, provides many opportunities for future studies, and suggests a hesitancy among earlier researchers to examine this history.[12] Glowacka's assertion that sexualized violence against males was more widespread than previously thought adds insight to our understanding of the ways in which sexualized violence was carried out against Jewish boys and men and how it impacted their masculinities and their postwar lives.

Works on men are exceptions in the field of sexualized violence in the Holocaust: most work focuses on women. The current field of sexualized violence in the Holocaust grew out of an incredibly gendered approach to Holocaust studies that has focused almost solely on women. Recognizing this fact, Tommy J. Curry recently argued that:

> One of the consequences of the female-specific account of gender and gendered violence utilized throughout the research on rape and sexual assault was that these histories did not include or even consider the rape Jewish men and boys suffered during the Holocaust to be within their purview.[13]

As Curry notes, scholarship specifically concerning the rape of Jewish boys and men remains particularly limited. In an attempt to fill this gap and challenge the stigma that has clouded our understanding of sexualized violence in the Holocaust, Curry investigates such rapes and in doing so offers a more nuanced understanding of sexualized violence in the Holocaust. Curry argues that there is a need to reconfigure conventional notions of perpetrators and victims in

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[11] Dorota Glowacka, "Sexual Violence Against Men and Boys during the Holocaust: A Genealogy of (Not-so-Silent) Silence," *German History* 38, no. 2 (2020), 2.
[12] Glowacka, "Sexual Violence Against Men and Boys during the Holocaust: A Genealogy of (Not-so-Silent) Silence," 4.
[13] Curry, "Thinking through the Silence: Theorizing the Rape of Jewish Males During the Holocaust through Survivor Testimonies," 449.

contexts of war and genocide, since traditional theories concerning sexualized violence in these contexts have focused solely on women as the targets for such violence.[14] In these narratives, men, most often members of the military, are positioned as the sole perpetrators who seek to conquer the land and reinforce their power by violating women. In these contexts, women are viewed as representing the opposing nation or "race," and thus attacks on women represent not only individualized violence, but also assaults against an entire community.[15] However, the Nuremberg trials brought to light the gruesome violence female Nazi guards engaged in,[16] and international criminal tribunals after the genocide in Rwanda as well as the wars in Yugoslavia and Sierra Leone have shown that it is not just men who perpetrate wartime sexualized violence, nor is it only women who experience such violence.[17] Men's experiences are not insignificant and recognizing that men endured wartime sexualized violence helps to reframe the traditional conception of its victims.[18]

Although more research has been conducted on this topic recently, sexualized violence against men in the Holocaust is still understudied. While this thesis unfortunately cannot remedy the lack of research on this subject, in reproducing men's testimonies, their stories are made known. As discussed further below, my research is constrained by the testimonies available in the USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive, the vast majority of which belong to Jewish women. Thus, while men's voices are not totally absent from this project, the predominance of

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[14] Adam Jones, "Masculinities and Vulnerabilities in the Rwandan and Congolese Genocides" in *Genocide and Gender in the Twentieth Century: a Comparative Survey,* ed. Amy E. Randall (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015), 63.
[15] Steven Katz, "Thoughts on the Intersection of Rape and Rassenchande during the Holocaust," *Modern Judaism* 32, no. 3 (2012): 300.
[16] Na'ama Shik, "Sexual Abuse of Jewish Women in Auschwitz-Birkenau" in *Brutality and Desire: War and Sexuality in Europe's Twentieth* Century, ed. Dagmar Herzog (Basingstoke, England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 222, 231-232.
[17] Anette Bringedal Houge, "Sexualized War Violence. Knowledge Construction and Knowledge Gaps," *Aggression and Violent Behavior* 25, (2015): 80-83.
[18] Bringedal Houge, "Sexualized War Violence. Knowledge Construction and Knowledge Gaps," 81.

testimony belonging to Jewish women means that my primary focus remains on Jewish women rather than Jewish men.

An Overview of Sexualized Violence in the Holocaust

The scholarship of sexualized violence in the Holocaust grew directly out of studies on women and the Holocaust that emerged in the 1980s. Before this period, when scholars in male-dominated academia began studying and theorizing the Holocaust in the late 1960s and early 1970s, male survivors' experiences were utilized to draw a picture of a universal Holocaust experience. For decades, scholars were hesitant to examine the roles of gender, sexuality, and sexualized violence in the Holocaust for fear that these topics would undermine the brutality of the genocide itself, and particularly that gender would displace race as the key category of analysis. Such topics were considered trivial within the academy, and Holocaust deaths, imprisonment, and other forms of suffering were considered both more important and more quantifiable than instances of sexualized violence, when such violence was considered at all.[19] As a result of the 'Second Wave' feminist movement and the advent of women and family studies that accompanied it, in the 1980s, Holocaust studies saw an increase in research focusing on women.[20] Yet this research remained marginal in comparison to mainstream Holocaust studies. Many scholars considered a focus on women's experiences a trivial topic when compared to more 'pressing' questions of historical research, such as understanding how the

[19] Nomi Levenkron, "Death and the Maidens: 'Prostitution,' Rape, and Sexual Slavery during World War II," in *Sexual Violence Against Jewish Women During the Holocaust*, ed. Sonja M. Hedgepeth and Rochelle G. Saidel (Waltham, Massachusetts: Brandeis University Press, 2010), 24, 28.
[20] Judith Tydor Baumel-Schwartz, *Double Jeopardy: Gender and the Holocaust* (Portland, Oregon: Vallentine Mitchell, 1998) x; 46.

Final Solution came to be enacted. Additionally, critics condemned the focus on gender as eliding "race."[21] As Regina Mülhäuser puts it, "the aim to emphasize the uniqueness of Nazi racist and anti-Semitic violence seems, somewhat tragically, to have contributed to obfuscating knowledge about sexual crimes."[22]

Recognizing that a focus on women as victims was beginning to shape the new field of gender and Holocaust studies, in 1985, philosopher Joan Ringelheim sought to centre agency by pivoting the conversation away from the trauma women endured and toward the ways in which their gender shaped their experiences.[23] Ringelheim, one of the first scholars to address the topic of sexualized violence against Jewish women, noted that many Jewish women were raped by Nazi authorities but asserted that sexual abuse was not a universal experience for all women, calling for scholars to move away from a singular focus on violence of all kinds in women's Holocaust histories and toward the agency women held.[24] Scholars seemed to pay attention to Ringelheim's call, as sexualized violence was still barely mentioned in studies of gender and the Holocaust for a decade. When it was, the extent of the violence was often downplayed. For instance, in 1993, historian Sybil Milton, like Ringelheim, warned against a focus on exploitation and violence in histories of Jewish women:

> A popular postwar myth, sometimes exploited and sensationalized, held that Jewish women were forced to serve as prostitutes in the SS bordellos and were frequently raped. Although such cases did undoubtedly occur, it was not the norm and reflects a macabre postwar misuse of the Holocaust for popular titillation.[25]

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[21] Levenkron, "Death and the Maidens: 'Postitution,' Rape, and Sexual Slavery during World War II," 28.
[22] Regina Mühlhäuser, "The Historicity of Denial: Sexual Violence Against Jewish Women During the War of Annihilation, 1941–1945" in *Gendered Wars, Gendered Memories*, eds. Hilary Earl and Karl A. Schleunes, 1st ed. (London: Routledge, 2016), 30.
[23] Joan Ringelheim, "Women and the Holocaust: A Reconsideration of Research," *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 10, no. 4 (1985): 743.
[24] Ringelheim, "Women and the Holocaust: A Reconsideration of Research," 743-744.
[25] Sybil Milton, "Women and the Holocaust: The Case of German and German- Jewish Women" in *Different Voices: Women and the Holocaust,* eds. Carol Rittner and John K. Roth (New York: Paragon House, 1993), 230–231.

Similarly, former Czech resistance member Vera Laska argued the same year that:

> Considering the tens of thousands of women incarcerated in the camps, rape by the SS was relatively rare. While it is a fact that the SS could – and did – do as they pleased with any female inmate, raping them was not their preference.[26]

While the SS could indeed face punishment if they were caught, recent research has demonstrated that punishments were not an effective deterrent.[27] Nevertheless, approaches such as these were common until the 1990s, bolstered by a lack of evidence of sexualized violence and the insistence that Nazi theories and laws prohibiting *Rassenschande* (literally "race shame", a German racial concept condemning "miscegenation") precluded sexual interactions between "inferior races" and "Aryans." As Ringelheim and Milton's work suggests, the urge to avoid a focus on Jewish women as victims and instead emphasize their role as historical agents may also have contributed to this lack of attention. Instances of sexualized violence against Jewish women by Nazis, it was thus argued, either did not occur at all, or were rare.

In the mid- to late-1990s, scholars more regularly began to address sexualized violence in the Holocaust. The use of rape in the Rwandan and Bosnian genocides brought the topic of sexualized violence in wartime contexts to the forefront of conflict studies and human rights initiatives, prompting scholars to ask questions about sexualized violence in the Holocaust.[28] Additionally, by the 1990s, it was increasingly clear that survivors were nearing the end of their

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[26] Vera Laska, "Women in the Resistance and in the Holocaust," in *Different Voices: Women and the Holocaust*, eds. Carol Rittner and John K. Roth (New York: Paragon House, 1993), 265.

[27] The SS was comprised of "racially elite" Germans. Most SS were men, but a small number of women were hired when the war began to put pressure on the male German workforce. In total, 3,508 women officially served as camp guards, compared to over 51,000 SS men who worked in the camp system between 1933 and 1945 (Daniel Patrick Brown, *The Camp Women: The Female Auxiliaries Who Assisted the SS in Running the Nazi Concentration Camp System* [Atglen, PA: Schiffer Military History, 2002], 9); Sinnreich, '"And It Was Something We Didn't Talk About': Rape of Jewish Women During the Holocaust," 2; Rochelle G. Saidel, *The Jewish Women of Ravensbrück Concentration Camp* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2004) 23.; Katz, "Thoughts on the Intersection of Rape and Rassenchande during the Holocaust," 294.

[28] Mühlhäuser, "The Historicity of Denial: Sexual Violence Against Jewish Women During the War of Annihilation, 1941–1945," 30; Amy E. Randall, *Genocide and Gender in the Twentieth Century: A Comparative Survey* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2015) 14.

lives and that once they were gone, their unrecorded stories would go with them. As a result, increased efforts were made to record survivors' testimonies, and some survivors felt that they could tell their stories of sexualized violence more safely during this time than in previous decades. The number of testimonies in the Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive that make mention of sexualized violence is in part due to the fact that the majority of interviews were conducted in the 1990s when many survivors felt that enough time had passed for them to discuss instances of sexualized violence without fear of judgement or ridicule. Additionally, the fact that some interviewers now asked whether sexualized violence occurred in the camps prompted survivors to mention abuse they might not have discussed otherwise.[29] As Helene Sinnreich argues:

> In earlier oral history projects, the discussion of rape only arose if a survivor specifically mentioned the incident and some survivors confessed that although their experience of sexual assault continued to haunt them, it did not seem worthy of mention when compared with the mass death that took place.[30]

Additionally, the postwar social and political climate in Europe and North America largely prioritized moving on from the war, resulting in a general lack of interest in listening to survivors' stories.[31] Such testimonies are crucial to this history and signaled a pivotal turning point in the historiography, because as Stacy Banwell asserts, "one of the difficulties in writing about the rape and the sexual abuse of Jewish women during the Holocaust is that there are no official Nazi documentations of these assaults."[32] *Rassenschande* was condemned by Hitler

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[29] Sinnreich, "'And It Was Something We Didn't talk About': Rape of Jewish Women During the Holocaust," 5; Na'ama Shik, "Description and Silence: Sexual Abuse in Early and Later Testimonies of Survivors and the Emergence of the Israeli Narrative," *Holocaust Studies* 27, no. 4 (2021): 6; Myrna Goldenberg, "Sex-Based Violence and the Politics and Ethics of Survival" in *Different Horrors, Same Hell,* ed. Amy H. Shapiro and Myrna Goldenberg (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2013).
[30] Sinnreich,"'And It Was Something We Didn't talk About': Rape of Jewish Women During the Holocaust," 4.
[31] Halbmayr, "Violence against Women during Nazi 'Racial' Persecution," 46.
[32] Stacy Banwell, "Rassenschande, Genocide and the Reproductive Jewish Body: Examining the use of Rape and Sexualized Violence Against Jewish Women during the Holocaust?" *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 15, no. 2 (2016): 210.

himself, and to keep records of the crime would reflect poorly on the "racially elite" SS who often carried out such attacks. Such violence often went unpunished, as discussed below, so no official records were documented.[33] Historians have thus remained reliant on memoirs and testimonies to tell this history, the bulk of which were not available until the 1990s.

Stories that are told well after they occurred, particularly those regarding stigmatized or traumatic topics, are what Holocaust scholar Sara Horowitz calls "deferred testimony." According to Horowitz's definition, deferred testimony refers to "accounts of matters once considered unspeakable, but that finally find their way into some kind of narrative about a traumatic past."[34] Such testimony, which is relatively common among survivors, "makes clear not only what happened during the war years, but how people struggle to recount and cope with their experiences."[35] The words of Polish Jewish survivor Sara Moses are an example of deferred testimony and exemplify the shame that so many survivors of sexualized violence experience. In discussing the sexual abuse she endured as a young child in Ravensbrück, a concentration camp for women in Germany, decades after it occurred, Sara asserted that in her family, the abuse "was something we didn't talk about":

> It was very difficult to talk to my surviving family members about happenings… [.] There was a lot of pain and mention of certain times or questions would bring tears and crying, and I guess as a child and young woman growing up I felt like I didn't want to bring them more pain. And it was already done with, that was my attitude.[36]

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[33] Sonja M. Hedgepeth and Rochelle G. Saidel, "Introduction" in *Sexual Violence Against Jewish Women During the Holocaust,* ed. Sonja M. Hedgepeth and Rochelle G. Saidel (Waltham, Massachusetts: Brandeis University Press, 2010), 2.
[34] Sara R. Horowitz, "If He Knows to make a Child: Memories of Birth and Baby-Killing in Deferred Jewish Testimony Narratives," in *Jewish Histories of the Holocaust*, ed. Norman J.W. Goda (Berghahn Books, 2014), 136.
[35] Horowitz, "If He Knows to make a Child: Memories of Birth and Baby-Killing in Deferred Jewish Testimony Narratives," 136.
[36] Sara Moses, interview by Saramina Berman, *USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive,* University of Southern California, Los Angeles; St. Louis, Missouri, U.S., May 12, 1997, Interview Code 29016, Tape 4, Segment 17.

As seen in Sara's testimony, memories of sexualized violence are often prevalent in the deferred testimony of survivors, along with other taboo acts such as infanticide.[37] Because such experiences remained buried for so long, other survivors may not have been aware of or might not have discussed such events amongst themselves. This explains why some survivors, such as Polish Jew Roman Englander, remained adamant that Jews did not experience sexualized violence at the hands of Nazi authorities. Roman asserted in 1996 that Nazis abusing Jewish girls and women sexually "was unheard of."[38] The reluctance to discuss one's experiences, as well as the fact that there is no official Nazi documentation of such instances, thus accounts for what scholars previously viewed as a lack of evidence.[39]

The number of survivor testimonies recorded in the 1990s mentioning sexualized violence proved that Jews experienced such violence. Yet, the notion that it was rare or did not occur at all due to Nazi racial laws persisted into the twenty-first century. For instance, Elizabeth Roberts Baer and Myrna Goldenberg noted in 2003 that in the camps:

> Women were at risk of being assaulted (although rape by German soldiers or camp guards was relatively rare, due to the prohibition of *Rassenschande*, interracial sexual relations, or literally: racial shame or sin).[40]

While Baer and Goldenberg are correct in noting that "Aryan" Germans were legally forbidden from having sexual relations with Jews as directed by §2 of the September 1935 Nuremberg Laws, in particular The Protection of German Blood and German Honour, scholars have

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[37] Horowitz, "If He Knows to make a Child: Memories of Birth and Baby-Killing in Deferred Jewish Testimony Narratives," 136.
[38] Roman Englander, interview by Lillian Gewirtzman, *USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive,* University of Southern California, Los Angeles; Glen Rock, New Jersey, U.S., June 26, 1996, Interview Code 16533, Tape 3, Segment 76.
[39] Jonathan C. Friedman, *Speaking the Unspeakable: Essays on Sexuality, Gender, and Holocaust Survivor Memory* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2002), 54;. Saidel, *The Jewish Women of Ravensbrück Concentration Camp*, 23; Bergen, "'Sexual Violence in the Holocaust: Unique and Typical?,'"180; Levenkron, "Death and the Maidens: 'Prostitution,' Rape, and Sexual Slavery during World War II," 15.
[40] Baer and Goldenberg, *Experience and Expression: Women, the Nazis, and the Holocaust*, 33.

provided ample evidence that the criminalization of *Rassenschande* did not prevent the rapes of Jewish women by "Aryan" men. For instance, Patricia Szobar's "Telling Sexual Stories in the Nazi Courts of Law: Race Defilement in Germany, 1933 to 1945" offers an analysis of Nazi court records of *Rassenschande* cases, determining that the law prohibiting sexual relations between "Aryans" and Jews was not always followed, nor was it always enforced by officials and judges.[41] In her 2004 book on Jewish women in the Ravensbrück concentration camp, Rochelle Saidel argued similarly that:

> The racial laws enacted in Germany in 1935, which made it illegal for "Aryans" to have sexual relations with Jews, should have protected Jewish women against rape and forced prostitution. However, there is evidence in historical accounts and testimonies that these laws were often broken.[42]

Saidel also asserts that most survivors did not discuss instances of sexualized violence that they experienced themselves but mentioned that friends and family members endured such violence. This does not necessarily mean that none of these survivors experienced abuse themselves, but rather that some may have found it easier to discuss the violence in the third person.[43]

In 2008, Helene Sinnreich argued that not only did sexual abuse against Jewish women occur, but it was also rarely penalized:

> Certainly sexual relations between German men and all women considered racially inferior, including Jews, was against Nazi policy, but these relations persisted nevertheless. Importantly, when the laws were broken, there was little or no punishment. For example, German soldiers who engaged in consensual - or even non-consensual - sexual relations with non-German women were rarely reprimanded.[44]

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[41] Patricia Szobar, "Telling Sexual Stories in the Nazi Courts of Law: Race Defilement in Germany, 1933 to 1945," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 11, no. 1/2 (2002): 135.
[42] Saidel, *The Jewish Women of Ravensbrück Concentration Camp*, 23.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Sinnreich, "'And It Was Something We Didn't Talk About': Rape of Jewish Women During the Holocaust," 2.

Sinnreich also notes that the SS abused young Jewish girls, likely without the knowledge of camp authorities. This could explain why some men went without punishment for such crimes.[45]

Philosopher and Holocaust scholar Steven T. Katz argues that because of the racist ideology of Nazism, the rape of Jewish women was appealing to some German men because it acted not only as a localized sexual performance, but also as an assault against the Jewish population as a whole.[46] While Katz argues that *Rassenschande* was not uncommon, he notes that many Jewish women who were raped by Germans were murdered by their rapists shortly after.[47]

A decade into the twenty-first century, then, most scholars accepted the fact that sexualized violence against Jews by Nazis did indeed occur in the Holocaust, despite its technical illegality. In a 2009 study of sexualized violence against Jewish women in Auschwitz-Birkenau, Na'ama Shik argued forcefully that sexual abuse occurred in the death camp. Shik noted that in Birkenau, men and women alike were dehumanized, but argued that because daily life was highly gendered in the camps, women's experiences of dehumanization were unique.[48] While Nazi ideology condemned Jewish women's sexuality on the one hand and thus sought to

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[45] Helene Sinnreich, "The Rape of Jewish Women during the Holocaust" in *Sexual Violence Against Jewish Women During the Holocaust,* eds. Sonja M. Hedgepeth and Rochelle G. Saidel (Waltham, Massachusetts: Brandeis University Press, 2010), 112.

[46] Katz, "Thoughts on the Intersection of Rape and "*Rassenchande"* during the Holocaust," 300.

[47] Ibid., 294. In a 2016 study, Stacy Banwell echoed Sinnreich and Katz's arguments and found that despite the threat of punishment "Aryan" men faced for committing the crime, *Rassenschande* was not an uncommon occurrence.

[48] Men and women were separated upon entry into the camps. After this point, one's gender continued to impact their camp experience. For instance, as detailed by Hungarian-Jewish doctor Gisella Perl who was imprisoned in Auschwitz in 1944, women dealt with pregnancy, menstruation, and on occasion, childbirth. Women prisoners also served as housemaids for SS men, which, as is discussed below, could result in sexualized violence. As Sebastian Huebel has noted in his study of German-Jewish masculinity in pre-war concentration camps, the SS sought to emasculate Jewish men, which led some Jewish men in the camps to adopt a "military masculinity" constructed in relation to "Aryan" masculinity. Men's experiences were also impacted by social roles which emphasized the necessity of men providing for their families. Separated from their wives and children, some men, as the testimony of Gottfried Bloch in Chapter Two indicates, instead sought to aid women in nearby camps by providing aid and advice.

desexualize them, on the other, "the female body remained a sexual object," as proven by the array of sexualized violence against Jewish women in the camps.[49] Thus, Shik argued:

> In Auschwitz the Jewish female body became matter only, matter bereft of humanity but nonetheless having sexual traits and the ideological–physical threat of reproductive capabilities.[50]

In examining instances of sexualized violence by Nazis against Jewish women, Shik also called for research on the topic that makes explicit who perpetrated the abuse, since many testimonies and memoirs used as sources for such studies "include mention of cases of rape that were mainly perpetrated by non-Germans," a category which included Nazi collaborators, members of other occupied nations, and Russian liberators.[51] This obfuscation makes it difficult to gauge the breadth of abuse perpetrated by "Aryans" against Jews.

Sonja M. Hedgepeth and Rochelle G. Saidel's 2010 *Sexual Violence against Jewish Women during the Holocaust* is the first English language study of sexualized violence against Jewish women under the Nazi regime. A significant addition to the field, the book covers a vast array of topics, including forced sexual slavery, concentration camp brothels staffed by prisoners, and forced abortion and sterilization, and emphasizes the importance of representing agency in testimonies which include instances of sexualized violence.[52] Brigitte Halbmayr's chapter adds insight into the various forms of sexualized violence perpetrated against Jewish women during the Holocaust and explains how racism and sexism intersected in the Third Reich to shape policies concerning sex and reproduction.[53] Halbmayr explicitly states that rape was a common occurrence in the testimonies she analyzes, pushing back against previous arguments that it was

[49] Shik, "Sexual Abuse of Jewish Women in Auschwitz-Birkenau." 223.
[50] Ibid., 223.
[51] Ibid., 228.
[52] Hedgepeth and Saidel, "Introduction,"14.
[53] Halbmayr, "Violence against Women during Nazi 'Racial' Persecution," 39.

uncommon in the Holocaust. She also notes that sexualized violence was not limited to rape and in fact took on many forms, including but not limited to sexual assault, sexual slavery, verbal and physical sexual harassment, the forcible shaving of hair, and forced nakedness, as well as forced pregnancy, abortion, and sterilization. Halbmayr details the ways in which such violence impacted survivors in their postwar lives, an important yet still understudied area of research.[54] Critically, Halbmayr distinguishes between sexualized violence in the Holocaust and other genocides, noting that the historical context of sexualized violence is crucial. She argues that under the Nazi regime, sexualized violence took on a different association than under the genocides in Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia, where rape was utilized by perpetrators as a strategy of war. In the Holocaust, sexualized violence was not a central, state sanctioned weapon of the genocide. Rather, such abuse "was part of the continuum of violence that resulted from genocide."[55] Just as the Holocaust was a unique genocide, so too was sexualized violence in the Holocaust a unique form of violence.

Myrna Goldenberg's 2013 "Sex-Based Violence and the Politics and Ethics of Survival" investigates sexualized violence against Jewish women not only at the hands of Nazis, but also by Jewish men, a contentious topic.[56] In an analysis of Nazi legal records and survivor testimony, Goldenberg asserts that despite laws prohibiting *Rassenschande*, the rape of Jewish women by German men was common. Using information gleaned from her own interviews with survivors, Goldenberg details instances of rape in various contexts, including in hiding and in the ghettos and camps, to provide a fuller picture of sexualized violence in the Holocaust. Goldenberg also briefly discusses instances of bartered sex, a topic scholars point to as in need of further

[54] Ibid.," 43.
[55] Ibid., 38-39.
[56] Goldenberg, "Sex-Based Violence and the Politics and Ethics of Survival," 117.

research.[57] Goldenberg urges scholars to conduct more scholarship on sexual abuse of all kinds, asserting that knowledge about sexualized violence in the Holocaust deepens our understanding of the genocide and its impact.

In 2015, Beverley Chalmers published *Birth, Sex, and Abuse: Women's Voices Under Nazi Rule*, one of the most thorough overviews thus far of the sexualized violence endured by Jewish and non-Jewish women and men during the Holocaust.[58] True to the interdisciplinary nature of Holocaust studies, Chalmers combined evidence and approaches from a variety of fields, including Holocaust studies, gender studies, medical studies, and reproductive and sexual health psychology, to detail how the Nazi regime exploited the sexualities and reproductive capabilities of men and women in order to reach their eugenicist goals.[59] In doing so, Chalmers sheds light on the ways in which the Nazi regime used pro-natalist (efforts to raise the birthrate) and anti-natalist (efforts to discourage and prevent pregnancy) policies to raise the "Aryan" birthrate and prevent "undesirable races" from reproducing, emphasizing the role medical professionals played in enacting the Nazis' genocidal goals. Concisely detailing each form of violence and the shape it took in various contexts, including the ghettos, concentration camps, and death camps, Chalmers' work adds great insight into the breadth of sexualized violence in the Holocaust.

While the proliferation of publications on this topic in the last few years has added knowledge into the nature and scope of sexualized violence in the Holocaust, the recent experience of Anna Hájková, a Czech historian who specializes in the study of sexuality and

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[57] Ibid., 120-121. An important study concerning sexual barter was published in 2013. Czech historian Anna Hájková's trailblazing article "Sexual Barter in Times of Genocide: Negotiating the Sexual Economy of the Theresienstadt Ghetto" examines the ways in which sex functioned as a form of currency in the ghetto. For more recent work, see Sarah M. Cushman's 2020 "Sexuality, Sexual Violence, and Sexual Barter in the Auschwitz-Birkenau Women's Camp" and Debórah Dwork's 2021 "Sexual Abuse, Sexual Barter, and Silence."
[58] Chalmers, *Birth, Sex, and Abuse: Women's Voices Under Nazi Rule*, viii.
[59] Ibid., 2, 5-6.

queerness in the Holocaust, exemplifies the ways in which the "morally sensitive and politically fraught" nature of this work can have tangible impacts on scholars.[60] Hájková made headlines in April 2020 after a German court found that she had violated the rights of a deceased woman Holocaust survivor by concluding from witness testimonies that the former camp prisoner was likely forced into a relationship with a female SS guard.[61] The fact that historians like Hájková are vulnerable to such accusations is evidence of the stigma still surrounding homosexuality and sexualized violence, particularly in the context of the Holocaust.

Shortly after the verdict, in June of 2020, Hájková published an important introduction to a special issue of *German History.* In the article, Hájková urges scholars to reconsider our deeply held beliefs around taboo topics such as sexuality and sexualized violence. She argues that by making stories of such topics known, scholars can help further challenge "established assumptions—such as that certain experiences were always terrible, that there could be no agency or pleasure in moments of danger."[62] In doing so, Hájková is asking scholars to eschew their comfortable binaries in order to gain a better understanding of histories of stigmatized topics in the Holocaust, such sexualized violence.[63] Only after scholars have done so can we better understand the true impact of the genocide and move toward "a more inclusive, less judgemental and more just history."[64]

Now recognized as a legitimate subfield within studies of gender and the Holocaust, studies of sexualized violence in the Holocaust are gaining validity. Yet, the many areas in this

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[60] Annette F. Timm, "The Challenges of Including Sexual Violence and Transgressive Love in Historical Writing on World War II and the Holocaust," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 26, no. 3 (2017): 352.
[61] Jennifer Evans, "In Support of Difficult History," *New Fascism Syllabus,* http://newfascismsyllabus.com/opinions/in-support-of-difficult-history/ (accessed September 20, 2021).
[62] Anna Hájková, "Introduction: Sexuality, Holocaust, Stigma," *German History* 38, no. 2 (2020): 2.
[63] Hájková, "Introduction: Sexuality, Holocaust, Stigma," 1.
[64] Ibid., 2.

field in need of attention mean that there are ample opportunities for scholars to explore and augment this history. To write about sexualized violence using survivor testimony is also to write a history of resistance to such violence, as survival itself constituted a challenge to the Nazis' genocidal goals. In examining Jewish experiences of sexualized violence in the camps and their resistance to it, I seek to add to this body of literature. Before moving onto my contribution to the field, however, I will first probe more generally the existing historiography of Jewish resistance in the Holocaust.

Historiography of Jewish Resistance

Because it has existed for much longer, the historiography of Jewish resistance in the Holocaust has been through more shifts than that of sexualized violence. Yet although Jewish responses to the Nazi regime have remained a much debated topic among historians since the 1940s, several key ideas persist: that resistance was predominantly comprised of organized action and group efforts, and most often carried out by men.[65] While the first studies of Jewish resistance in the Holocaust were completed before the end of the war,[66] discussions of Jewish resistance gained significant attention in the early 1960s when the idea that Jews failed to resist the Holocaust and even played a role in their own demise was put forth by scholars such as Bruno Bettelheim, Raul Hilberg, and Hannah Arendt.[67] These and other early writers on the

[65] Wolf Gruner, "'The Germans Should Expel the Foreigner Hitler': Open Protest and Other Forms of Jewish Defiance in Nazi Germany," *Yad Vashem Studies*, Vol. 39, no. 2 (2011): 13-14; Ingrid Lewis, "Invisible Resistance: Women's Contribution," in *Women in European Holocaust Films: Perpetrators, Victims and Resisters*, ed. Ingrid Lewis (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2018), 72.
[66] *The Last Stand: Jewish Resistance in Nazi Europe and the Role of the Labor Zionist Movement* (New York: Poale Zion Organization of America, 1944).
[67] Bruno Bettelheim, *The Informed Heart: Autonomy in a Mass Age* (Glencoe, Ill: Free Press, 1960); Raul Hilberg, *The Destruction of the European Jews* (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1961); Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Viking Press, 1963).

subject promoted the belief that Jews were complicit in the Holocaust and were led to their death 'like sheep to the slaughter.'[68]

As a response to the claims regarding Jewish resistance, or lack thereof, that emerged in the early 1960s, Yad Vashem, Israel's Holocaust memorial centre, organized its first conference in 1968 titled *Jewish Resistance during the Holocaust*.[69] The bulk of the presentations focused on armed resistance by men, which, despite the pleas of some scholars, was praised by a number of attendees as a superior form of resistance and came to be upheld as the standard of Jewish resistance.[70] Despite this rather singular focus, the conference reiterated the fact that Jewish resistance occurred and helped shape the direction of research on the topic for years to come.

In 1979, Israeli historian Yehuda Bauer noted the massive amount of evidence of Jewish resistance and argued emphatically against the notion that Jews failed to challenge the Nazi regime. Instead, he asserted that resistance took place by various groups wherever it could.[71] The emphasis on groups is important here, because for Bauer, "any *group* action consciously taken in opposition to known or surmised laws, actions, or intentions directed against the Jews by the Germans and their supporters" constituted Jewish resistance during the Holocaust.[72] Bauer's work on resistance, which argued against the assertion that Jews went to their deaths like 'lambs to the slaughter', helped inform academic debates for decades.[73]

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[68] Robert Rozett, "Jewish Resistance" in *The Historiography of the Holocaust*, ed. Dan Stone (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 341-342. Henri Michel, for instance, argued in *The Shadow War: Resistance in Europe*, *1939-1945* (London: Deutsch, 1972) that armed and organized resistance were the only types of resistance that were significant in the fight against Nazi rule. The Jews, having apparently not taken up arms or organized themselves sufficiently, were bound to their fate accordingly.

[69] Havi Dreifuss, "Conceptualizing Jewish Reactions: Between Amidah and Resistance," *The Journal of Holocaust Research* 36, no. 1 (2022): 51.

[70] Mei Grubsztein*, Jewish Resistance during the Holocaust: Proceedings of the Conference on Manifestations of Jewish Resistance, Jerusalem, April 7-11, 1968* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1971).

[71] Yehuda Bauer, *The Jewish Emergence from Powerlessness* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Bell & Howell, 1996), 7.

[72] Bauer, *The Jewish Emergence from Powerlessness*, 27.

[73] Ibid.

Conceptualizations of Jewish resistance became broader throughout the 1980s as more scholars entered the debate, and although the focus remained on group and armed efforts, women's contributions were increasingly recognized. In 1983, former Czech resistance member Vera Laska argued forcefully against the idea that Jews, and Jewish women in particular, failed to resist.[74] Laska's publication *Women in the Resistance and in the Holocaust: The Voices of Eyewitnesses* consists of 30 brief memoirs belonging to women, Jewish and gentile, who challenged the Nazi regime. The collection of stories outlines how women resisted in various ways, including smuggling weapons, forging documents, and performing rescue missions. Laska notes that sexism often bolstered their resistance efforts, arguing that "the old male underestimation of the power of a woman" often worked to women's advantage.[75] This perspective challenged the dominant assertion at the time that women's gender prohibited them from engaging in resistance work, and Laska's examples of women's resistance in various contexts demonstrates the breadth of resistance by women. A similar approach was taken by Judith Tydor Baumel, who pushed back against the idea that women were absent from resistance movements in a discussion of female underground resistance fighters whom she calls "active heroines." In her examination of what constitutes a Jewish heroine, Baumel's work, which focuses on organized resistance, underlines the importance of Jewish women to resistance networks.[76]

In 1990, the definition of Jewish resistance in Israel Gutman's *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust* made mention of individual resistance.[77] Shortly after, in 1992, Raul Hilberg revisited

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[74] Vera Laska, *Women in the Resistance and in the Holocaust: The Voices of Eyewitnesses* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1983), 10.
[75] Laska, *Women in the Resistance and in the Holocaust: The Voices of Eyewitnesses,* 7.
[76] Baumel-Schwartz, *Double Jeopardy: Gender and the Holocaust*, 146-147.
[77] Robert Rozett, "Jewish Resistance," in *Encyclopedia of the Holocaust*, ed. Israel Gutman (New York: Macmillan, 1990), 1265.

his assertion regarding the lack of Jewish resistance in *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders: The Jewish Catastrophe, 1933-1945,* which included a chapter about Jewish nonconformity, although he characterized such resistance as exceptional.[78] In 1997, Jewish sociologist Nechama Tec published an analysis of the various forms of Jewish resistance in an attempt to better understand its breadth and scope. In her study, Tec applied a broad definition in which she described resistance as "motivated by the intention to thwart, limit or end the exercise of power of the oppressor over the oppressed."[79] The goal of such acts, she argued, "must be to lessen the total quantity of oppression."[80] Although her work focused largely on organized resistance (coordinated resistance efforts carried out by groups), in utilizing such a broad approach to resistance, Tec encouraged scholars to consider non-traditional forms of resistance and made clear that resistance could be equated with no single act. Rather, resistance meant something different depending on who engaged in it, what their circumstances were, and what options were available to them, among other factors.[81]

In an effort to centre the voices of those who actually experienced the Holocaust, Ruby Rohrlich published an edited a volume on resistance in the Holocaust that focused heavily, although not exclusively, on Jewish resistance. Rohrlich borrowed Tec's definition, adding that "survivors of the Holocaust know best from personal experience what resistance means, but their ideas about the nature of resistance, as about everything else, are various and differ greatly."[82] Although the book focuses primarily on collective and armed resistance, it includes important

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[78] Raul Hilberg, *Perpetrators, Victims, Bystanders: The Jewish Catastrophe, 1933-1945,* 1st ed. (New York, NY: Aaron Asher Books, 1992), 170.
[79] Nechama Tec, *Jewish Resistance: Facts, Omissions, and Distortions* (Washington, D.C.: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 1997), 4.
[80] Tec, *Jewish Resistance: Facts, Omissions, and Distortions*, 4.
[81] Ibid., 2.
[82] Ruby Rohrlich, "Introduction," in *Resisting the Holocaust*, ed. Ruby Rohrlich (New York, NY: Berg, 1998) 1.

mentions of individual resistance by Jews, such as Ami Neiberger's chapter outlining the ways in which family and friendship helped contribute to women's survival in Auschwitz.[83]

While research on Jewish responses to the Holocaust continued to focus on group efforts into the twenty-first century, historians increasingly paid attention to cultural, spiritual, social, and economic methods of resistance. Historian Marion Kaplan's 1999 *Between Dignity and Despair: Jewish Life in Nazi Germany,* while not an account of Jewish resistance per se, recounts how Jews navigated changing life both in public and behind the private walls of the home. With a recognition that one's social roles dictated the forms of resistance available to them, Kaplan describes many examples of individual resistance among German Jews, such as concealing one's Jewish identity and maintaining cultural and religious practices in the face of persecution.[84]

The focus on armed and collective resistance, although it has incorporated an increasing number of Jewish women since the 1980s, has meant that less overt forms of resistance have been omitted from the historical record. Such forms were frequently gendered in nature, since women's opportunities for resistance often evolved out of preexisting roles in the home and in charities. As Ingrid Lewis argues:

> The heroic actions of women and their contribution to opposing Nazi persecution are part of a story that has been silenced because it does not fit common resistance patterns. This does not mean, however, that female heroines are totally absent from the pantheon of Holocaust resistance.[85]

Indeed, women are not absent from resistance stories. In his 2002 publication detailing the ways in which Jews responded to the Holocaust, Yehuda Bauer included a study of Gigi Fleischmann, a leader within the Slovak *Judenrat* ("Jewish Council," an administrative agency set up by the

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[83] Ami Neiberger, "An Uncommon Bond of Friendship: Family and Survival in Auschwitz" in *Resisting the Holocaust*, ed. Ruby Rohrlich (New York, NY: Berg, 1998), 133.
[84] Marion Kaplan, *Between Dignity and Despair: Jewish Life in Nazi Germany* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998), 205; 213-214.
[85] Lewis, *Women in European Holocaust Films Perpetrators, Victims and Resisters*, 73.

Nazis in all Jewish ghettos across occupied Europe to maintain order) who helped a number of Jews flee Slovakia. Fleischmann was arrested and sent to Auschwitz in October 1944, where she was killed shortly after her arrival.[86] In a powerful critique of the sexism women faced in the 1940s, Bauer notes that Fleischmann's leadership position was exceptional considering that "given the constraints of the period, only men were called upon to lead Jews."[87]

An emphasis on group resistance has often excluded smaller-scale methods of resistance in which Jewish women were able to play a greater role. Although his work does not focus on gender specifically, in 2011, German historian Wolf Gruner published an analysis of German Jewish resistance in the form of petition writing in which he emphasized the importance of individual resistance among Jews. In an attempt to shift the dominant academic focus of the last few decades from armed and collective resistance to a more expansive conceptualization of challenges to the Nazi regime, Gruner advocates for an approach that recognizes individual resistance as equally important and valid as armed or group resistance.[88] This approach is useful for a number of reasons. For example, a broader approach to resistance allows for greater nuance. Even if individual or group acts of resistance were not successful, they had an impact on the structures of power that were oppressing Jews; they also used up resources that were otherwise used to subjugate Jews and other minorities, thus thwarting the genocidal aims of the Nazis. The inclusion of individual acts of resistance in studies of Jewish resistance also removes the implication that Jews who were not armed or organized did not engage in legitimate resistance. This is important, because as Gruner makes clear, in a context in which all acts of resistance were punishable by death, individual acts were no less deadly than those carried out by

[86] Yehuda Bauer, *Rethinking the Holocaust* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2002), 183.
[87] Bauer, *Rethinking the Holocaust,* 184-185.
[88] Gruner, "'The Germans Should Expel the Foreigner Hitler': Open Protest and Other Forms of Jewish Defiance in Nazi Germany," 13-14.

groups.[89] Gruner thus emphasizes the need for scholars of the Holocaust to broaden their understanding of Jewish responses to the genocide in order to recognize the impact that individual acts played in challenging the bureaucratic system that comprised the Nazi regime.[90]

A 2017 study by Arthur B. Shostak brings together individual and gendered forms of resistance in the Holocaust. Shostak focuses exclusively on care-based acts of resistance by "Carers": Jews doing what they could to reduce suffering and help others, and themselves, survive. As Shostak notes, in forced labour, concentration, and death camps, resistance meant a number of things, including sharing clothing and food, clandestinely replacing a friend for their work duty if they were injured or exhausted, and any other act intended to preserve one's dignity.[91] Shostak's work is an important study of individual resistance and exemplifies the ways in which small acts of kindness and friendship constituted radical resistance in the camps. By looking at the ways in which kindness was carried out to help others survive, Shostak encourages scholars to broaden their perceptions of resistance and in doing so forcefully combats the perception that the only legitimate resistance was organized or took place in groups.

As Shostak's work demonstrates, conceptualizations of resistance have come a long way since the early postwar years when armed and organized resistance, primarily by men, was considered the only "real" form of resistance.[92] Most recently, it is more widely accepted that

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[89] Ibid., 26, 52.
[90] Ibid., 18.
[91] Arthur B. Shostak, *Stealth Altruism: Forbidden Care as Jewish Resistance in the Holocaust* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2017), 10.
[92] Although Katharina von Kellenbach argued in 1999 that reproduction by Jewish women constituted resistance, stating that "those women who decided to carry a pregnancy to term… because they hoped that their work could help thwart the Nazis' genocidal intentions, ought to be seen as resisters," her perspective was very much ahead of its time and not widely accepted when initially published (Katharina von Kellenbach, "Reproduction and Resistance during the Holocaust" in *Women and the Holocaust: Narrative and Representation*, ed. Esther Fuchs [Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 1999], 28).

that resistance was no single act, and that survival itself was a form of resistance for those most persecuted. As historian Kristin Semmens argues, efforts to challenge the Nazi regime:

> [I]nclude a variety of forms of cultural and spiritual resistance, as well as actions that attempted to limit or end the oppressors' power and that opposed the Nazis' acts, policies and intentions. These included strategies to reduce suffering and make survival possible.[93]

As Semmens makes clear, resistance efforts varied depending on the context. This conceptualization is closely linked to the definition of resistance I use in this thesis, borrowed from Holocaust scholars Wolf Gruner and Thomas Pegelow Kaplan, who define resistance as:

> Any individual or group action in opposition to known laws, actions, or intentions of the Nazis and their collaborators, whether successful or unsuccessful, which comprises a wide range of acts of opposition and defiance.[94]

As Gruner and Pegelow Kaplan argue, this definition "return[s] agency to the persecuted minorities and challenge[s] the myth of these men and women's alleged passivity."[95] Importantly, this definition stresses that no matter the degree of success, the act itself constituted resistance.

There is very little overlap between historiographies of sexualized violence and historiographies of resistance. While conceptualizations of resistance have been broadened significantly in recent years and researchers have paid increasing attention to the ways in which sexualized violence was used by Nazis against prisoners in camps, virtually no studies, at least in English, exist concerning the ways in which those who experienced sexualized violence resisted such abuse. That so little has been written about how sexualized violence was resisted means that many questions are left unanswered. Who resisted such violence? And how? What factors

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[93] Kristin Semmens, *Under the Swastika in Nazi Germany* (Bloomsbury, forthcoming), 8.
[94] Thomas Pegelow Kaplan and Wolf Gruner, "Introduction" in *Resisting Persecution: Jews and Their Petitions during the Holocaust,* eds. Thomas Pegelow Kaplan and Wolf Gruner (New York: Berghahn Books, 2020), 7-8.
[95] Kaplan and Gruner, "Introduction," 7-8.

impacted one's ability to resist? What punishments did prisoners experience if they resisted a camp authority figure? This study, which investigates Jewish experiences of sexualized violence in the camps by camp authorities and resistance to it, seeks to answer some of these questions.

Methodology

The primary source base for this research is English-language oral testimonies, which I transcribed myself, sourced from the Visual History Archive (VHA) at the University of Southern California Shoah Foundation – The Institute for Visual History and Education. The VHA contains over 55,000 audio-visual testimonies in 43 languages which can be narrowed down by use of the indexing system and timestamped hyperlinks. These features allow users to search terms in order to locate specific digitized testimony about a person, place, thing, feeling, event, or movement. To gather testimony for this project, I relied on two search terms dictated by the archive: "camp sexual assaults" and "camp sterilization medical experiments."[96] 197 testimonies are available in English for the first search term, 196 of which belonged to Jewish survivors, and 112 for the second search term, with 106 belonging to Jewish survivors. After reviewing over 300 testimonies tagged with the keywords I selected, I chose and analyzed testimonies based on their relevance to this project. Nearly all of the testimonies on this topic in

[96] The VHA does not use the term "sexualized violence." However, it defines sexual assaults as "any sexual contact or act of sexual penetration forced upon a person in the camps or on camp prisoners outside the camps, excluding refugee camps." Under this term, testimonies that discuss the following are included: camp sexual abuse, camp attempted rapes, camp rape attempts, camp rape/sexual molestation, camp rapes, camp sexual harassment, camp sexual molestation, camp sexual violations, concentration camp, rape/sexual molestation, concentration camp sexual assaults, concentration camp sexual harassment, rape/sexual molestation in concentration camps, rape/sexual molestation in the camps, rapes in the camps, sexual assaults in the camps, sexual harassment in the camps, and sexual molestation in the camps. As this list indicates, the term "camp sexual assaults" encompasses a broad range of violence. Notably, however, it does not cover all of the terms that scholars agree make up what composed sexualized violence in the camps. Such violence took on many forms and the restraints of this project do not allow an examination of every type of sexualized violence.

the VHA belong to Jewish women who experienced or witnessed sexualized violence by male SS, *Wehrmacht,* Gestapo, or other camp personnel. While there are instances of female SS guards engaging in acts of sexualized violence against prisoners in the camps, the vast majority of testimonies I analyze mention male abusers. This can be attributed to the relative lack of female SS in the camps compared to male SS and the fact that SS women were granted less authority than SS men. Also, as Edward B. Westermann has discussed, sexualized violence served to foster camaraderie among men in the German military and was not necessarily discouraged by those in command.[97]

As is not uncommon in Holocaust studies, throughout my work I refer to survivors by their first names. Those who gave their testimony were given the option of providing their full name and agreed to interviews. In doing so, they permitted the VHA to make their testimony available for educational purposes. To use survivors' first names does not signal a lack of respect, but rather humanizes those who agreed to tell their stories. Additionally, although I recognize that gender is not a binary and in fact is a social construct, I refer to survivors as "women" and "men" because this is the language that survivors use to refer to themselves.

Because such a wide array of offences constituted sexualized violence in the Holocaust, it is not possible to analyze resistance to every type of violence in this study. My work is narrowed by the fact that some forms of violence, while they did indeed occur, are not reflected in testimony or were not carried out against Jewish prisoners. Take, for example, the concentration camp brothels established by the SS for prisoner use in an effort to increase productivity via incentives. Non-Jewish female prisoners, often Slavic women, were forced to staff the brothels

[97] Edward B. Westermann, *Drunk on Genocide: Alcohol and Mass Murder in Nazi Germany* (Cornell University Press, 2021), 92.

and engage in sex with privileged male prisoners (never Jews) who were permitted entry.[98] While the brothels are an example of sexualized violence in concentration camps, Jewish women were not forced to staff them. Thus, although a very small number ended up working in such brothels, these examples seem to be exceptional and so the experiences of Jewish women in the brothels are not considered in this study.[99] Additionally, while forced abortions also constituted sexualized violence in the Holocaust, a sufficient analysis of such violence requires more space than this thesis permits.[100] In this study, I look at instances of sexualized violence that occurred against Jewish women and men within the camp universe by SS, *Wehrmacht,* Gestapo, and other camp personnel, using testimony prescribed by the archive's indexing terms. The vast majority of testimony concerning this topic belongs to Jewish women, which accounts for my almost exclusive focus on them.

It is important to note that my definition and understanding of sexualized violence and that of survivors differs. Survivors' own understandings of sexualized violence, both during the Holocaust and when their testimonies were recorded, vary greatly and are a product of both their own experience and the context in which they spoke about such abuse. Likewise, survivors have tried to understand the sexualized violence they and others experienced in various ways. Many women survivors, for example, attribute instances of sexualized violence to appearances, such as Hungarian Jewish woman Eve Gabori, who in Auschwitz "heard that very, very good looking

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[98] Robert Sommer, "Forced Prostitution in National Socialist Concentration Camps: The Example of Auschwitz," in *Forced Prostitution in Times of War and Peace: Sexual Violence against Women and* Girls, eds. Barbara Drinck and Chung-noh Gross (Bielefeld, Germany: Kleine Verlag, 2007), 124.
[99] Nicole Bogue, "The Concentration Camp Brothels in Memory," *Holocaust Studies* 22, no. 2-3 (2016): 209; Robert Sommer, "Camp Brothels: Forced Sex Labour in Nazi Concentration Camps," in *Brutality and Desire: War and Sexuality in Europe's Twentieth Century*, ed. Dagmar Herzog (Basingstoke, England: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 175; Wendy Gertjejanssen, "Victims, Heroes, Survivors: Sexual Violence on the Eastern Front during World War II," (Ph.D. diss., University of Minnesota, 2004),190; Shik, "Description and Silence: Sexual Abuse in Early and Later Testimonies of Survivors and the Emergence of the Israeli Narrative," 3.
[100] Chalmers, *Birth, Sex, and Abuse: Women's Voices Under Nazi Rule*, 96.

and very pretty young women were taken to a certain house where they were used as— as— as prostitutes."[101] Similarly, Jewish Romanian survivor Eva Schultz recalls that in Auschwitz-Birkeanu, "a lot of the SS men took all the beautiful women they wanted."[102] Many other survivors mention appearance in their testimonies when discussing sexualized violence as a way to understand why they or others were subject to abuse, such as Rose Russ, a Jewish Romanian woman, who attests that "if you were good looking… the soldiers wanted [you]— the soldiers, they wanted me."[103] While the links between appearance and sexualized violence in the camps need further attention from scholars, the scope of this project does not permit an in-depth analysis of this topic. Additionally, while some perpetrators seem to have chosen prisoners to abuse based on their appearance, this thesis does not aim to examine the motivations of perpetrators of sexualized violence. As such, I do not offer an analysis of comments pertaining to appearance in instances of sexualized violence. The link between perceived beauty, sexual assault, and gender identity in the camps is an area in need of further research, one which scholars have already begun to examine with vigour.[104]

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[101] Eve Gabori, interview by Judith Gal, *USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive,* University of Southern California, Los Angeles; Toronto, Ontario, Canada, March 20, 1995, Interview Code 1544, Tape 3, Segment 80.
[102] Eva Schultz, interview by Frances Aronovitz, *USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive,* University of Southern California, Los Angeles; Miami, Florida, U.S., August 13, 1996, Interview Code 18495, Tape 2, Segment 52.
[103] Rose Russ, interview by D'vorah Kohn, *USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive,* University of Southern California, Los Angeles; Brooklyn, New York, U.S., November 12, 1996, Interview Code 22814, Tape 2, Segments 41-42.
[104] For work on this topic, see Monika Flaschka, "Only Pretty Women Were Raped: The Effect of Sexual Violence on Gender Identities in Concentration Camps" in *Sexual Violence Against Jewish Women during the Holocaust,* ed. Sonja M. Hedgepeth and Rochelle G. Saidel (Waltham, Mass: Brandeis University Press, 2010); Stacy Banwell, "Rassenschande, Genocide and the Reproductive Jewish Body: Examining the use of Rape and Sexualized Violence Against Jewish Women during the Holocaust?" *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies* 15, no. 2 (2016); Nicole Ephgrave, "On Women's Bodies: Experiences of Dehumanization during the Holocaust," *Journal of Women's History* 28, no. 2 (2016).

The benefits and limitations of using digitized testimony have been discussed by many scholars.[105] This project takes into account that the information available through some of these interviews is scarce due to the stigma surrounding this topic which prevented many survivors from speaking about their experiences candidly. I also recognize that the information provided by such testimony is limited to that which is offered by survivors in response to questions asked by interviewers adhering to methodological standards which prioritized open-ended questions.[106] Finally, because of the nature of oral testimonies, places and dates are frequently absent from survivors' stories. Nevertheless, this testimony provides valuable insight into the nature of sexualized violence in the Holocaust and the ways in which such violence was resisted by those who experienced it.

While studying the ways in which sexualized violence was resisted restores agency to victims, I acknowledge that there is inherent risk in what Jonathan Friedman calls "sweetening the Holocaust."[107] That is, applying hope and uplifting narratives to stories of the Holocaust where none can be found. In focusing on resistance to sexualized violence, in no way do I wish to fall into this historiographical trap. Rather, my hope is that by focusing on resistance, rather than simply on instances of sexualized violence, the individuals subjected to this violence will be granted a degree of agency, rather than be re-victimized through the re-telling of their trauma.

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[105] Henry Greenspan, "From Testimony to Recounting: Forty Years of Listening to Holocaust Survivors" in *Beyond Testimony and Trauma: Oral History in the Aftermath of Mass Violence*, ed. Steven C. High (Vancouver, BC: UBC Press, 2015); Noah Shenker, *Reframing Holocaust Testimony* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2015); Jeffrey Shandler, *Holocaust Memory in the Digital Age: Survivors' Stories and New Media Practices* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2017); Paul Frosh, "The Mouse, the Screen and the Holocaust Witness: Interface Aesthetics and Moral Response," *New Media & Society* 20, no. 1 (2018).

[106] Jeffrey Shandler, *Holocaust Memory in the Digital Age: Survivors' Stories and New Media Practices* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2017), 11-12.

[107] Jonathan Friedman, "Togetherness and Isolation: Holocaust Survivor Memories of Intimacy and Sexuality in the Ghettos," *The Oral History Review* 28, no. 1 (2001): 73; Beverley Chalmers, "Jewish Women's Sexual Behaviour and Sexualized Abuse During the Nazi Era," *The Canadian Journal of Human Sexuality* 24, no. 2 (2015): 254.

In the following chapters I examine testimonies belonging to Jewish women and men who experienced sexualized violence in forced labour, concentration, and death camps in areas occupied by Nazi Germany to determine how such violence was resisted. Chapter One introduces readers to the types of sexualized violence in forced labour, concentration, and death camps. While such a typology is in no way rigid, it acquaints readers with the forms of violence Jewish men and women experienced in the camps, providing a foundation for the following chapter. Chapter Two provides an analysis of how various forms of sexualized violence were vigorously resisted in many ways. Resistance also, perhaps surprisingly, did not always end in death. Indeed, survivors' own testimonies seem to suggest that those who resisted, for the most part, went unpunished for resisting, even while perpetrators themselves faced consequences. Yet, even if attempts at resistance were unsuccessful or resulted in one's death, they exemplify the fact that individual acts of resistance were just as important as group acts and deserve as much attention. It is my hope that my work will strengthen our understanding of what constituted resistance and provide greater nuance to discussions of sexualized violence in the Holocaust.

CHAPTER ONE: JEWISH EXPERIENCES OF SEXUALIZED VIOLENCE

When Lillian Small, a Jewish woman from Vienna, was in Dachau, a concentration camp north of Munich, Germany, "disgusting, disgusting things" happened often. During her time in the camp, Lillian experienced and witnessed "torturous" acts of sexualized violence. Recalling various forms of sexual torture, including the amputation of breasts, forced oral sex, and rape with a fist, Lillian says that the Nazis in the camp:

> Invade[d] the human, a woman's body… They want to [defile them], as a human being who could continue to live and reproduce. That is their motive. They didn't want another Jew to be born. That was their slogan, to wipe them out. The world has to be Jewish free, free of Jews. Free.[1]

Decades later, at age 73, Lillian sometimes still feels the physical pain resulting from the violence that she experienced in the camps. The emotional pain stays with her, too, although Lillian finds it hard to put into words: it is "so difficult to describe, you know, when you have pain… I don't know how to describe the cruelty."[2] Although she struggles to define it, Lillian is sure of its root cause, and clearly characterizes the sexualized violence in Dachau as being rooted in hatred. To Lillian, the sexualized violence of the camps was "a rape of hate because… when you get raped, you're [being] punished." The Nazis "had to have the biggest hate in their heart for a Jew, a Jew, a Jew, a Jew. A Jew was hated. I don't understand how any human being can hate a human being because [of] a religion!"[3] Lillian's testimony exposes the hatred at the heart of so much of sexualized violence.

As discussed in the Introduction, such violence in the camps was varied and took a variety of forms depending on the context. For example, during the camp intake process,

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[1] Lillian Small, interview by Jody Kleinman, *USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive,* University of Southern California, Los Angeles; New Orleans, Louisiana, U.S., February 29, 1996, Interview Code 12562, Tape 4, Segment 115.
[2] Lillian Small, interview by Jody Kleinman.
[3] Ibid.

common forms of sexualized violence included forced public nakedness, the forcible shaving of body hair, the violent searching of body cavities, and other humiliating methods of physical examination. Sexual harassment in the form of suggestive stares and insults was also common, as was physical sexual harassment. Other forms of violence included sexual assaults, including penile rape, rape with an instrument, sodomy, forced sexual labour, forced abortion and sterilization, and other medical experiments.[4]

This chapter explores how the Nazis sexually abused prisoners within the camps. Specifically, to illustrate some of the many forms that such violence took, I use testimony from Jewish survivors to outline some of the ways in which sexualized violence was carried out by Nazis, primarily members of the SS but also by members of the *Wehrmacht*, Gestapo, and other camp personnel, in forced labour, concentration, and death camps. I begin with a discussion of survivors who claim that sexualized violence against Jewish women and men did not happen in the camps to stress that, although it occurred, not all women and men experienced or witnessed sexualized violence, and that there is denial of such violence. I then provide examples of various types of sexualized violence, using survivors' own words to describe their experiences wherever possible. By outlining the many forms that such violence took, I provide an understanding of the scope of such violence and how it was carried out before moving onto a discussion of how it was resisted in the following chapter.

Despite the fact that sexualized violence was not ordered as a directive by the Nazi regime because sexual intercourse between Germans and Jews was officially condemned on ideological grounds, acts of sexualized violence against Jews occurred nonetheless.[5] However,

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[4] Anette Bringedal Houge, "Sexualized War Violence. Knowledge Construction and Knowledge Gaps," *Aggression and Violent Behavior* 25, (2015): 81.

[5] This is established in the Introduction in my discussion of the emergence of wartime sexualized violence as a field of study in the late 1990s.

both during their time in the camps and in the years after, some survivors maintained that Jewish women were not sexually abused, and certainly not raped, by German authorities. This notion largely stemmed from the "racial purity" laws enacted by the Nazis, such as the 1935 Law for the Protection of German Blood and German Honour which was enacted to prevent *Rassenschande.* The law forbade Jews and all "non-Aryans" from having sexual relations with or marrying those of "German or related blood" because such relationships could lead to "mixed race" children who were thought to diminish the purity of the "Aryan race."[6] Those who violated these laws, in a consensual manner or otherwise, were considered to have engaged in *Rassenschande* and faced punishment in the form of hard labour, prison, or death.[7] However, "Aryans," particularly those belonging to the Nazi Party or in the military, who committed acts of *Rassenschande* often avoided punishment. Infringements of these laws were generally kept out of the press because the regime did not want to publicize transgressions by those who were supposed to exemplify "Aryan" purity.[8] This explains why, despite the fact that the rape of Jews by German soldiers was made illegal through German racial hygiene laws as well as military laws prohibiting *Notzucht* (sexual assault), instances of the crime were not uncommon within the German military. Indeed, this formal criminalization supports that fact that it was happening; otherwise there would be no reason to have such a law. While these rapes were primarily perpetuated by individual motives and opportunities, *Wehrmacht* and SS authorities did not often prosecute

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[6] Yitzhak Arad, Israel Gutman, and Abraham Margaliot, *Documents on the Holocaust: Selected Sources on the Destruction of the Jews of Germany and Austria, Poland, and the Soviet Union* (Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 1987), 77.
[7] Beverley Chalmers, *Birth, Sex, and Abuse: Women's Voices Under Nazi Rule* (Guildford, Surrey: Grosvenor House Publishing Limited, 2015) 2, 14; Annette F. Timm, "Sex with a Purpose: Prostitution, Venereal Disease, and Militarized Masculinity in the Third Reich," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 11, no. 1/2 (2002): 234; Arad, Gutman, and Margaliot, *Documents on the Holocaust: Selected Sources on the Destruction of the Jews of Germany and Austria, Poland, and the Soviet Union*, 79.
[8] Beverley Chalmers, "Jewish Women's Sexual Behaviour and Sexualized Abuse During the Nazi Era," *The Canadian Journal of Human Sexuality* 24, no. 2 (2015): 15-17.

Rassenschande.[9] Military command did little to prevent such abuse and in fact exploited such behaviour in order to spread fear among the occupied populations and foster a sense of unity among the men, both of which served Nazi military aims.[10] When men were punished, it was for failing to maintain military discipline rather than for the act of *Rassenschande* itself.[11] However, despite the fact that it could go unpunished, victims of sexualized violence deemed *Rassenschande* were often killed after being abused, sometimes because perpetrators sought to cover up their crimes by murdering their victims and sometimes for the perpetrator's gratification. As is clear in testimony below, Jews were very much aware that the perpetrators were going against racial laws when Nazis committed acts of sexualized violence against them. Speaking about sexualized violence in Skarżysko-Kamienna, a forced labour camp in Poland, Ida Scheinfeld puts it succinctly: "First [the Nazis] did what they wanted to do… [.] And this was not allowed. Was against the German law. But they did it [anyway]."[12]

Because such violence was shrouded in disgrace, many Jews kept instances of it secret and some even considered it impossible. For instance, Roman Englander, a Polish Jew, worked

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[9] Regina Mühlhäuser, "Understanding Sexual Violence During the Holocaust: A Reconsideration of Research and Sources," *German History* 39, no. 1 (2021): 20-21; Chalmers, "Jewish Women's Sexual Behaviour and Sexualized Abuse during the Nazi Era," 253.

[10] Mühlhäuser, "Understanding Sexual Violence during the Holocaust: A Reconsideration of Research and Sources," 21.
As Stacy Banwell writes in "*Rassenschande*, Genocide and the Reproductive Jewish Body: Examining the use of Rape and Sexualized Violence Against Jewish Women during the Holocaust?", reasons for sexually abusing Jewish women varied. For some men, the "physical intimacy" of acts such as rape may have helped provide normalcy in the context of war. In other cases, as Edward Westermann argues in *Drunk on Genocide: Alcohol and Mass Murder in Nazi Germany*, sexualized violence was used to foster belonging and community among a group of men and to demonstrate "invasion and control" over victims.

[11] Helen Sinnreich, "'And it Was Something We Didn't Talk About': Rape of Jewish Women During the Holocaust," 2.

[12] Ida Scheinfeld, interview by Shelly Roberts, *USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive,* University of Southern California, Los Angeles; Margate, Florida, U.S., March 7, 1996, Interview Code 13093, Tape 2, Segment 48.

in a brothel in Kraków-Płaszów, a concentration camp in Kraków, Poland.[13] Roman steadfastly asserted that:

> [Germans] couldn't touch a Jewish girl. This is one thing, you know, people ask about it. You know, if you ever touched a Jewish girl, you were shot. This was a [sic] *Rassenschande*. You hear very little about rape during the war. I mean… it's unheard of. The Germans stood away from a Jewish girl like he stays away from, from, AIDS. I mean, he couldn't, he couldn't touch her with a 10 foot pole.[14]

Similarly, when A. Grinbaum, a Polish Jew, was asked whether there was "any sexual abuse" in the camps she was in, she declared, "no, not that. Because, you see, the Germans by themselves, they were the higher [race], we were the low race of people. So they wouldn't have anything [to do] with us."[15] Likewise, Romanian Jew Rose Berman is adamant that in Auschwitz-Birkenau, there was no sexual abuse of Jewish women. When asked by the interviewer whether young Jewish girls were "ever abused in some other ways by the SS," Rose replies that:

> There were rumours… I don't know really. There [were] rumours that there were places that they took girls for the SS, for the soldiers, Jewish girls, but… It's not so because they said this is *Rassenschande*. You cannot be with a Jewish woman. I don't know. [If] you want to believe it, you believe it. They did not use us.[16]

The belief that Jews did not experience sexualized violence by the Nazis, and in particular that Jewish women were not raped, meant that some prisoners feared sexualized violence less than others during their time in the camps. Magda Hilf, a Czech Jew, recalls not being afraid of sexualized violence in part because she knew of no Jewish women abused by Nazis in the camp:

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[13] While Roman does not specify whom the women in the brothel were forced to service, it is likely that the brothel was intended for use by Nazi men and their allies, as no brothel for prisoner use was established in Kraków-Płaszów, according to Robert Sommer, the leading historian on the topic of the concentration camp brothels.

[14] Roman Englander, interview by Lillian Gewirtzman, *USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive,* University of Southern California, Los Angeles; Glen Rock, New Jersey, U.S., June 26, 1996, Interview Code 16533, Tape 3, Segment 76.

[15] A. Grinbaum, interview by Gail Novack, *USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive,* University of Southern California, Los Angeles; Toronto, Ontario, Canada, March 21, 1988, Interview Code 54142, Tape 2, Segment 75.

[16] Rose Berman, interview by Lillian Gewirtzman, *USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive,* University of Southern California, Los Angeles; Bronx, New York, U.S., November 12, 1997, Interview Code 35356, Tape 5, Segment 25.

> As far as I know, nobody was sexually molested or threatened. Because by this time, the Germans were not allowed to associate with us. It was a big sin, you know. The Aryan race should not be associated with the Jews. And I don't know anybody. And I am certain if somebody was molested, they wanted to be molested… There are women and men that might have [had] some hanky panky, but not by force. Absolutely not.[17]

As is made clear later in this chapter, Jews did experience sexualized violence in the camps. However, the testimony from Magda and the other survivors above does not necessarily mean that they are wrong about it not occurring. According to Yolan Frank, a Jewish Romanian survivor of Auschwitz, those who denied the existence of sexualized violence in the camps turned a blind eye, consciously or otherwise: "[I]t was no secret. That you didn't believe it is a different thing… [.] [I]t suited you not to believe… [.] [Y]ou didn't doubt it, but you didn't digest it. You didn't want to digest it."[18] While Yolan's words are true, it was not always this simple. The differences in opinion regarding the existence of sexualized violence also exemplify the vast discrepancies in survivors' experiences. Clearly, not all Jewish women were fearful of sexualized violence. For some, because of Nazi attitudes around race. For others, because the threat of sexualized violence was less consequential in comparison to the starvation and hardship of daily life, and thus was not registered as a distinct danger. Nonetheless, the fear of rape and other forms of sexualized violence figures prominently in many survivors' discussion of life in the camps. For example, when Czech Jew Ruzena Markow was in Auschwitz, she was not aware of any Jewish girls being taken for sexual purposes by the SS but was nonetheless fearful of something of the sort happening to her. When Ruzena was in a *kommando* (work squad) tasked with "carr[ying] stones from one place to another," one of the SS men guarding the *kommando*

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[17] Magda Hilf, interviewer unknown, *USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive,* University of Southern California, Los Angeles; Toronto, Ontario, Canada, March 09, 1988, Interview Code 54141, Tape 2, Segment 63.
[18] Yolan Frank, interview by Reuben Zylberszpic, *USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive,* University of Southern California, Los Angeles; Perth, WA, Australia, August 14, 1997, Interview Code 35354, Tape 8, Segment 220.

"almost attack[ed] me right there."[19] Prior to this point, Ruzena was suspicious because the man "was bringing me bread. He was bringing me candy. He was bringing me all kinds of things" and she realized what he might expect in return for the gifts. So, Ruzena "didn't go near him. I just stayed with the stones. And that's it."[20] Ruzena's testimony is exemplary of the fact that fear of sexualized violence remained palpable during some women's time in the camps, even if one was unaware of any actualized sexualized violence against Jewish prisoners.

Assaults during the Camp Intake Process

As soon as Jews arrived at the camps, they were at risk of sexualized violence by their captors. The entry process into the camps was demeaning and violent by design and the violence was intended to obliterate prisoners' humanity. At the death camps, once transports arrived via train, those inside were hauled out and separated, segregated by gender and age. Families were torn apart as the young, the old, and the infirm were slated for immediate death. Those who were permitted to live were ordered to strip naked so their bodies could be searched for valuables, shaved, and, at Auschwitz, tattooed.

Testimony from Elizabeth Feldman de Jong, a Jewish woman from Amsterdam, exemplifies the humiliating nature of the camp intake process. Elizabeth was 27 when she was sent to Auschwitz from Amsterdam. After enduring a horrifically cramped 6-day train ride from Holland to Poland, she stepped off the train that had transported her, her family, and countless others to the camp. There, Dr. Joseph Mengele, one of the camp's physicians, stood on the

[19] Ruzena Markow, interview by Marlene Glassman, *USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive,* University of Southern California, Los Angeles; Brooklyn, New York, U.S., June 2, 1997, Interview Code 29439, Tape 4, Segment 19.
[20] Ruzena Markow, interview by Marlene Glassman.

platform and sorted the arrivals into two groups: those who would live for the time being and those who would be gassed immediately. Elizabeth was chosen to live. Then, Mengele selected Elizabeth, her sister-in-law, and around 40 other people, all of whom were taken into Auschwitz.[21] Unbeknownst to Elizabeth, her mother, who was sent to the other line, was murdered.

Upon entering the camp, Elizabeth had to strip naked and take off all of the jewelry she was wearing. The single gold tooth in her mouth was also pulled out.[22] After, Elizabeth and the women she entered the camp with were shaved. Like many women, Elizabeth felt that the forcible shaving of her hair was an assault on her femininity. To make matters worse, Elizabeth was menstruating the day she entered the camp. As she describes how menstruation complicated the process, Elizabeth falters and struggles to explain how it made her feel:

> **E.F.**: And I— and I was— that day, I had my period, you know? And no clothes, everything— ugh. Unbelievable. You— you— it does not— you can— you can say—
> **INT**: The lack of dignity.
> **E.F.**: The lack of decency, nothing, you know? … And you're naked, absolutely naked, before them. And then your hair cut off. And they took my tooth out. And I was so frustrated.[23]

After they had their prisoner number tattooed on their arms, Elizabeth and the other women were escorted to their barracks, Block 10, naked: "We went through the main [entrance] with all the men looking at us… [.] I had no clothes." After arriving in the barracks and receiving clothes, "the first thing" Elizabeth asked was, "where's my mother?"[24] She learned very quickly from the other prisoners what had happened to her mother. They asked Elizabeth, "do you see the smoke, and the ash?" and explained to her that those who were sent away in a truck after

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[21] Elizabeth Feldman de Jong, interview by Edie Kalb, *USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive,* University of Southern California, Los Angeles; Toronto, Ontario, Canada, January 11, 1995, Interview Code 543, Tape 2, Segment 49.
[22] Elizabeth Feldman de Jong, interview by Edie Kalb.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid.

selection, rather than entering the camp, "go straight to the gas chamber, and they get burned." Upon hearing this, Elizabeth thought that "they say [sic] something to make me afraid, you know?" She soon learned, however, that her fellow prisoners were telling the truth: "It was true."[25]

Elizabeth's story provides a glimpse into the humiliation and distress caused by the intake process. The process, with its forced nakedness and shaving of body hair, was an act of violence itself. Other women mention additional forms of abuse during their entry into the camps. Ruth Katz recalls that when she entered Libau, a concentration camp in Latvia, the SS guards gave her and other women what she calls a "GI" procedure during the intake process. Ruth explains that the procedure involved the guards checking the women's anal cavities to see whether "we brought anything in [the camp]… jewels, or whatever."[26] Veronika John-Steiner remembers a similar procedure being conducted, under the guise of checking for lice, when she entered Bergen-Belsen, a concentration camp in Germany. During the intake process, 14-year-old Veronika was subjected to an invasive search. As she describes, the male SS officers:

> [V]ery brutally handle[d] us in terms of searching for lice… [.] So you could say it was finger rape. It wasn't penis rape. We were violated because supposedly they were looking for lice in our vagina, you know."[27]

Veronika notes that "we came from an environment [where lice] would have been very unlikely," suggesting that the procedure was intended to humiliate the women.[28] Similarly, when Maria Scheffer entered Auschwitz-Birkenau, a death camp in Poland, at age 13, she experienced

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[25] Ibid.
[26] Ruth Katz, interview by Ruth Resnikoff, *USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive,* University of Southern California, Los Angeles; Coconut Creek, Florida, U.S., December 5, 1995, Interview Code 9649, Tape 3, Segment 86.
[27] Veronika John-Steiner, interview by Hilary Helstein, *USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive,* University of Southern California, Los Angeles; Santa Fe, New Mexico, U.S., Nov 18, 1998, Interview Code 47178, Tape 5, Segment 35.
[28]Veronika John-Steiner, interview by Hilary Helstein.

an assault. When they were taken to the showers for delousing after being selected to live, Maria and the other women with whom she had travelled to Auschwitz were forced to strip naked, surrounded by "lots and lots and lots of German SS soldiers, lots and lots of Jewish workers standing around. Men, of course":[29]

> There were all these men around. We were told to strip. We said, 'strip? But there are people!' And, of course, the answer to that would have been a huge whack on the head or whatever. So we had to strip. So we strip[ped]. Now, I was unfortunate enough to be immediately sexually assaulted. When I say sexually assaulted, don't think that that means an actual sexual intercourse, because no. But I was assaulted by hand. And again, I have never, ever forgotten the feeling of this person touching me."[30]

As a young girl, Maria had "obviously never been touched" in that way before. Although she was traumatized by the event, "in the end, that wasn't the most important. In the end, that somehow went into the background. The other things that happened had taken over. But I just thought I'd mention it, because it happened."[31] Although horrific, such testimony suggests that Maria views her assault as inconsequential in comparison to the violence that she endured while in the camp. And, like many other women, Maria had never spoken of her assault to anyone before recounting it in her testimony. The interviewer later asks whether other women were assaulted, to which Maria replies: "I don't know. I'm sure there were. But I don't know because I've never talked— in fact, to tell you the honest truth, I have never talked about it. I have never— I don't think I've ever mentioned it to anyone, really." Maria pauses, then says "No, I don't think I have. But there it is."[32] Maria's words exemplify the shame that so many survivors of sexualized violence experience and are an example of something that Holocaust scholar Sara

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[29] Maria Scheffer, interview by Barbara Linz, *USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive,* University of Southern California, Los Angeles; Coromandel Valley, South Australia, Australia, July 21, 1995, Interview Code 4187, Tape 3, Segment 73.
[30] Maria Scheffer, interview by Barbara Linz.
[31] Ibid.
[32] Ibid.

Horowitz calls "deferred testimony." This phenomenon is relatively common among survivors and has resulted in silence about taboo topics, such as sexualized violence, incest, or pedophilia, until later in a survivor's life.[33]

Although certain forms of violence during the intake process seem to stand out more prominently in women's testimony than in that of men, male prisoners were not immune from such invasive assaults.[34] When Nikola Hamburg, a Yugoslavia native, entered Theresienstadt, he saw that:

> German SS women… with big dogs were walking around and looking at us…[.] They had sticks in their hand, and then went seeing the genitals of people, how— the size or whatever it is… [.] They just came [and] looked.[35]

As he tells the story, Nikola laughs. While it is unclear whether the laugh stems from discomfort, the absurdity of the act, or some other emotion Nikola felt in retelling the story, the disturbing nature of the act is clear and was recognized by Nikola as a young boy.[36] The fact that the prisoners were not touched physically in this instance does not minimize the trauma likely inflicted through this process; forced public nakedness and suggestive stares and jeers were common forms of sexualized violence in the camps and intended to humiliate and demean prisoners.[37]

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[33] Sara R. Horowitz, "If He Knows to make a Child.: Memories of Birth and Baby-Killing in Deferred Jewish Testimony Narratives," in *Jewish Histories of the Holocaust*, ed. Norman J.W. Goda (Berghahn Books, 2014), 136.
[34] Monika Flaschka, "Only Pretty Women Were Raped: The Effect of Sexual Violence on Gender Identities in Concentration Camps," in *Sexual Violence Against Jewish Women during the Holocaust,* ed. Sonja M. Hedgepeth and Rochelle G. Saidel, (Waltham, Mass: Brandeis University Press, 2010), 80-81.
[35] Nikola Hamburg, interview by Florence Shuster, *USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive,* University of Southern California, Los Angeles; New York, New York, U.S., February 26, 2001, Interview Code 51476, Tape 4, Segment 117.
[36]As Jeffrey Shandler argues in *Holocaust Memory in the Digital Age: Survivors' Stories and New Media Practices*, expressions of emotion in the form of laughter or tears and actions such as hand gestures or the exposure of a wound, though nonverbal, are crucial parts of a survivor's story and can tell the viewer as much about the survivor's story as their words.
[37] Brigitte Halbmayr, "Violence against Women during Nazi 'Racial' Persecution," in *Sexual Violence Against Jewish Women during the Holocaust*, eds. Sonja M. Hedgepeth and Rochelle G. Saidel (Waltham, Mass: Brandeis University Press, 2010), 38-39.

Attempted Assaults

Although some sexualized violence was not physical, the SS men in charge of the camps were not afraid to touch Jewish women, as is clear from many survivor accounts, including that of Hungarian Jew Shari Braun. Shari was imprisoned in a concentration camp near Augsburg, Germany, when she was 14. During her time in the camp, Shari experienced an attempted rape by "a German," likely an SS man, whom she describes as "an older man…maybe 32 years old", when she emerged from the latrines:

> He grabbed me, and grabbed me up front. I didn't have nothing yet. I was flat [chested] … [.] [He] started to grab me. And I could not say anything, just… Please don't do it… [.]And [he] look[ed] like he had a good time. And I hardly could get out of it.[38]

The man didn't get the chance to rape her, she continues, "because it was in the open. If he did that, he would be in [a] concentration camp. When he saw somebody coming, he had to let me go. Otherwise, he would be in trouble, because I was a Jew."[39] After she narrowly avoided an assault, Shari went back to the latrines and prayed for freedom from imprisonment. When her sister came and asked what happened, Shari replied that nothing had gone on and that "everything is [okay]."[40] It is unclear whether Shari told her sister she was fine because she did not want her to worry or because she was ashamed of what happened.

Speaking about the incident in 1995, Shari certainly felt shame: "I'm embarrassed to say. And that's why I said, I feel— I understand people who get raped, you know, because [it is] not always their fault." Shari's shame is evident as she recalls the story decades later: "I'm still embarrassed to tell, like it would be my fault. That's why I was thinking about those people who are raped. Some people may be asking for that. But believe me, I would not ask [for] something

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[38] Shari Braun, interview by Carol Stulberg, *USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive,* University of Southern California, Los Angeles; Los Angeles, California, U.S., March 22, 1995, Interview Code 1249, Tape 3, Segment 71.
[39] Shari Braun, interview by Carol Stulberg.
[40] Ibid.

like that."[41] Though she doesn't clarify, Shari's comment that some rape victims are "asking for that" may be in reference to instances of sexual barter in which prisoners traded sex for valuable goods such as clothes or shoes. Her comment could also be a reflection of ideas in the dominant culture that suggests that those who get raped "asked for it."

SS men were clearly bold in their attempts to abuse Jewish women, but often backed off when potential witnesses were nearby. When Romanian Jew Magdalena Fazekas was in Freudenthal, a concentration camp in Moravia-Silesia, Czechoslovakia, she also narrowly avoided an assault because a potential witness walked past. As she recalls, SS men "wanted to get friendly with the girls… With us."[42] Magdalena herself "had one experience, too." The conversation between Magdalena and the interviewer describes what happened:

> **M.F.**: [There] was a washroom and in front of what was a hall. And from the hall was the door for the washroom and I went in and there was two, was the black uniform[ed] soldiers and one came after me. And he started [saying] how nice I was and started to tell, and I was so afraid. And luckily he already started to hold his hand at the wall, you know, he pushed me at the wall and—
> **INT**: And he's holding you there?
> **M.F.**: Yes. And then one of the German girls came out and that was it.
> **INT**: He let you go?
> **M.F.**: He, yes, he let me go and he went out because I am sure he wasn't allowed to [touch me]. I tell you, I was afraid.[43]

In this instance, Magdalena's would-be abuser was deterred by the possibility of a witness. Although it is unclear whether the German girl Magdalena mentions was a fellow prisoner or a German female administrative staff member, the fact that her presence impeded the SS man's sexual advances illustrates that perpetrators understood they could be punished for their indiscretions.

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[41] Ibid.
[42] Magdalena Fazekas, interview by Dina Brustman, *USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive,* University of Southern California, Los Angeles; Caulfield North, Melbourne, Victoria, Australia, October 18, 1996, Interview Code 21220, Tape 4, Segment 111.
[43] Magdalena Fazekas, interview by Dina Brustman.

In some cases, SS men caught their comrades attempting to engage in acts of *Rassenschande* and halted the abuse not to save the victims, but to preserve "racial purity." When Golda Indig was in Auschwitz, she witnessed an attempted rape of a child that was prevented only because another SS man noticed what was going on. One day, the SS made the women in her barracks line up outside of their block because "the SS wants to [sic] do things to the little girl" while the girl's mother was forced to watch. Golda was "scared and terrified" of what was about to happen. Then:

> [A]fter a while some other big Nazi came by. He says, 'what's going on here?' And they said, 'everybody back, everybody back in the block.' Another SS ordered us right away to get back because people are afraid to get caught. They were ready to do something to the little girl. It was very scary. The mother was terrified, crying, screaming.[44]

In each of these instances, the only thing that prevented assaults from occurring was chance: someone passing by at the right time. As is further explored in Chapter Two, chance played a large role in surviving in the camps, as well as avoiding sexualized violence. While some prisoners like Shari, Magdalena, and the girl mentioned by Golda escaped from attempted assaults because of the intervention of strangers and authority figures who had the power to punish the perpetrator indirectly or directly, others were not so lucky.

Sexual Assaults and Rape

Sexualized violence did not end after prisoners were admitted into the camps; such violence only escalated. Born in 1938, Sara Moses was just a child when she was imprisoned in Ravensbrück, a concentration camp exclusively for women located north of Berlin. The

[44] Golda Indig, interview by Lenore Weinstein, *USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive,* University of Southern California, Los Angeles; Miami Beach, Florida, U.S., January 30, 1997, Interview Code 25314, Tape 2, Segment 8.

conversation below between Sara and the interviewer outlines the trauma this event inflicted on Sara:

> **INT**: Tell me about a different kind of experience with soldiers, if you ever had them.
> **S.M**.: Well, I, um, it's very difficult for me to even talk about this because was one of the most horrible of my experiences… [.][45] Someone came to get me. And I was given some candy, I believe. And I remember being given candy. And I was taken into a building and into a small room…. [.] There were two men there. And there were some other people in the room, I think, but I remember two men, and I was put on a table… [.] And I was very violently sexually abused. And I remember being hit, I remember crying. And I wanted to get out of there. And I was calling people and screaming. And I remember one thing that stands out in my mind [is] that one of them told me that they would stand me up on my head and cut me right in half and they wanted me to stop screaming… [.] And then I was taken back to where my aunt was, and it was something we didn't talk about.
> **INT**: You did not talk even to her about it?
> **S.M**.: No.
> **INT**: Do you remember if those men were in uniform?
> **S.M.**: I remember thinking of them as the superiors.[46]

Sara's testimony is a particularly strong example of deferred testimony, and evidence that camp personnel had no qualms about abusing children. Speaking in 1997, decades after her abuse took place, it is clear from the long pauses and her hesitancy in speaking that the story remains difficult for Sara to tell. Her difficulty discussing the event after liberation suggests that Sara is still processing the trauma she endured, which is not uncommon among survivors considering the lack of counselling and psychological support available postwar.[47]

Other instances of sexualized violence were acts of opportunity. For example, many women were assaulted when visiting the latrines at night. Debora Sessler, a Jewish woman from Amsterdam, describes an instance in Lublin, a concentration camp on the outskirts of the city of

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[45]As Sara's testimony suggests, the sexual violence she endured constituted "one of the most horrible" of her experiences in the camp. Yet, as the testimony of other survivors in this study indicates, for some survivors sexual assault paled in comparison to the other trauma and violence they experienced in the camps. This discrepancy is further evidence of the diversity in experiences among survivors.

[46] Sara Moses, interview by Saramina Berman, *USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive,* University of Southern California, Los Angeles; St. Louis, Missouri, U.S., May 12, 1997, Interview Code 29016, Tape 4, Segment 17.

[47] Halbmayr, "Violence against Women during Nazi 'Racial 'Persecution," 46.

Lublin, Poland when a woman in her barracks "went one night to the bathroom… And she was raped by one of the guards outside the barrack."[48] Debora describes the incident:

> There was a… woman, she was quite a bit older than I was. She must have been around 40 and I was 16, so she already looked like an older woman to me, you know? And she went to the bathroom at night and, uh, those Germans attacked her… [.] And then she was killed and of course that is terrible because that is for the Germans… that's *Rassenschande*, that was the race shame.[49]

Debora recalls that "the next morning [the woman] was pulled out of the barracks. And as far as we know, she was sent to the gas chamber after she had been raped by that guard." It is unclear what happened to the guard, but Debora suggests that he may have been punished for his actions: "I don't know what they did to him, but somebody must have talked and told [the camp authorities] because that is *Rassenschande*, race shame. You can't mix races."[50] Like Shari, Magdalena, and Golda, in Debora's case both she and the SS were well aware of the penalties that such abuse carried. However, in Debora's story, the SS man was punished it seems because an act of sexualized violence was actually discovered.

In Sobibór, a death camp in Poland, an SS man by the name of Paul Groth "was such a sadistic— such a sadist."[51] Despite being known by prisoners and SS personnel alike for his penchant for humiliating Jewish prisoners, Groth "fell in love" with a Jewish girl. Two German Jewish girls were made to cook and clean in the SS living quarters in the camp, and soon "Groth fell in love with [one girl]. Naturally… he slept with her." Groth went so far as to bring "tiny little deer" into the camp for the girl to have as a pet. As Polish Jewish survivor Samuel Lerer recalls:

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[48] Debora Sessler, interviewer unknown, Vallejo, *USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive,* University of Southern California, Los Angeles; Vallejo, California, U.S., June 02, 1995, Interview Code 52693, Tape 3, Segment 157.
[49] Debora Sessler, interviewer unknown.
[50] Ibid.
[51] Samuel Lerer, interview by Bonnie Gurewitsch, *USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive,* University of Southern California, Los Angeles; Brooklyn, New York, U.S., March 23, 1995, Interview Code 1609, Tape 3.

> One day, a high officer was supposed to visit the camp… [and] they're going to accuse him of *Rassenschande*. So they send him away to Treblinka, Paul Groth. They sent him away. And they took those two girls, and they shot them… [.] And Paul Groth was— he didn't come back.[52]

Debora and Samuel's stories demonstrate that Nazi rapists were sometimes punished for their actions. Polish Jewish survivor Edith Laurri also recalls one particular instance in Skarżysko-Kamienna, a forced labour camp in Poland, in which a German guard was executed on gallows erected in the camp yard alongside the Jewish girl he raped.[53] However, as we see below, many such men, even serial rapists of Jews, went without reprimand.

Multiple survivors describe instances wherein SS men chose girls, took them to an isolated location, abused them, and, often, killed them afterwards. Polish Jew Harry Koltun remembers one such instance when he was in Skarżysko. In the camp, "there was a selection one day. The Gestapo and SS came and took out Jewish girls and they did what they had to do, sexually, and they killed them."[54] Harry recounts this matter-of-factly, as if the rape of Jewish women was a regular occurrence. In Skarzysko, it was. Tola Weissbaum, a Jewish woman from Łódź, Poland, asserts that in Skarżysko, German officers:

> Came every night in and brought some beautiful girls out… [.] They took them out, they have a good time, and they kill them right away. You can hear, when you are in camp, you can hear outside. Bang, bang, bang, bang, bang. In the morning, we're looking for them… [.] We heard outside the banging. And they're not coming to the sleep [sic]… [.] They're gone. It was terrible.[55]

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[52] Samuel Lerer, interview by Bonnie Gurewitsch.
[53] Edith Laurri, interview by Jane Rushefsky, *USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive,* University of Southern California, Los Angeles; Rochester, New York, U.S., August 8, 1996, Interview Code 18432, Tape 2, Segment 32.
[54] Harry Koltun, interview by Sheila Frohlich, *USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive,* University of Southern California, Los Angeles; North York, Ontario, Canada, September 8, 1996, Interview Code 19656, Tape 2, Segment 15.
[55] Tola Weissbaum, interview by Patricia Stein, *USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive,* University of Southern California, Los Angeles; Boca Raton, Florida, U.S., July 2, 1998, Interview Code 42996, Tape 3, Segment 20.

Tola remembers vividly the fear among the women in her barracks as a result of these selections. The women never knew exactly when the officers would come, but when they did, the process was swift and clear: "They look at you. They want to take you. You have to go."[56]

Skarżysko was infamous for sexualized violence against Jewish women. Eva Lassman, a Polish Jew who was imprisoned in the camp, describes the abuse succinctly:

> The *Kommandant* of this camp, his name was Bartenschlager. He was a terrible German person. He was preying on women. He didn't care if they're Jewish women. He used them as long as he wanted them. And then he shot them. Needless to say that every woman, when [they] heard that he is coming, hid in a mouse hole.[57]

Fritz Bartenschlager appears often in the testimony of those who were imprisoned in Skarżysko-Kamienna, and the abuse he perpetrated was no secret. Although Eva refers to him as the camp *Kommandant,* Bartenschlager actually belonged to the SA (*Sturmabteilung*, the paramilitary wing of the Nazi Party) and was second-in-command to SS-*Hauptsturmführer* ("Head Storm Leader," equivalent to the army ranking of captain) Kurt Krauze. Krauze was head of the *Werkschutz*, which was an entity consisting of about 180 guards in charge of the camp's organization, supervision, and day to day administration.[58] Bartenschlager ultimately held a high level of authority in the camps and used it to his advantage to facilitate his sexual abuse.

Bartenschlager "lived on the other side [of the camp] in a beautiful place." When important German officials visited Skarżysko, Bartenschlager would "take young girls back" to his residence.[59] Polish Jewish woman Alice Davis describes Bartenschlager's process of selecting girls and what the men would do with them:

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[56] Tola Weissbaum, interview by Patricia Stein.
[57] Eva Lassman, interview by Mia Segal, *USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive,* University of Southern California, Los Angeles; Spokane, Washington, U.S., September 21, 2000, Interview Code 51181, Tape 5, Segment 128.
[58] Felicja Karay, *Death Comes in Yellow: Skarżysko-Kamienna Slave Labor Camp* (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic, 1996) 41.
[59] Alice Davis, interviewer unknown, *USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive,* University of Southern California, Los Angeles; Toronto, Ontario, Canada, May 31, 1993, Interview Code 53977, Tape 2, Segment 87-88.

> We used to go under the bunks and hide, and somebody used to give us always the okay to come out or go under and hide. And [Bartenschlager] would take a name or a number or something. And then at night, a German would come in and get the girls… [.] They had terrible, terrible orgies.[60]

After the men were done raping, they murdered the women to destroy evidence of their crimes:

> They would go… behind the camp… and shoot them because there [sic] was *Rassenschande*. They like to do it [rape women] but they didn't want to, they not allowed to do it. So then these two shoot [them].[61]

Bartenschlager did not just select young girls when guests were visiting. Charles Feldman, a Polish Jew, asserts that in Skarzysko, Bartenschlager used to take girls to "do jobs in their house. He used them for himself. They never came back. They never came back, not one of them. And he used to do it very often."[62] Likewise, Sonia Nightingale, a Polish Jewish woman, remembers that during her time in Skarżysko, Bartenschlager would visit her barracks "every Saturday night." He was "sometimes drunk, [and] sometimes he came with another SS man." Once inside, Bartenschlager would conduct "a selection," which terrified Sonia and the girls in her barracks because they knew it meant "trouble." Sonia recalls that because the women had recently arrived at the camp, they "were still fresh, young and healthy. And we look[ed] like human beings," which made them even more fearful of being chosen. He would pick one for himself, and when he was with the other SS man, "he picked two… [and] took them away."[63] Speaking about the girls that Bartenschlager took with him, Sonia says that she "never saw them again. Because we knew what's going down. We knew [what] the shots [meant]. We knew. We knew what happened… [.] He molested them." The girls were killed because a "German

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[60] Alice Davis, interviewer unknown.
[61] Ibid.
[62] Charles Feldman, interview by Bonnie Slavin, *USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive,* University of Southern California, Los Angeles; Miami Beach, Florida, U.S., August 22, 1995, Interview Code 4071, Tape 5, Segment 148.
[63] Sonia Nightingale, interview by Allen Charney, *USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive,* University of Southern California, Los Angeles; Downsview, Ontario, Canada, April 4, 1995, Interview Code 1832, Tape 2, Segment 46

shouldn't touch a Jewish girl, shouldn't even look at her." As a result, Bartenschlager "brought them back and they shot them… [.] We heard the shots. We didn't see them again." After they were murdered, Sonia and the other girls were forced to dispose of the women's bodies.[64]

Polish Jew Bronia Shlagbaum also witnessed Bartenschlager's selections during her time in Skarżysko. She recalls that:

> Every night they came to our bunker and they selected some girls, took them out, and a few minutes later we could hear the shouts in the forest… I wasn't a bad looking girl so I figured out, okay this is going to be me next, they're going to take me. And it was *Rassenchande*.[65]

Bronia recalls that the SS men made a significant effort to hide their transgressions by killing the women they abused and attempting to "wipe up all the footsteps" to get rid of any evidence. The fear of assault was particularly strong for Bronia, since her friend's sister was a victim of such a selection.[66]

The night Polish Jew Saul Marmurek arrived in Skarżysko, the Germans:

> Had killed, from our hometown, two or three girls, and some other girls. They took some beautiful girls from the camp, chosen women. They took them out, they partied. They did what they had to do, probably sex, and then they killed them. And they were buried in the forest right behind the camp.[67]

As the testimony belonging to Saul and the other survivors above indicates, it was well known among inmates that Jewish women endured heinous sexualized violence on a daily basis in Skarżysko. Many women in the camp were fearful of such violence, such as Polish Jew Helen

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[64] Sonia Nightingale, interview by Allen Charney.
[65] Bronia Shlagbaum, interview by Robert Shostak, *USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive,* University of Southern California, Los Angeles; N. Miami Beach, Florida, U.S., January 9, 1996, Interview Code 10747, Tape 1, Segment 7.
[66] Bronia Shlagbaum, interview by Robert Shostak.
[67] Saul Marmurek, interview by Linda Davidson, *USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive,* University of Southern California, Los Angeles; Downsview, Ontario, Canada, September 9, 1995, Interview Code 6145, Tape 4, Segment 25.

Lefkowitz, who was "was afraid… I just was afraid" of being raped and murdered during her time in the camp.[68]

While sexualized violence was commonplace in the forced labour camp of Skarżysko, it also occurred in concentration and death camps. Pearl Gottesman, a Czech Jew, asserts that when she was in Auschwitz, prisoners were often raped by German soldiers who:

> [U]sed to come and select girls and they took them away. We didn't know why and how and what for. And we, two or three days later, they came back, they could hardly walk. So we asked them what happened. Well, they use[d] them. One soldier after the other, they raped them.[69]

As Pearl's testimony indicates, the rape of Jewish women was not uncommon outside of Skarżysko. While some women were taken and abused, sexualized violence often occurred when women were working in the SS quarters in the camp. As Pearl recalls, those who worked such jobs "were so lucky that they were working in a kitchen or they were sewing."[70] However, such privileged positions, while they provided access to additional food and alleviated the boredom that Pearl says made life unbearable, still carried a risk of sexualized violence. For example, when she was 20 years old, Polish Jew Freda Reiner was imprisoned in Lassowitz, a concentration camp in Śląsk, Poland. After being discharged from the infirmary for an injury to her foot, Freda was assigned a job working in a kitchen. Sometimes, SS officers would call her to do personal services for them, such as housework. While these jobs were a welcome escape from hard labour, working alone in the home of an SS officer carried a different, yet just as deadly,

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[68] Helen Lefkowitz, interview by Paula Draper, *USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive,* University of Southern California, Los Angeles; Toronto, Ontario, Canada, May 27, 1991, Interview Code 54183, Tape 2, Segments 91; 97.
[69] Pearl Gottesman, interview by Mickie Schulman, *USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive,* University of Southern California, Los Angeles; Bayside, New York, U.S., September 21, 1995, Interview Code 6992, Segment 2, Tape 10.
[70] Ibid.

risk. For example, Freda says that a man whom she describes as "the chief, the guy from the kitchen" also regularly asked her to clean for him:

> This guy weighed maybe about 400 pounds, and [was] tall, and each time [he] sent me to clean his room he came to molest me… [.] He was probably 50 years old. Each time, oh, I was petrified. I was so scared when… I went to clean his room. He was there. He want [sic] to molest me. That was so terrible. And [he was] a giant… [.] I went through so much. I was begging. I couldn't report him. I couldn't say anything. It was just terrible.[71]

Freda's fears worsened when "I didn't get my period." She recalls "thinking I'm pregnant. What's gonna happen to me? I was so naive, I didn't know what's going on."[72] Freda stopped menstruating as a result of malnutrition, rather than pregnancy, something that was common for women in the camps. However, it was also not uncommon for women who were raped to become pregnant. Such pregnancies almost always resulted in death for the woman and her unborn child unless an abortion was performed by a doctor, often a prisoner who conducted the abortion without knowledge of the camp authorities.[73]

Sexualized Brutality

As the discussion thus far makes clear, sexualized violence by Nazis was commonplace in camps across Nazi occupied Europe. Although a heavy emphasis is often placed on the victim's physical characteristics in discussions of sexualized violence in testimonies, rape and other instances of sexualized violence are about power, not simply lust or attraction. In the camps, some acts were also carried out to be humiliating and malicious in order to reinforce the

[71] Freida Reiner, interview by Leslie Bennett-Troper, *USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive,* University of Southern California, Los Angeles; Brooklyn, New York, U.S., February 9, 1996, Interview Code 10361, Tape 2, Segments 56-58.
[72] Freida Reiner, interview by Leslie Bennett-Troper.
[73] Ibid.

victim's supposed subhuman status. I borrow the term 'sexualized brutality' to describe such acts. As Beverley Chalmers argues:

> While rape may have been an act of arousal, if not passion, as well as violence, sexual brutality reflects darker motivations such as fear, hatred, disrespect, and dehumanization of the victim, or sadism, misogyny, a need for power and aggrandizement, or the establishment of superiority of the perpetrator.[74]

In many cases, survivors recall SS men carrying out acts of extreme violence simply for entertainment. Italian Jewish woman Rachel Hanan witnessed a particularly gruesome incident in Auschwitz-Birkenau in which a woman was reprimanded for stealing food. The punishment for doing so was swift and harsh; the SS would often "kill you on the spot," but sometimes they tortured prisoners before killing them. As Rachel describes:

> There were other punishment[s] they could do to you… [.] There was those dogs in the camp. They were very huge dogs. We were afraid of those dogs more than the Germans. Because they were trained to make, you know, to make, like, sex with girls. So if they want to punish you, they will take these horrible, big dogs, and they force you there to make whatever… [.] There was a French lady. And she had a beautiful daughter of 16… [.] They forced her, the girl… to do that with the dog. The mother was— was watching. The girl died, because the dog was vicious, and bad, and big, and whatever. She die[d] on the spot.[75]

After witnessing her daughter's gruesome death, the French woman committed suicide by throwing herself on the electric fence surrounding the camp. Such violence was horrific, and not an isolated incident; Polish Jew Emil Gold also recalls SS men using dogs to sexually abuse women in Auschwitz-Birkenau. In the camp, Emil worked in a labour commando tasked with clearing a river during the winter so that German boats could pass through with equipment and reinforcements to send to the Eastern front. As his commando cleared, a group of women worked on the other side of the river. One day, the SS suddenly ordered the prisoners to stop working

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[74] Chalmers, *Birth, Sex, and Abuse: Women's Voices Under Nazi Rule*, 233.
[75] Rachel Hanan, interview by Lorrin Brasg, *USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive,* University of Southern California, Los Angeles; Harare, Harare, Zimbabwe, Apr 01, 1996, Interview Code 13096, Tape 3, Segment 86.

and gather around a single spot, "and they made a show."[76] The SS, flanked by German shepherds, brought the women over. Then, "they asked all the women to undress. Maybe 20 of them. And those German dogs raped them. Sex." As Emil and his commando stood and watched, the SS forced them "to applaud what the dogs are doing." For Emil, the incident was particularly traumatizing because he knew one of girls who "was raped from [sic] the dog.":

> I had a friend from our city, she was raped. After the liberation, she committed suicide. She couldn't stand that she is married. She married an English soldier. And she went to England and from third floor she dropped down.[77]

Emil finishes his story by saying in a somber tone, "I witness[ed] this. I'm the only one alive who witness[ed] this. I can't believe it."[78] Clearly, the trauma from such incidents was not limited to those who directly experienced the violence. As Emil's testimony suggests, such sexual brutality left an imprint on Jewish witnesses as well.

Ilse Zilversmit remembers that when she was in Bergen-Belsen, a concentration camp in Germany, an SS man "had his fun with me one day." Ilse recalls that the SS man had previously "made fun of me… He said, 'you're not a Jew.' I said, 'what do you mean 'you're not a Jew?'' He said, 'oh, you're the child of a misstep of your mother's.'"[79] Then, one day:

> This German, he had a bicycle…[.] And he ran his bicycle up to, in between my buttocks. He thought that was hilarious. Of course, I ran away. And I still hear him standing there, laughing his head off [like] that was the funniest thing he had done. Like I said, he had his fun with me. [He wanted to] see if he could provoke me.[80]

This act seems to have been carried out with the intention of upsetting Ilse enough that she lashed out, perhaps to give the German reason to punish her. Ilse was wise to this, noting that

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[76] Emil Gold, interview by Toni Binstock, *USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive,* University of Southern California, Los Angeles; Denver, Colorado, U.S., September 05, 1996, Interview Code 19178, Tape 2, Segment 55.
[77] Emil Gold, interview by Toni Binstock.
[78] Ibid.
[79] Ilse Zilversmit, interviewer unknown, *USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive,* University of Southern California, Los Angeles; Montreal, Quebec, Canada, March 23, 1994, Interview Code 54825, Tape 2, Segment 63.
[80] Ilse Zilversmit, interviewer unknown.

"you better not be provoked. You better just keep as quiet as you could," which is exactly what she did.[81]

Such brutality was often carried out by SS men, but SS women also committed acts of extreme cruelty.[82] In some cases, SS women are described by survivors as being worse than SS men in terms of the violence they inflicted upon prisoners. In a concentration camp near Leipzig, Germany, Polish Jewish woman Helen Zisman experienced such abuse:

> An SS woman abused me, sexually. Not [just] that she abused use me, but sadistically, sadistically. She came every night on my— on my bed. What she did I can't repeat it. Can't, even now… I want my children or my grandchildren to know this, though. But it was sadistically [sic], it's like, murderous.[83]

Shortly after, Helen was liberated. However, her pain didn't stop there. When she was liberated by the Russian Army in 1945, she endured more violence. As "if the concentration camps weren't enough," Helen says, the Russians "fixed us up after the war." When the interviewer asks what Helen means by this, she describes how the Russian soldiers killed and "sexually abused" the women she was staying with. To avoid being raped, Rachel jumped out of the window of the house they were in, breaking her leg.[84] Unfortunately, many women who survived sexualized violence in the camps endured similar abuse when liberated by the Russians.[85]

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[81] Ibid.
[82] Daniel Patrick Brown, *The Camp Women: The Female Auxiliaries Who Assisted the SS in Running the Nazi Concentration Camp System* (Atglen, PA: Schiffer Military History, 2002), 9.
[83] Helen Zisman, interview by Doris Epstein, *USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive,* University of Southern California, Los Angeles; Toronto, Ontario, Canada, March 2, 1993, Interview Code 54386, Tape 1, Segment 24.
[84] Helen Zisman, interview by Doris Epstein.
[85] See, for example, the testimony of the following women in the VHA: Bluma Samuels, interview by Carol Stulberg, *USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive,* University of Southern California, Los Angeles; Los Angeles, California, U.S., February 9, 1995, Interview Code 832, Tape 2, Segment 51; Donia Blumenfeld Clenman, interview by Nancy Rubenstein, *USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive,* University of Southern California, Los Angeles; Toronto, Ontario, Canada, August 25, 1987, Interview Code 54137, Tape 2, Segment 86; Manya Horowitz, interview by Toni Binstock, *USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive,* University of Southern California, Los Angeles; Denver, Colorado, U.S., October 1, 1995, Interview Code 7301, Tape 4, Segment 94.

Sexualized Violence against Male Prisoners

Women were by no means the only victims of sexualized violence in the camps. Polish Jew Sam Lubat remembers that in Ellrich, a subcamp of Mittelbau-Dora concentration camp, and Buna, a slave labour camp in the Auschwitz compound, as well as Auschwitz itself, it was common for German guards to take Jewish men "to sleep with them."[86] He asserts that they took young boys, used them for sexual purposes, and then "gave [them] better [food] to eat." At age fourteen in Fürstengrube, a concentration camp in Śląsk, Poland, Czech Jew Klaus Pollak experienced such abuse firsthand.[87] One evening, the German camp authorities asked various prisoners whether they could play instruments and sing. Klaus volunteered and was told that "if you do a good job, you're going to get rewarded." He "had no clue what reward I was going to get" but the idea was appealing. Klaus sang and played instruments for around half an hour, enjoying himself as the guards sang along. As a reward, Klaus was given a piece of bread, which pleased him. Then:

> They said, 'well, you're going to get two pieces of bread, but you've got to do something else, too.' So what it amounted [to] was that three or four of these guys decided, well, they would like to have some type of homosexual, you might say, a confrontation… [.] They wanted to satisfy their desires. And the best thing they could come up with were some young boys like me.[88]

Klaus continues telling the story, his testimony is dotted with long pauses as he gathers his thoughts:

> And I was cooperating, and they didn't force me into anything more severe than, than oral sex at the— at the beginning. But later on, it became a little bit more severe and became where they wanted anal sex, and they wanted things that I hadn't any idea [about]… [.] I

[86] Sam Lubat, interview by Naomi Rappaport, *USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive,* University of Southern California, Los Angeles; Englewood, New Jersey, U.S., September 9, 1998, Interview Code 47407, Tape 4, Segment 101.
[87] Klaus Pollak, interview by Susan Shear, *USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive,* University of Southern California. Los Angeles; Westminster, Colorado, U.S., October 22, 1997, Interview Code 34668, Tape 6, Segment 30.
[88] Klaus Pollak, interview by Susan Shear.

> didn't know what to expect… [.] When you— when you are starved, the last thing you want is any kind of sex.[89]

Although he had absolutely no interest in the activities being forced on him, Klaus recalls that hunger was more powerful than any other feeling at the time. He weighed "around 80 pounds, maybe a little less," and by performing sex acts for these German men, Klaus received some food which gave him enough strength to survive:[90]

> And this went on nightly. And I decided that I had no choice. This is what kept me alive. I saw people around me dying, and I decided that perhaps that I'd rather do that than die.[91]

When the interviewer asks whether any prisoner offered him comfort or whether Klaus confided in anyone, he says no: "I'm not sure how many people knew about this. This was done in a lot of secrecy." Additionally, he was a sheltered young boy with few friends, and the other prisoners were only concerned with their own hunger. Essentially, "there wasn't anyone there that I felt even gave a hoot what's going on."[92] As a result, Klaus stayed quiet and kept the abuse to himself, a common reaction among male survivors of sexualized violence.[93] Yet, in remaining silent, Klaus enabled his own survival. As is further discussed in Chapter Two, such silence can be considered a form of resistance, as it led to survival which defied the Nazi exterminationist agenda.

Elsa Breuer, a Hungarian Jew, recalls that "German officers abused young boys" in Auschwitz-Birkenau and laments the lack of attention paid to such violence. She tacks the story onto her testimony regarding her time in the camp, almost as an afterthought:

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[89] Ibid.
[90] Although this is not an example of bartered sex, it is an example of the ambiguous nature that sexualized violence in the camps sometimes took on and a "choiceless choice," a concept discussed further in the following chapter.
[91] Ibid.
[92] Ibid.
[93] Dorota Glowacka, "Sexual Violence Against Men and Boys during the Holocaust: A Genealogy of (Not-so-Silent) Silence," *German History* 39, no. 1 (2021): 78.

> I have to tell you something which I left out. Very important. Once we were waiting for the bath, naked, and there was a block [with] windows. From the windows young, beautiful boys were looking at us, well fed. I knew something was wrong, not okay. Now, now it is 1998, nobody ever, ever talks, writes about this block full of young boys. And nobody ever told you in books, I read everything, all the history books [t]hat I could… [.] All. And the writers, and the survivors, nobody ever tells you that the German officers use[d] young boys. Nobody. Now it is 1998, today it is still a taboo to talk about it? I am absolutely horrified.[94]

Elsa's condemnation of this silence still rings true today. While sexualized violence against female prisoners has received an increasing amount of attention from scholars in recent years, the abuse of boys in the camps by Nazis, is recently receiving the scholarly attention it requires and rarely discussed by survivors in testimony.[95]

Forced Sterilization

Forced sterilization was a widespread form of sexualized violence that occurred against Jewish prisoners during the Holocaust. Considered an act of sexualized violence by the World Health Organization because it is most often carried out against women and girls with the goal of preventing reproduction, both female and male prisoners were subject to sterilization in the camps.[96]

Beginning in March 1941, sterilization experiments were conducted in Auschwitz and Ravensbrück, among other camps.[97] Although the Nazi regime ultimately intended to murder all

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[94] Klaus Pollak, interview by Susan Shear.
[95] Two recent works in this area are survivor Nate Leipciger's 2015 memoir *The Weight of Freedom* and Dorota Glowacka's 2020 article S*exual Violence against Men and Boys during the Holocaust: A Genealogy of (Not-So-Silent) Silence,* both of which add great insight into the experiences of sexualized violence against male prisoners in the camps.
[96] Etienne G. Krug, "Sexual Violence," in *World Report on Violence and Health,* ed. Etienne G. Krug, Linda L. Dahlberg, James A. Mercy, Anthony B. Zwi, and Rafael Lozano (Geneva: World Health Organization, 2002), 170.
[97] Chalmers, *Birth, Sex, and Abuse: Women's Voices Under Nazi Rule*, 25-26, 125. Although sterilizations in the camps began in 1941, sterilizations carried out against disabled Germans and those considered "asocial" began in

Jews, they also sought to exploit them for various purposes before their death. Thus, in addition to exploiting prisoners for labour, Nazi doctors such as Carl Clauberg and Horst Schumann conducted sterilization experiments on prisoners to fulfil their own "research" purposes. Heinrich Himmler, *Reichsführer* (chief) of the SS, approved of such experiments because, as his assistant Rudolph Brandt stated at the Nuremberg Trials, Himmler:

> Was extremely interested in the development of a cheap and rapid sterilization method which could be used against enemies of Germany, such as the Russians, Poles, and Jews. One hoped thereby not only to defeat the enemy but to exterminate him. The capacity for work of the sterilized persons could be exploited by Germany, while the danger of propagation would be eliminated.[98]

Himmler thus supported sterilization experiments because he wanted a quick, inexpensive, and effective method of sterilization so that Germany could exploit prisoner labour to the fullest extent possible before murdering those who did the work.[99] Thus, although "by 1941 it was the accepted policy of the Third Reich to exterminate the Jewish population of Germany and the occupied countries[,] [b]ecause of the pressing need for laborers, sterilization of Jews able to work was considered as an alternative to outright extermination."[100] Castration via x-ray was a quick and inexpensive form of sterilization and was also favoured because prisoners did not immediately realize the effects of the radiation on their reproductive capabilities.[101] However, sterilization was also carried out via medication, chemicals, and surgery.[102]

The full approval of such experiments resulted in widespread sexualized violence, particularly in Auschwitz. In that camp, Polish Jew Sam Itzkowitz's friend was sterilized and eventually died from the injuries sustained during the sterilization procedure. Sam was tasked

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1933 when the Law for the Prevention of Genetically Diseased Offspring made sterilization compulsory for those who were considered to be of "inferior stock."

[98] Office of Military Government for Germany (U.S.), *Nuremberg Military Tribunals Indictments*, vol. 1, 695.

[99] Chalmers, *Birth, Sex, and Abuse: Women's Voices Under Nazi Rule*, 123; 126.

[100] *Nuremberg Military Tribunals Indictments*, vol. 1, 695.

[101] Ibid.

[102] Chalmers, *Birth, Sex, and Abuse: Women's Voices Under Nazi Rule*, 126.

with fixing bunks that had fallen into disrepair in Block 10, where German doctors conducted medical experiments, including sterilization, on prisoners. One day, Sam saw a young girl, about 18 years old. When he came in the next day, the girl was gone. When he asked the *blockova* ("female block leader," a woman prisoner placed in charge of a block) 'what happened to her?' the woman replied, "they sterilized her yesterday. And she's laying there on the bed, she's dying." Sam was "shocked" and upset that "I couldn't do nothing [sic] about it." The girl died two days later, like many victims of such experiments.[103]

This was Sam's first encounter with a victim of sterilization experiments, but it was not his last. Sam was later told to repair the bunks in Block 20, the prisoners' hospital block. There, Sam saw his two good friends Aaron Blum and Henry Lasek. The men were lying in bed, which prompted Sam to ask, "what happened?" The men replied that the medical personnel "'cut [our] testicles out yesterday.'" A few months earlier, they said, "Mengele selected a bunch of us Jewish boys and he took us in into a room and put us in a seat like a bicycle saddle and radiated our groin." The next day, Henry's "whole front turned black." He told Sam that "all the hair, the pubic hair on my groin fell out and I do not feel my penis. And I don't feel my testicles.'"[104] A couple of months after the radiation, Henry started to feel better. He told Sam he was "feeling my testicles, but I was hurting something awful." Then:

> Mengele came in and picked all of us out, [put] all of us back into that infirmary, made every one of us masturbate. And as we were having an orgasm, the orderly took a peg and stuck it in our rectum and pressed on the semen bag to squeeze out all the semen. And as soon as you do that, so the [nurses] on the bed strapped us in, [made a] major incision in the groin, pulled the testicle out, and put it in a bowl. [Henry] says, 'and that damn orderly doctor that did the operation was a Polish doctor!' And he says, 'I was

[103] Sam Itzkowitz, interview by Miriam Davidow, *USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive,* University of Southern California, Los Angeles; Richmond, Virginia, U.S., June 7, 1996, Interview Code 15815, Tape 6, Segments 34-35.
[104] Sam Itzkowitz, interview by Miriam Davidow.

> having my, my orgasm and he told me he says, you better make it a big one because this is the last one you're going to have for the rest of your life.' This is how cruel it was.[105]

Ultimately, "Adam Blum survived. Henry Lasek did not." Sam saw his friend "a few weeks later," although he had "never seen such a sight in my life." Henry, he says:

> Was like a skeleton. His voice has changed. [He] looks like a female. No, the hair on his face. No trace of his hair… He says, 'what's the use. I'm a vegetable. I don't feel nothing. I don't know nothing. I'll never be able to have sex. Even if I survive.' I say, 'Henry for Pete's sake! After the war they'll invent a way to reverse it, they'll put some testicles in you.' He says, he says, 'good thinking.' He says, 'fat chance.' A week later he was dead. He resigned. He just gave up… [.] Most of them that had operation died on the operating table or died after the operation. But I'm just telling you about those two, that I knew.[106]

Sam's vivid description of sterilization encapsulates the pain and suffering that victims of such experiments endured. Later on, Sam witnessed sterilizations himself. By looking through the window of Block 18, Sam "could look in and see what was going on. And I heard the screams and the hollering of those poor victims that were being castrated."[107] Sam's story, like that of Emil's above, illustrates the trauma that sexualized violence inflicted on not just victims, but also other Jewish prisoners who witnessed the violence. Seeing the sterilizations and the impact they had on his fellow prisoners clearly influenced Sam, whose sadness and disgust is clear as he tells the story.

Polish Jewish survivor Jack Oran was also sterilized, although his experience in Auschwitz-Birkenau was different from that of Sam's friends. One day, SS personnel entered Jack's barracks and:

> Took some young people and I was among them. And we were taken to the women's hospital, the women's camp hospital. And we were sterilized. It didn't hurt and we got an extra portion of bread and we didn't have to go to work that day. It was a winner. How little did I know.[108]

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[105] Ibid.
[106] Ibid.
[107] Ibid.
[108] Jack Oran, interview by Renée Firestone, *USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive,* University of Southern California, Los Angeles; Dallas, Texas, U.S., October 11, 1996, Interview Code 20926, Tape 2, Segment 10.

The procedure was simple: "It was a machine that you put your, your sexual parts on it. And the machine buzzed. That's all it was. That's what they call sterilization."[109] In part because it was so swift, Jack was unaware of what the machine did: "Little did we know the consequences of this.[110] Like Jack, many other victims of forced sterilization, did not realize what had been done to them until well after liberation. For instance, Polish Jew Julia Kay recalls that immediately after she arrived in Ravensbrück in 1944, she and the other women were taken for a shower. Later, the SS took the women "to see a doctor and the doctor injected [us]. We didn't know what [it was]. How could we know what? They could do anything they wanted with us."[111] Julia was given injections in her vagina. She didn't feel pain from the procedure and did not know what the injections had done to her body. She only realized what had happened when:

> I was liberated and I wanted to have a baby. And I couldn't. And I went to a doctor. So he said, 'how could you? They sterilized you.'[112]

Julia's experience was not unusual; many prisoners were unaware of the results of such experiments by design. If prisoners were ignorant as to the nature of the experiments, then there was less of a chance that they would physically resist. When Mike Staner, a Polish Jew, was in Krakau-Plaszow, a concentration camp in Kraków, Poland, he was also subjected to unknown medical experiments. He and a few other young boys were selected and taken to the camp sick bay. There, Mike recalls:

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[109] Jack Oran, interview by Renée Firestone.
[110] Ibid.
[111] Julia Kay, interview by Jennifer Resnick, *USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive,* University of Southern California, Los Angeles; N. Miami beach, Florida, U.S., October 13, 1995, Interview Code 7622, Tape 3, Segment 57.
[112] Julia Kay, interview by Jennifer Resnick.

> They didn't tell you what they're doing. They've been giving you [sic] some injections. And you didn't know what for. And they've been then taking [sic] blood for tests and stuff like that.[113]

According to Mike, this process happened every second week or so. It was brief, and he "was a bit drowsy" after each time it occurred: "For five minutes [they] do what they have to do and they let you go." The SS doctor offered no explanation as to what was happening, and as Mike recalls, "you cannot ask. Who [are] you going to ask for reasons? The German doctor, the SS doctor?"[114] Like Jack and Julia, Mike discovered what had happened postwar, only "by coincidence, after [I had] gotten married and realized that I cannot have children."[115]

When he was in Auschwitz, Polish Jew Chuna Tarnegol was sterilized. He recalls being forced to sit on a big, white electric machine that was warm, with an SS doctor standing behind him holding "a big stick" to prevent the men from moving. The entire procedure took about 20 minutes. Six months later:

> Josef Mengele, he called, he says, I got to be there the next day [at] 10 o'clock… I came there to him. He called me in. I was sitting with him face to face. He asked me all kinds of questions. If I can make sex [sic]. He says, 'here I got some nice girls standing outside all nude.' He says, 'you go take any kind of girl you want. Go enjoy.' I went out, I looked, and I came back. I say, 'I got no feeling.' … [.] He said to me now, 'one day, you need to come back to see me.'[116]

Chuna does not specify who the girls were, but it is likely Mengele selected female prisoners from the hospital or elsewhere in the camp for Chuna to have sex with. One day, later on, the *Blockältester* (block leader) of Chuna's block told him, "you got to go [sic] see Josef Mengele at 10 o'clock. So when I came there, he said to me, 'you, you're going now.' He didn't tell me

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[113] Mike Staner, interview by Leah Werner, *USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive,* University of Southern California, Los Angeles; Coombabah, Brisbane, Queensland, Australia, May 16, 1996, Interview Code 15087, Tape 2, Segment 15.
[114] Mike Staner, interview by Leah Werner.
[115] Ibid.
[116] Chuna Tarnegol, interview by Gerry Singer, *USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive,* University of Southern California, Los Angeles; Montreal, Quebec, Canada, August 21, 2001, Interview Code 54502, Tape 1, Segment 37.

where."[117] Chuna was sent outside where six SS men, armed with machine guns, forced him and eight other boys to walk from Birkenau to Auschwitz. Once they reached Auschwitz, the boys were placed in "a special place… like for sick people," likely the prisoners' hospital. Chuna remembers being given a bed, getting shaved, and having "red stuff" rubbed on his body. "Then came the doctor," Chuna says, who "gave me a needle in the back," which froze him from the waist down. Then, the doctor cut Chuna's left testicle open and "put the stitches on right away, and then I was not feeling nothing."[118] Chuna was placed outside, where he was unable to move for "a day and a half."[119]

Sylvia Amar, a Greek Jew, describes very vividly the process of sterilization that she underwent in Auschwitz. Unlike the survivors mentioned above, however, Sylvia was made aware of what was happening to her thanks to a fellow prisoner working in the hospital block. Shortly after she entered the camp, she was taken to Block 10, where there were 200 other women. Sylvia realized that the block was an experimentation block only after she and her sister were called downstairs and doctor Carl Clauberg "started the experiment." Sylvia recalls that Clauberg "put two injections [in her uterus] and clogged the tubes." The process was done without anesthesia, but Sylvia remembers that "we was [sic] not hurting. And nothing went wrong after that. I was normal in every sense." When asked by the interviewer whether the other women suffered as a result of the procedure, Sylvia recalls that "no… [there] was no suffering."[120]

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[117] Chuna Tarnegol, interview by Gerry Singer.
[118] Ibid.
[119] Ibid.
[120] Sylvia Amar, interview by Mahli Lieblich, *USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive,* University of Southern California, Los Angeles; South Hallandale, Florida, U.S., August 24, 1995, Interview Code 6000, Tape 2, Segment 41.

Sylvia only knew what had been done to her during the procedure because she asked the woman working in the block:

> What they did, and then she explained [it] to me. And she said, 'don't worry, when you— if you go out of here, you could probably have an operation and this will be fine.' But it wasn't, so she told me that to make me feel good. But it wasn't so because I went to many doctors when I was free.[121]

Although "it was really nasty" to be experimented upon, Sylvia recalls that "to be alive, this was good." She considered herself lucky to be in Block 10, because "working outside was terrible. Or throwing [the gas] in the gas chamber, that was bad." At least, she remembers, in Block 10 "you were in good health. You eat [sic] well. We were working with knitting. We used to make [sic] enough things to eat. We were never hungry again." Sylvia says that this one injection was the only one she and the other women were given, and that she was not examined by Dr. Clauberg again. However, another doctor removed one of her ovaries. As a result of these experiments, Sylvia was unable to have children after the war, like countless other survivors of Nazi medical experiments.[122]

Many survivors of Nazi sterilization medical experiments remained unaware of what happened to them until after liberation; survivors such as Sylvia appear to be the exception to the rule. Further research that examines the impact of such experiments on survivors will help us better understand how they reconciled their experiences, particularly when they discovered the fact of their infertility postwar.

As the stories above demonstrate, sexualized violence inflicted upon Jewish women and men in forced labour, concentration, and death camps was not uncommon and took a variety of different forms. Often, it was the result of bad luck; those who endured such violence are in no

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[121] Sylvia Amar, interview by Mahli Lieblich.
[122] Ibid.

way responsible for their experiences. Although the lack of knowledge about such experiments made it difficult for prisoners to resist, as we see in Chapter Two, resistance to sterilization nevertheless occurred. The significance of luck cannot be downplayed; survivors themselves identify luck as a recurring theme in their testimonies. The concept of luck is picked up in the following chapter, which offers an examination of how prisoners vigorously resisted the violence they experienced in a variety of ways.

CHAPTER TWO: JEWISH RESISTANCE TO SEXUALIZED VIOLENCE

Polish Jew Louis Lefkowitz asserts that in Riga-Kaiserwald, a concentration camp in Latvia, the SS "took advantage, again, of the ladies and the women" in the camp.[1] When asked by the interviewer to elaborate, Louis replies flatly, "they raped them. They raped them. The girls didn't say nothing, no. God forbid if you were to say something in camp [sic] they would shoot you."[2] Defiance to camp personnel and authorities was dangerous and the punishment for resistance was death. However, despite the risk that resistance to sexualized violence carried, many prisoners challenged their abusers in various ways, and such resistance did not always end in murder, as is evidenced by the testimony in this chapter. In fact, the testimonies available in the VHA seem to suggest that resistance could go unpunished and result in one's survival, even in circumstances in which perpetrators themselves were punished by their superiors for violating racial laws.

Acts of resistance and the mere fact that they occurred are significant as they strengthen our understanding of how Jews opposed sexualized violence, a form of violence whose very existence was denied for decades. This chapter, organized into a typology of ways victims resisted sexualized violence, outlines how Jews resisted such violence to challenge the horrors they endured, avoid sexual abuse, and survive. I separate methods of resistance into three categories: avoidance, verbal, and physical. In some cases, survivors employed more than one form of resistance in their efforts to avoid sexualized violence. Thus, the groupings I employ are more porous than these categories suggest. While I recognize that methods of resistance were not always clearcut, and in some cases Jews resisted in multiple different ways, the typology I set out

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[1] Louis Lefkowitz, interview by Rhoda Daum-Kenner, *USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive,* University of Southern California, Los Angeles; Mt. Vernon, New York, U.S., March 30, 1995, Interview Code 1764, Tape 2, Segment 47.
[2] Louis Lefkowitz, interview by Rhoda Daum-Kenner.

helps determine how and when different forms of resistance were utilized, which allows us to honor victims and survivors and to better understand how Jews in the camps challenged their Nazi tormentors.

This chapter also separates sterilization from other forms of sexualized violence in an effort to explore men's resistance to sexualized violence. It has been established that Jewish men experienced sexualized violence in the camps.[3] However, the scope of research conducted for this project did not include explicit evidence of men resisting sexualized violence against camp authorities except in the case of forced sterilization. This does not mean that men failed to resist other forms of sexualized violence. Rather, the relative lack of testimony concerning men's resistance to sexualized violence compared to that of women likely reflects the stigma experienced by men who endured such abuse which prevented them from speaking about their experiences. Additionally, given the rampant homophobia within the SS[4], it is likely that many men did not survive the sexualized violence they endured, whether or not they were homosexual. Thus, as a reflection of my findings, men's resistance to sexualized violence is not mentioned until the latter part of this chapter in a discussion of resistance to sterilization which details how women and men resisted in gendered ways.

It is important to note that the main concern of this study is not whether resistance was effective in preventing sexualized violence. An emphasis on whether resistance was effective carries the possibility of creating an unnecessary hierarchy among survivors. That someone resisted sexualized violence does not grant them a higher moral standing than someone who did

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[3] Dorota Glowacka, "Sexual Violence Against Men and Boys during the Holocaust: A Genealogy of (Not-so-Silent) Silence." *German History* 39, no. 1 (2021); Tommy J. Curry, "Thinking through the Silence: Theorizing the Rape of Jewish Males during the Holocaust through Survivor Testimonies." *Holocaust Studies* 27, no. 4 (2021).

[4] See, for example, Geoffrey J. Giles, "Legislating Homophobia in the Third Reich: The Radicalization of Prosecution Against Homosexuality by the Legal Profession," *German History* 23, no. 3 (2005); Jason Crouthamel, "Homosexuality and Comradeship: Destabilizing the Hegemonic Masculine Ideal in Nazi Germany," *Central European History* 51, no. 3 (2018).

not resist, nor does it mean that one response was braver than the other. Life in the camps was full of what Holocaust scholar Lawrence Langer, in his writing on choice and morality in the context of the death camps, has termed "choiceless choices."[5] That is, decisions made under circumstances in which there were really no meaningful choices available. For instance, in many cases, when one prisoner avoided sexualized violence, another was simply taken in their place. Thus, to save oneself often meant sacrificing another. Such instances also fall under Italian Jewish survivor Primo Levi's concept of the "grey zone" which complicates the urge to binarize the oppressed and the oppressor. Himself a "privileged" prisoner[6], Levi argues that the grey zone is a space inhabited by those who compromised with their oppressors, to various degrees, in exchange for better treatment. He also emphasizes the necessity of withholding judgement on such victims and their actions.[7] Essentially, praising those who resisted while ignoring those who did not suggests a hierarchy of victimhood which serves no purpose but to further subjugate those who endured the Holocaust. I argue that in looking at individual examples of resistance to sexualized violence in the camps, we can work towards a more nuanced understanding of what constituted resistance in the Holocaust.[8] In doing so, I assert that any effort to survive constituted resistance; no form of resistance utilized to challenge the Nazis should be prioritized over another, whether one remained silent or fought back physically.

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[5] Lawrence Langer, "The Dilemma of Choice in the Deathcamps," *Centerpoint: A Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* 4, no. 1 (Fall 1980).

[6] Within the Nazi camp universe there was a hierarchy structure based on nationality and reason for incarceration in which some prisoners had clear powers, privileges, and perks over others. The term 'privileged prisoner' refers to those in the camps who held a position which offered them access to benefits unavailable to other prisoners, such as additional food and clothing, light work duties, or access to information.

[7] Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved: Sommersi e i Salvati. English*. First Vintage International ed. New York: Vintage International, 1989.

[8] Wolf Gruner, "'The Germans Should Expel the Foreigner Hitler': Open Protest and Other Forms of Jewish Defiance in Nazi Germany," *Yad Vashem Studies*, Vol. 39, no. 2 (2011): 13-14.

For Jews, survival was the ultimate form of resistance to a regime that tried to destroy them. Survivors often mention luck, miracles, and chance in their discussions of avoiding sexualized violence and surviving the camps, and my analysis of resistance emphasizes the agency of prisoners. However, one's ability to avoid sexualized violence or survive was not a result of luck or agency. Rather, it was the factor of luck *in* agency. Opportunities for resistance were often the result of chance or whim, and both survival and avoidance of sexualized violence were often contingent on luck. Our understanding of agency is thus broadened by the fact that while prisoners adopted strategies of resistance, whether they were successful and whether they survived, was often a matter of luck. Each person who shared their testimony was trying to survive. The difference is that while some were lucky, others were not.

Preventative Measures, Avoidance, and Ingenuity

As established in Chapter One, Jewish prisoners in the camps were well aware of the threat of sexualized violence by camp authorities and knew that such behaviour violated the Nazis' own laws regarding "race." As Polish survivor Louis Lefkowitz notes, the rape of Jewish women went directly against the Nazis' own ideology: "they're supposed to be a pure nation, a pure race, you know."[9] To cover up evidence of their crimes, the Nazis who abused Jewish prisoners often (although not always) murdered them. As Polish Jew Harry Koltun describes in Skarżysko-Kamienna, a forced labour camp in Skarżysko-Kamienna, Poland:

> There were a lot of girls, beautiful girls… [There] was a selection one day, the Gestapo SS came in and took out a few Jewish girls, they took them into a forest, and they never

[9] Louis Lefkowitz, interview by Rhoda Daum-Kenner.

> came back. They did what they had to do sexually, and they killed them. Nice, nice looking girls.[10]

Harry's description of the girls as "beautiful" and "nice looking" provides insight into how prisoners sought to reconcile the fact of such abuse. In their efforts to understand why sexualized violence occurred despite German laws prohibiting *Rassenschande,* some survivors link appearance with motivations for sexualized violence. The assumed connection between beauty and sexualized violence meant that many prisoners sought to prevent such violence by making themselves appear as unattractive as possible. For example, when Polish Jew Sabina Frydman was in Tschenstochau, a concentration camp in Czestochowa, Poland, she was aware of rumours that the Gestapo was "taking out girls, raping, and killing" them, and knew that "a lot of Jewish girls died this way."[11] Fearful that the Gestapo would rape and kill them also, Sabina and the other women in her *kommando* "smeared our faces with dirt to look ugly, to look filthy" when they walked back from the field in which they worked.[12] Polish Jew Ethel Klein remembers taking similar measures when she was in Skarżysko. Ethel and a few other women were working in a stone quarry about a mile away from the camp. One day, "a few attractive German guys, tall guys" came to the women's work site and "picked out five women… [.] They raped them, they brought them back through the camp, and [they] shot them."[13] Ethel and the other girls in her work commando "were frightened to death." To prevent something similar from happening to

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[10] Harry Koltun, interview by Sheila Frohlich, *USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive,* University of Southern California, Los Angeles; North York, Ontario, Canada, September 8, 1996, Interview Code 19656, Tape 2, Segment 15.
[11] Sabina Frydman, interview by Taffy Gould, *USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive,* University of Southern California, Los Angeles; Golden Beach, Florida, U.S., December 11, 1995, Interview Code 9941, Tape 4, Segment 93.
[12] Sabina Frydman, interview by Taffy Gould.
[13] Ethel Klein, interview by Benny Osher, *USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive,* University of Southern California, Los Angeles; Toronto, Ontario, Canada, July 26, 1989, Interview Code 54163, Tape 1, Segment 19.

them, the women "used to smear our faces with whatever, [because] we [did not] want look attractive to them."[14]

While some women dirtied their faces, others covered their heads in an attempt to appear unattractive. When Milla Doktorczyk, a Polish Jew, was in Skarżysko, she worked in a factory alongside her friend Gochma Eisenberg. One day, the girls were in the factory when "a German" came and whisked Gochma away from her machine. Then, multiple Germans "raped her a couple times, everybody, and after they killed her… [.] They raped her there, right in the middle [of the factory]. One after another one."[15] After witnessing "so many [incidents] like that," Milla, fourteen at the time, tried to make herself look as inconspicuous as possible to avoid Gochma's fate: "I wasn't, like, presentable, my hair was [not] done, I didn't have hair, I will never [sic] tie my scarf off my head, I wasn't dressed [well]."[16] Helen Lefkowitz, a Polish Jew, did the same in Skarżysko. She was aware that "[t]here was a lot of incidents" in which the camp authorities took young women who "never came back":

> What they did with them, who knows. We could hear shots afterwards, middle of the night. In the morning, they shot them and they buried them, then they took some others to bury them in the camp.[17]

When she went to work, Helen wore the blandest clothing she could find and would "just put that kerchief on my head" to avoid attracting attention.[18]

Efforts to alter one's appearance in an attempt to avoid sexualized violence were also used by women who worked in the SS quarters and often found themselves alone with SS men.

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[14] Ethel Klein, interview by Benny Osher.
[15] Milla Doktorczyk, interview by Myrna Riback, *USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive,* University of Southern California, Los Angeles; North York, Ontario, Canada, May 10, 1996, Interview Code 15012, Tape 2, Segments 56-57.
[16] Milla Doktorczyk, interview by Myrna Riback.
[17] Helen Lefkowitz, interview by Paula Draper, *USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive,* University of Southern California, Los Angeles; Toronto, Ontario, Canada, May 27, 1991, Interview Code 54183, Tape 2, Segments 91, 97.
[18] Helen Lefkowitz, interview by Paula Draper.

When she was in Reigersfeld, a forced labour camp in Germany, Ida Russ, a German Jew, "worked in the kitchen… for the SS."[19] One day, Ida was ordered to clean the SS quarters, a task which rendered her "petrified. I was so afraid." To avoid sexualized violence, Ida put "a thing on my head… so they would think I'm— I'm old and ugly."[20] Ida "was shaking all the time, [hoping] nothing should [sic] happen to me there." She managed to avoid sexualized violence during her time in the camp, an outcome which she attributes to altering her appearance.

Some male prisoners, such as Gottfried Bloch, a Czech Jew, connected not only women's appearance, but also their demeanor, to their risk of sexualized violence in the camps. Gottfried was in the prisoner's hospital in Auschwitz-Birkenau when a large transport of Hungarian Jews arrived and the camp next to his became the Hungarian women's camp. Gottfried felt sorry for the women and would try to talk to them:

> There was an electrically charged fence between the two camps, our hospital camp and that Hungarian camp. They came as close as they could come, and there were some difficulties in communications. There were a few that talked a little bit Slovak, and we usually talked Czech so we could communicate, but more or less we communicate[d] by movement, gesture. [21]

Gottfried became friendly with one of the girls who "spoke a little German." The girl told Gottfried that one day in the washroom, she "was raped by one of the SS people… [.] [S]he thought that this was the worst thing. She had never had any contact with a man, and that was the worst thing that can happen to her." The girl, fearing another attack, said to Gottfried, "'I wonder if he comes again [sic]?'" Gottfried assumed that "the greatest fear, like in [a] rape traumatized

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[19] Ida Russ, interview by Rachelle Cohen, *USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive,* University of Southern California, Los Angeles; Beverly Hills, California, U.S., December 2, 1997, Interview Code 35966, Tape 3, Segment 79.
[20] Ida Russ, interview by Rachelle Cohen.
[21] Gottfried Bloch, interview by Dana Schwartz, *USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive,* University of Southern California, Los Angeles; Los Angeles, California, U.S., September 23, 1994, Interview Code 107, Tape 3, Segment 18.

young woman, is 'what if it happens again?'"[22] In response, Gottfried "told her what to do", advising the young woman to be strong and steadfast:

> I said, 'you just make yourself as tall as you can be and don't look at him… [.] Just look into the emptiness. Ignore, but don't face. Don't confront. You look like anyone looks. There's no reason why you should be more in danger than anybody else.'[23]

Gottfried ultimately "lost contact" with the girl when she left the camp with a work transport and thus never found out if she endured further abuse, but he took pride in helping the woman.[24]

While some women sought to prevent sexualized violence by altering their appearance or standing tall, others bribed fellow prisoners to avoid would-be perpetrators. When Polish Jew Luba Malz was in Skarżysko, camp authorities would come into her barracks and ask the "house mother" (the woman in charge of the barracks, also referred to as a *blockova*) to supply girls for the men to use for their own pleasure: "One night a couple of Germans came up and they looked down, and they told the… house mother… 'I want 20 girls under the age of 50.'"[25] Luba, fearful because she was well under the age of 50 at the time, went to the bathroom to avoid being selected. Thus, when the house mother "came to my bed, [it] was empty." Another girl in Luba's barracks told the house mother that Luba worked the "nightshift [and was] at work," which was untrue. The house mother, faced with a "choiceless choice" and required to fulfil the men's orders, instead took Luba's cousin, who "came up a couple hours later, bleeding all over, with a piece of bread… in her hand."[26] Luba's cousin and the other women taken later died as a result of the incident: "They told me she died… [.] [N]one of them recuperated, all these girls.[27]

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[22] Gottfried Bloch, interview by Dana Schwartz.
[23] Ibid.
[24] Ibid.
[25] Luba Malz, interview by Nancy Fisher, *USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive,* University of Southern California, Los Angeles; Staten Island, New York, U.S., November 18, 1997, Interview Code 35267, Tape 3, Segment 12.
[26] Luba Malz, interview by Nancy Fisher.
[27] Ibid.

Although Luba expresses guilt over this fact, she hardly had a choice in the matter; to save herself from violence, Luba utilized the resources and opportunities available to her. She could not help that her cousin was chosen in her place and died as a result. Thus, although she avoided sexualized violence and survived, Luba's actions hardly felt victorious, tainted by a sense of betrayal forced upon her by the lack of choice available.

In an attempt to avoid abuse, some prisoners directly tricked camp authorities. In Auschwitz, Vera Eden, a Jew from Czechoslovakia, was in a barracks with her mother and sister. The three women slept together in a small bunk. At the end of each day, with "that kind of exhaustion, you fall asleep [quickly]." Although sleep was necessary, it was dangerous:

> In the late night, the *kapos* [prisoner functionaries] would come in, and they would select young girls, because the SS was lonely. And they needed refreshment of body [sic]. So, the young girls were hurdled [sic] and taken to the SS barracks. And whatever they did, they did.[28]

Vera and her sister "were spared" such abuse because "luckily, my mother stayed up" and "covered us, myself and my sister, with a blanket so that nobody saw us."[29] As Vera's story suggests, familial connections and other relationships among prisoners were often essential to survival in the camps as one's network provided opportunities for additional food, clothing, and aid. As Arthur B. Shostak and others have noted, women often formed groups or surrogate families in which they "adopted" children or younger girls.[30] As Shostak explains:

> These small units provided a welcomed degree of clarity, as they offered savvy protection, nostalgic courtesies, and emotional support. Members looked to them to maintain high moral standards in a coarse setting and to provide warm comradeship in a fearsome place. Camp sisters practiced a wide range of nurturing activities. They would share scarce resources (clothing, food, etc.). Help wash one another. See one another through prolonged illnesses (rather than go to the infirmary, a deadly "selection" site).

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[28] Vera Eden, interview by Rona Arato, *USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive,* University of Southern California, Los Angeles; Oakville, Ontario, Canada, June 20, 1996, Interview Code 16503, Tape 2 Segment 37.
[29] Vera Eden, interview by Rona Arato.
[30] Arthur B. Shostak, *Stealth Altruism: Forbidden Care as Jewish Resistance in the Holocaust* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2017), 177.

> Celebrate birthdays… The group literally and figuratively kept members on their feet and helped them maintain a sense of themselves as worthwhile human beings.[31]

Considering the role they played in fostering survival, there is no doubt that the camp authorities sought to deter such relationships.[32] Thus, although such relationships seem mundane, they were radical methods of resistance in a system designed to break the spirit and destroy the dignity of Jews before their inevitable death. As Vera's case exemplifies, these family units and the acts of care they provided were also utilized in women's efforts to avoid sexualized violence. Vera herself was protected by her biological family, but in many cases, when one's family was not available, a surrogate family was created to fill the void. Such "supportive relationships—substitute mothers, 'camp sisters,' friends, and same-sex lovers—" were crucial to women's survival in the camps.[33] These groupings were highly gendered and more common among women than men, in part because the camps were segregated by gender, but also because women more so than men seem to attribute the activities performed in these units and the relationships formed within them to their survival.[34] As the testimonies in this study demonstrate, women were much more conscious of the threat of sexualized violence in the camps than men, making avoidance of such violence a more significant part of their support networks.

Verbal Resistance and Silence

In instances of attempted or actualized sexualized violence, verbal resistance was common. Such resistance sometimes meant pleading with the abuser, screaming for help, or

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[31] Shostak, *Stealth Altruism: Forbidden Care as Jewish Resistance in the Holocaust*, 179
[32] Ibid., 180.
[33] Ibid., 177.
[34] Ibid., 181.

simply saying 'no.' Importantly, in some circumstances, the decision to remain silent was a method of resistance; a lack of verbal expression in no way meant compliance.

Screaming could be an effective form of resistance to sexualized violence because it could alert others to the situation at hand. When Polish Jew Esther Cane was in Budzyń, a forced labour and concentration camp in Lublin, Poland, she was working in a kitchen for the guards from the factory. One day, one of the guards cornered her in the kitchen, approached her, and then started "feeling" Esther, who "started screaming… so loud."[35] A man whom Esther refers to as "the shoemaker" was nearby. He came in and said to the guard, "'what are you doing? … [.] I thought she got hurt, you know, in the kitchen. So when she was screaming, I came in.'" The guard stopped and "he never touched me again."[36] Although Esther does not clarify, this shoemaker appears to have been a prisoner. His presence was a result of chance; the shoemaker could have been anywhere else in the camp, but he happened to be nearby, and entered the room not because he suspected an assault, but because he thought Esther was injured. When Esther screamed, it was this luck combined with her demonstration of agency that resulted in her avoidance of sexualized violence and survival.

A story told by Polish Jew Malka Grungold exemplifies the role luck played in surviving the camps. When Malka was in Grünberg in Silesia, a subcamp of Gross Rosen in Germany which served as both a forced labour and concentration camp, one of the men who oversaw the women working "used to try to rape a girl in the factory." One day, the girl started "to scream." When camp authorities discovered what was happening, "they sent [her] away to Auschwitz" and the man was sent to the Eastern front. Here, unlike the other cases in this study, the woman

[35] Esther Cane, interview by Marcia Goldberg, *USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive,* University of Southern California, Los Angeles; Southampton, Pennsylvania, U.S., November 24, 1996, Interview Code 23633, Tape 6, Segment 163.
[36] Esther Cane, interview by Marcia Goldberg.

was, it can be assumed, killed for her resistance. As this example indicates, depending on who was nearby, and what action they felt like taking, screaming could save you or it could cost you your life. Thus, while it saved Esther, screaming took the life of the girl mentioned by Malka.

Based on the testimony examined in this study, it was not uncommon that when camp authorities were made aware of instances of sexualized violence, perpetrators were punished, while those who endured the violence faced no punishment for resisting. Take the story of Czech Jewish woman Juliana Carpentieri. When Juliana was a teenager in Stutthof, a concentration camp in Poland, she and some other prisoners, including a mother and child, were once taken into the "soldiers' barracks" by a group of five drunk soldiers. The men ordered their dogs to tear the breasts off the mother of a young child while the child watched. Then, Juliana says, the "laughing, drinking" men, who were "spilling their alcohol" all over the barracks held Juliana down and "had fun with me in the corner," where they sodomized and raped her. Juliana was not strong enough to fight the men off, but when they "said they were gonna [sic] kill me… I cried out."[37] When Juliana did so, an "old man soldier heard the noise… [and] came in and he said that he was gonna [sic] report them." The man told the soldiers to clean up their mess and took Juliana and the child outside."[38] As a result of this intervention, again an example of chance, Juliana was removed from the violence and given a new job pumping water.

Manya Horowitz, a Polish Jew, was not so lucky. When she was in Auschwitz-Birkenau, an SS man chose her to be a maid in his living quarters. Manya cleaned his home, and although the man also had a cook, she was "in a different house," so Manya "was the only one down there by him in his quarters where he slept." The man kept his weapons in his office, visible to Manya.

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[37] Juliana Carpentieri, interview by Ruth Meyer, *USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive,* University of Southern California, Los Angeles; Northvale, New Jersey, U.S., December 16, 1998, Interview Code 48403, Tape 4, Segments 111-114.
[38] Juliana Carpentieri, interview by Ruth Meyer.

When Manya was told by the man, "'you're gonna [sic] work for me. You're gonna clean my stuff and wash and when the maid will bring in the food, you go and deliver to me," Manya did just that: "I followed him, [did] whatever he said." However, when the man "started to touch me on the face," Manya "knew I'm in trouble [sic]." When this happened, Manya "started to cry and yell," so the man began to beat on the back and told her that, "'the face I save for the last, the face I need to look [at].'"[39] Then, he raped her. As she recounts the details of the story, Manya gestures to her back, scarred from the SS man's beating, and says "you should see all my scars, the discolouration on my body. And the face. I wanted to see what he's doing in the back of me [sic] so I turned my face."[40] This turned out to be a mistake, and she paid a high price for looking. When Manya turned her head back, the man told her:

> The last one is the face. And the face will be gone. You go with the fire. He said, 'you see the smoke? That's where you belong. When I'm gonna [sic] see you finish. When you going to be [sic] disfigured completely [on] the face.[41]

The SS man's words suggest that he was going to send Manya to the gas chambers after he beat her. Yet, for some reason, despite his threats, Manya survived the beating and was not gassed as was threatened. Perhaps in this case the SS man was afraid that others had heard Manya's screams; if he murdered her, it might have raised suspicion about his misdeeds. In any case, Manya's fate was the result of both agency and chance. It was bad luck that resulted in the context that led to her rape, but she used her agency to defy the man. Luck, again, factored into her fate when Manya was not killed after being abused.

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[39] Manya Horowitz, interview by Toni Binstock, *USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive,* University of Southern California, Los Angeles; Denver, Colorado, U.S., October 1, 1995, Interview Code 7301, Tape 4, Segments 92-93.
[40] Manya Horowitz, interview by Toni Binstock.
[41] Ibid.

Being alone with SS men could, depending on the context and one's luck in a particular instance, carry a strong risk of sexualized violence. In Kraków-Płaszów, a concentration camp in Poland, Hungarian Jew Eve Gabori was working on a road when "two very handsome, blonde SS men" were assigned to oversee her *kommando*.[42] Soon after they took over, one of the SS men ordered Eve and another prisoner to wash the floor of the barracks. When the girls went inside the barracks, the soldiers locked the door behind them, grabbed the girl, and took her into the other room. Eve, who was alone and "heard her screaming… [,] kind of guessed what they are doing to her. And I said, "I'm next, I'm going to die." The girl continued to scream until a Polish *kapo* "was banging on the door, because he saw that the two SS men took us." The girls were taken back to their work site, silent except for the girl "crying and weeping and bleeding." The Polish *kapo* took down both girls' numbers and that night, two SS women entered their barracks, flanked by dogs. The SS women called their numbers and the girls were taken to an office:

> There was two SS men and two SS women. One was an officer. And they started asking us questions, 'what happened?' They asked me, 'what happened?' I said, 'I don't know what happened, I was just sitting there, waiting. I don't know.' 'Was the girl screaming?' And I didn't know whether I should say yes or no. So I— I was frightened… [.] [I]f somebody says that she screamed, then I say, no, I'll be in trouble. So I said, 'well, I think she was yelling. I thought, maybe, in the midway where she was yelling.' And they said, 'are you going to talk about this to other people?' I said, 'no.' 'Did you tell this to anyone?' I said, 'no'. [They] [s]aid, 'well, you can go out, now, and wait for the other girl.'[43]

Eve waited for three hours but the girls never came out. Finally, one of the SS women came out and told her, "'you go back to your barrack, and run.'" Eve followed her order. Eve, who remained silent until she strategically decided what to say, does not know what happened to the

[42] Eve Gabori, interview by Judith Gal, *USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive,* University of Southern California, Los Angeles; Toronto, Ontario, Canada, March 20, 1995, Interview Code 1544, Tape 3, Segment 80.
[43] Eve Gabori, interview by Judith Gal.

girl, but she "never saw her again."[44] The girl was likely either transferred to another camp or killed, while Eve was left to return to her barracks.

While some Jews challenged perpetrators by remaining silent or screaming in an attempt to alert those nearby, others attempted to identify with or please perpetrators using their words to avoid sexualized violence. Hungarian Jew Anna Gilbert utilized her diverse skills to ward off abuse in an act of resistance that demonstrates her incredible presence of mind and ingenuity. When Anna entered Auschwitz-Birkenau with her family at age 14, they arrived at night. Upon exiting the cattle car that transported her family to the camp:

> There was a light shining on me. And this German officer came up to me and grabbed me and took me away from my mother and my sister. And he was walking with me. And I had a feeling [that] this is not good because thousands of women are there, and he chose me to go with him. I said, 'this is not good for me.' And as I am walking alongside with him, I said, 'excuse me, I'm only 14 years old. I have very little life experience. I would like to go back to my mother.'[45]

When her plea failed to work, Anna:

> Started reciting Goethe and Schiller because I spoke German fluently… [.] And I loved Goethe and Schiller. And I just started reciting poetry to him. And he looked at me, and he couldn't believe that a Hungarian Jewish girl— I spoke the *Hochdeutsch*, the proper German language.[46]

In her attempts to appeal with the perpetrator, Anna was, incredibly, able to avoid an assault, but not before the officer turned her escape into a game:

> He asked me, 'are you a good runner?' And I said to him, 'I was the fastest one in school.' He said, 'I tell you what. I'll turn around, and I'll let you run. And then I'm going to run after you. But I'm warning you. If I catch you, I'm not going to let you go.' And you know, the adrenaline start to work [sic]. I flew. I was flying. I had wings.[47]

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[44] Ibid.
[45] Anna Gilbert, interview by Cheryl Wetstein, *USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive,* University of Southern California, Los Angeles; Downsview, Ontario, Canada, November 1, 1995, Interview Code 6213, Tape 2, Segment 44.
[46] Anna Gilbert, interview by Cheryl Wetstein.
[47] Ibid.

Luck was a factor in Anna's fate, not only because of her strong language skills, but also her athletic ability. Had she been more malnourished, she may not have been able to outrun the SS man and avoid assault or death. Although she was lucky, Anna used every skill she had to outwit her would-be rapist and murderer.

Physically unharmed, Anna returned to her sister and mother, who had fainted with worry. However, her near-encounters with sexualized violence did not end there. After being in Auschwitz for a few weeks, Anna, her mother, and her sister were transferred to Kraków-Płaszów. In that camp, Anna worked in the kitchen alongside her sister. Although "working in the kitchen was good because we could get some food," it meant that she was alone with "German officers" who:

> Every day, came in the kitchen, took me to the locker rooms and want[ed] to rape me. That was every day. So I just stood there, and I started reciting Goethe and Schiller. And they started to back off. They could not touch me. And I have experienced that on a daily basis. And what they would do to me, [is] they would take me and dump me in a big water container, where we washed the vegetables. In the ice cold water with my clothes on, they put me in there. And I came out with my wet clothes. But I was grateful to God that I wasn't raped. But this was every day.[48]

The officers' harassment was continuous, and when Anna's "sister found out what was happening[,] [s]he would come into the locker room and beat the Germans with her fist! She was a very brave girl." Although it appears from Anna's testimony that her sister only threatened to place a hand on the camp authorities, the determination to protect Anna was fierce and is another example of the role family members played in protecting each other from dangers in the camp.[49]

While Anna used her language skills and intellect to ward off potential abusers, Hungarian Jew Hedy Flesh used her words in a different way: she emphasized her sexual inexperience and pleaded with her perpetrator until he gave up his advances against her. When

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[48] Ibid.
[49] Ibid.

Hedy was imprisoned in Landsberg, a concentration camp in Bavaria, Germany, an SS man tried to rape her. While overseeing her work *kommando*, he said to Hedy, "'you come with me.'"[50] Hedy followed him to a hut, where the man told her, "'you will keep the fire with me— for me'" and soon made advances toward Hedy:

> Then he locked the door, and he said, 'You will love me now.' I was terribly scared. And I said, 'please let me go, because I never been with a man in my life,' what was true [sic]… [.] 'Let me go, please. I, I never [sic] been with a man.' And then I begged him so much… [.] Anyway, finally he let me go.[51]

Hedy, terrified of the potential repercussions, asked the man to promise that he would not punish her:

> I said, 'would you give me your hand, that you are not mad at me, and you don't want any revenge on me?' And he gave me his hand. And then he said, 'would you send me somebody else, please?' And I sent in a good, fat, Lithuanian woman to him. And she went in.[52]

As Hedy finishes the story, she laughs because miraculously, she avoided sexualized violence by proclaiming herself a virgin and providing the man with another woman to abuse. According to Hedy, the SS man did not mind letting her go, and he kept his word that he would not punish her. Hedy's actions are a clear example of a "choiceless choice" which indeed falls into Levi's grey zone: to avoid sexualized violence, Hedy supplied her would-be abuser with another woman, with the knowledge that the woman would be sexually abused; perhaps she hoped the other woman could likewise outwit their tormentor.

While some prisoners asserted their civility and humanity in an attempt to avoid sexualized violence, others outright defied camp authorities. When Romanian Jew Yolan Frank and her

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[50] Hedy Flesh, interview by Renée Firestone, *USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive,* University of Southern California, Los Angeles; Los Angeles, California, U.S., December 28, 1994, Interview Code 460, Tape 3, Segments 84-85.
[51] Hedy Flesh, interview by Renée Firestone.
[52] Ibid.

sister entered Auschwitz, "one German… [a] commander, he had an eye on my sister." The man told Yolan's sister, "'if you want, you can come out. I hide you [sic].'" Yolan's sister refused to go and told the man, "'I want to happen to me, what happens to my race [sic]. That's all,'" referring to the Nazis' goal of annihilating the Jews of Europe.[53] The Nazis sought to murder all Jews, and Yolan's sister did not want to avoid such a fate simply because of preferential treatment from a German commander. In this case, the SS man easily could have killed Yolan's sister himself or sent her to be gassed as punishment for her defiance. Yet, he chose to do neither. Yolan was proud of her sister, because she thought it likely that her sister would have died had she gone with the man:

> I don't know if she would have survived. Maybe— maybe he would have just had sex with her for a few weeks or something. Who knows. It was not uncommon that they picked up a woman, had sex with them, and was good, the sex, or not. You know, it was pick and choose at that time.[54]

Like Yolan suggests, "young and healthy" girls were taken by the "German guards" often in Auschwitz, and female prisoners exhibited fierce defiance in the face of such violence.[55] When Rose Russ, another Romanian Jew, was in Auschwitz-Birkenau, soldiers would select prisoners to use for sexual purposes. One day, she was chosen: "I'll never forget it. A young soldier, a bastard… [.] He put the finger [sic] that he wanted me. Between 100 girls, he wanted me." Rose knew that getting selected in this way meant being abused sexually, so she "went over and I spit on him. I said '… you German bastard… [.] You kill me now and I'm not gonna [sic] go with you.'" Then, "an old soldier came" who said to the man, "'don't kill her, put her [in] hard labor and leave her overnight, the rats will come and eat her up.'" The older soldier put Rose in a hole

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[53] Yolan Frank, interview by Reuben Zylberszpic, *USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive,* University of Southern California, Los Angeles; Perth, WA, Australia, August 14, 1997, Interview Code 35354, Tape 10, Segments 281-282.
[54] Yolan Frank, interview by Reuben Zylberszpic.
[55] Ibid.

and then left. However, he returned "in the middle of the night, brought me food and was sitting there," making sure the rats did not get to Rose.[56] Rose spent two days in the hole, during which time the older soldier made sure that the younger soldier did not come back and abuse her. For the rest of Rose's time in the camp, "that old man always watched over me." When asked by the interviewer why she suspected he watched over her, Rose replies, "I think he had children of his own. And he felt sorry… [.] I don't know, I had, how do you say it? Luck."[57] As Rose states explicitly, luck was a critical part of her resistance to sexualized violence as well as her survival.

Indeed, luck was the ultimate determining factor for survival in the camps. Life or death depended on many factors, including the mood of camp authorities at any given moment. The other women selected by the soldiers for sexual purposes, including many of Rose's friends, "never came back… [.] The soldiers were like animals. Used to take them away and promise them and they used to do whatever they had to do and kill them."[58] That Rose's resistance resulted in not only her survival but also a soldier watching over her is an incredible example of chance.

Some Jews utilized tactical redeployment and played on the Nazis' own racial ideas in their attempts to avoid sexualized violence. When Ana Cymerman, a Polish Jew, was 16, she was working outside in Bremen concentration camp in Germany when a soldier approached her and asked her to come with him into a room. Refusal was not an option, so Ana obeyed, because "you had to!" She followed the man into the room, where he began to ask her questions such as "[w]hat we do in the camp, and if we are really clean." Then, the soldier "came over near me.

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[56] Rose Russ, interview by D'vorah Kohn, *USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive,* University of Southern California, Los Angeles; Brooklyn, New York, U.S., November 12, 1996, Interview Code 22814, Tape 2, Segments 41-42.
[57] Rose Russ, interview by D'vorah Kohn.
[58] Ibid.

And he asked me like— like, he would like to have sex with me." Noticing that the man was getting nearer, Ana asked him, "'how can you say this to me? I'm a Jew, a dirty Jew. You shouldn't say that to me, because I'm Jewish.'"[59] She then sprinted to the door, opened it, and ran out. Immediately after the incident, when a fellow prisoner asked her, "what happened?" Ana, winded from running, lied: "I said, 'oh, I walked down the steps.'"[60] In this instance, Ana's silence regarding the incident helped contribute to her survival. Yet, while her silence aided her, luck also played a role in Ana's fate. She was all too aware of the risk her actions carried, and the role that chance played in her survival: "Now, he could have killed me. But he didn't. Like I said, I lived with miracles." At that time, Ana "wasn't afraid, because nobody was afraid. We knew we're gonna [sic] die anyway." As her testimony indicates, Ana was clearly aware that luck not only helped her escape sexualized violence, but also death.

After the incident, the man, who had previously promised to bring Ana food, told her he would never bring her bread again, Ana replied, "fine. I don't want anything." For a while, Ana "was afraid to look at him" in case he decided to kill her, but eventually, "somehow it passed by, it didn't bother me anymore."[61] Ana's only punishment for resisting the man was losing him as a source of additional food, which, while detrimental, was a sacrifice she was only too willing to make if it meant avoiding sexualized violence.

While Ana kept the incident to herself, some victims of sexualized violence challenged their circumstances by telling others about what they endured. When Frances Samel, a Polish Jew, was in Grünberg in Silesia, there was a German "chef who had the keys" to their barracks

[59] Ana Cymerman, interview by Martha Frazer, *USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive,* University of Southern California, Los Angeles; Riverdale, New York, U.S., November 14, 1995, Interview Code 8641, Tape 2, Segments 49-52.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Ibid.

who was known to abuse women. She describes the man as "beautiful, because he had a healthy glow about himself," and when the man "got drunk, he felt like raping. And… at that time, he was not particular. He didn't look for this one or that one, but whoever." In a case of bad luck, women were chosen for no particular reason: the man would simply enter the barracks "like [it was] a chicken coop… and grab whoever comes in."[62] The women he chose were slated for death: "[T]he next day she went right to Auschwitz because he was afraid that she will get pregnant and that was forbidden." Frances knew the man was not picky, so she bribed the other women in the barracks with her bread ration "to save myself, to be on the upper bunk" so that she could stay far away from the bottom where women were easily grabbed:

> I slept always on the upper because I gave a half of the bread to the girl what slept [sic] down [below] because I felt that he's not gonna reach for anybody. He's drunk. Whoever is there, he's gonna [sic] grab the first one.[63]

Frances was clearly aware that the man was going to take any woman, and her primary concern was that it was not her. The abuse continued "for several months" until one of the Jewish girls told another prisoner she worked with, a non-Jewish German woman, what was happening. Then, "all the German women came to look [at] what such a beautiful man is looking with those— with those Jewish girls [t]hat are half dead, starved. 'What is he going there for?'"[64] Word eventually reached the camp authorities, and the man's actions "cost him his life" because he was sent to the Eastern front. When they found out, Frances and the other women "had a ball. We said 'oh, thank God.'"[65] The Jewish woman's decision to tell the German prisoners about the abuse was a risky act of resistance because in telling them, she risked a reprisal should the

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[62] Frances Samel, interview by Hilary Helstein, *USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive,* University of Southern California, Los Angeles; Los Angeles, California, U.S., November 4, 1996, Interview Code 22144, Tape 3, Segment 71-72.
[63] Frances Samel, interview by Hilary Helstein.
[64] Ibid.
[65] Ibid.

perpetrator discover she told. However, it would seem that the authorities were more interested in punishing the chef for *Rassenschande* than the woman for speaking about the abuse, another example of chance considering the ad-hoc manner in which camp personnel were penalized for *Rassenschande*.

Sexualized violence took on multiple forms in the camps, and some prisoners used their luck, ingenuity, and agency to avoid more than one form of abuse. When Nicole Silberkleit, a French Jew, was in Auschwitz she worked in *Kanada* (the name prisoners gave to the warehouses where the stolen belongings of prisoners were stored) and was tasked with sorting clothes and cutting them into strips. After getting a blister from the scissors she used to cut fabric, Nicole went to the infirmary. Although she "was scared to death to go to the infirmary" because it was so connected with death, Nicole also could not continue working with an injured hand.[66] When she went to the infirmary, a soldier there told her to "put something on it" and then told Nicole, "'why don't you sit down?'" The soldier began to ask her questions, beginning with, "'where are you from?'" Nicole told him:

> Told him, 'I'm from Strasbourg.' 'Oh,' he said, 'that's a beautiful city.' He said, 'I used to play soccer there.' Fine. So then he said, 'are you here— did you come alone or with your family?' And I explained that my whole family was gone. And he asked me if I thought I would ever come out of there, and I said, 'no.' And he says, 'why not?' I said, 'well, how can you ask me such a question? Obviously if you have killed my whole family, why would you keep me?' And he said, 'well, you should never give up hope.' Well, I took it for whatever it was worth, and that was that. And I went back to my barrack and continued to work.[67]

Nicole worked the night shift, from midnight until eight in the morning. The next day, the soldier came to her barracks and talked to the *kapo*, who called her over. Nicole thought:

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[66] Nicole Silberkleit, interview by Merle Goldberg, *USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive,* University of Southern California, Los Angeles; Los Angeles, California, U.S., November 21, 1994, Interview Code 272, Tape 2, Segment 72.
[67] Nicole Silberkleit, interview by Merle Goldberg.

> ‘God, what is this?' You know, ‘what's going on?’ And he wants to talk to me. And I was embarrassed because what is this, you know? So, he says to me, ‘I would like you to meet me outside.’ And I'm really freaking out, as they say.[68]

Once outside, the soldier tried to grab Nicole, which made her “so infuriated because that's one thing I would never do in a million years is to— to have anything to do with a German.” Nicole “sort of pushed him away, and I went back to the barrack” but became “really scared because he'll feel nice and furious at me because I don't give into him.” Nicole was understandably fearful and did not know what to expect: “What is going to happen to me now?”[69]

The man did not return, but a couple of weeks later, Nicole found out that the camp authorities had compiled “a list of people that they're sending to the brothels” on the Eastern front for soldiers to use.[70] Nicole’s number was on the list, and she was frightened because the brothels were “a horrible thing” that women “never came back… [from] alive.”[71] Desperate, Nicole decided to talk to the soldier: “even though he's probably furious at me, he seems to be human. I'm gonna [sic] go and talk to him, see if he can help me.” When she explained what happened, the soldier told her, “'there’s nothing I can do about it.’” Nicole thanked him and prepared to be sent away, but was never transferred to the Eastern front, leading her to believe that the soldier “did take my name off [the list].” Nicole finishes the story by noting that “there are some human beings amongst beasts. Because I'm sure without him, I would have been taken. So I think it's worthwhile mentioning.”[72] It appears that not only did Nicole successfully reject the soldier’s advances without punishment, but the same man possibly saved her from another terrible fate by ensuring that she was not transferred out of the camp. However, without Nicole

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[68] Ibid.
[69] Ibid.
[70] For more information regarding brothels on the Eastern front established for use by the German military, see Wendy Jo Gertjejanssen,“Victims, Heroes, Survivors: Sexual Violence on the Eastern Front during World War II,” (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Minnesota, 2004).
[71] Ibid.
[72] Ibid.

seeking him out, the man could not have helped; she went to him, explained her predicament, and asked for his help, an action for which she easily could have been denied or killed. This is yet another example of chance and agency shaping one's fate.

Physical Resistance

Physical resistance was incredibly dangerous in the camps and often met with death. Camp authorities did not hesitate to beat or shoot prisoners, and in many instances of sexualized violence, victims were malnourished and much smaller than their perpetrators, making physical resistance all the more difficult. For example, Sonja Drake, a Jewish woman from Romania who "was raped four times" during her imprisonment in various camps, attempted to fight off her attackers, but asks rhetorically:

> [W]hat good did it do me? I was a little girl, there was a big guy… [.] [I]f I would hurt him with a hand [or] something, they would kill me. And that's not what I came here for, to get— be killed, see. So it was kind of rough.[73]

Yet, although physically resisting a perpetrator could very easily lead to one's death, many survivors describe fighting back when faced with the threat of sexualized violence, an incredible display of agency even if abuse still occurred.

Some prisoners were willing to risk death in order to avoid sexualized violence. When Rosalia Lenczner, a Romanian Jew, was imprisoned in Bergen-Belsen, a concentration camp in Germany, she worked in an outside *kommando*. One day, when she returned from work and was standing for *Appell* (roll call), an "SS man, an officer" pulled her out of line and took her to his

[73] Sonja Drake, interview by Bobbi Kurn, *USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive,* University of Southern California, Los Angeles; Klamath Falls, Oregon, U.S., November 4, 1999, Interview Code 50330, Tape 2, Segment 50.

room.[74] When the officer ordered Rosalia to get undressed, she refused, and "he hit me." Rosalia then got undressed, and when the man turned around to take his clothes off, Rosalia "got on the bed, and with my foot I broke the window glass and I jumped." After jumping out of the window, Rosalia says that a woman she describes as a female member of the Gestapo:[75]

> Spotted me naked in the snow. She said, 'you crazy one. What are you doing here?' I said, 'I jumped.' She didn't believe me. I showed her my back, [how] it's still scratched from the glass that was left in the window.[76]

Rosalia then pointed at the window and told the woman, "if you don't believe me, go to there [sic], it's the broken window that I just broke." The woman took Rosalia into an office of high-ranking officers and made her "identify him," which she did: "I said 'yes, that's him.'" There was a hearing during which Rosalia was asked how the attempted assault happened, and after, she went back to the man's room to retrieve her clothes and was taken back to her barracks. As a result of the hearing, the man was "sent to the Russian front," while Rosalia was left in the camp.[77]

When Lisa Koerner, a Jew from Czechoslovakia, was in Freiberg, a forced labour camp in Germany, she held a position in which she "had all the privileges."[78] Lisa worked in the munitions factory until one day, "an SS man… asked me to come to the office, and please help him in the office, figure out and write reports" because she "spoke and wrote and typed a perfect German." Lisa, who worked "for quite a while" in the office, used her privilege to do things that

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[74] Rosalia Lenczner, interview by Adam Brown, *USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive,* University of Southern California, Los Angeles; New York, New York, U.S., June 2, 1995, Interview Code 3286, Tape Segment 57.
[75] Although Rosalia describes the woman as a member of the Gestapo, there is no evidence that women belonged to the organization. It is more likely that the woman was a member of the SS.
[76] Rosalia Lenczner, interview by Adam Brown.
[77] Ibid.
[78] Lisa Koerner, Interview by Kenneth Aran, *USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive,* University of Southern California, Los Angeles; Somers, New York, U.S., October 14, 1998, Interview Code 47558, Tape 6, Segments 167-168.

prisoners were forbidden from doing: "I stole all the cigarettes, and he knew it. He knew it. I mean, you know, I smoked it [sic] in the office while he was out, watching in the factory."[79] Then, one day:

> I was in the factory working. And he came and he felt like raping me. So first, he hit me. And I kind of fell down. And I— *stupid*. That was the only stupid thing I ever did. I should have stayed on the floor. I got up to spite [him], you know, to show him that I'm not afraid of him. And he threw me down and put his boot right into my mouth and knocked all my teeth out. And then he still tried to degrade me in front of everybody, wanted to rape me. So I kicked what I could. Then he finally gave up. Made believe he didn't want to rape me.[80]

Lisa was covered in blood but survived. She was beaten badly, though, and when "the other girls came in to clean me up… I had all the teeth around me. And ever since then, I have no teeth."[81] Lisa's defiance cost her greatly, but she exhibits pride at the fact that she successfully resisted and avoided rape by the man.

Lisa's experience demonstrates how privileged positions in the camp sometimes put prisoners at a different risk of sexualized violence, because they found themselves alone with SS men more often than those who worked in non-privileged *kommandos*. When Eileen Kashub, a Polish Jew, was imprisoned in Mielegjany, a concentration camp in Wilno, Poland, she was assigned a job as a maid and secretary for a doctor named Tillman in his house. The doctor "was a Nazi… [.] And he told me that he hates all Jews, but he likes me. I was a good mate for him."[82] When asked by the interviewer whether the doctor tried "to abuse [her] in any way," Eileen reluctantly replies, "[y]es, it happened. But I hate to talk about it. "Yes, he tried. But he didn't succeed. I was quite determined not to [let him]." Eileen was understandably fearful after

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[79] Lisa Koerner, Interview by Kenneth Aran.
[80] Ibid.
[81] Ibid.
[82] Eileen Kashub, interview by Rosalie Franks, *USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive,* University of Southern California, Los Angeles; Palm Beach, Florida, U.S., April 30, 1997, Interview Code 31240, Tape 3, Segments 72-73.

rejecting the doctor because the threat of death was palpable: "When I resisted him, I didn't know what he's going to do to me. He could kill me also."[83] The doctor, however, did not kill her. Instead, the next day when Eileen arrived at his house:

> [H]e called me into his room and told me to sit down on his bed and he said to me, 'thank you for resisting me, because I would feel terrible if I would have anything to do with a Jewish girl. I'm very proud of you,' he said.[84]

The way in which the doctor reacted to Eileen's resistance was very uncommon. Not only did he not punish or kill Eileen for rejecting his advances, Eileen received praise for defying him. Such an outcome can certainly be attributed to luck; As she notes, the doctor could have killed Eileen, yet, he let her survive.

Often, as the example of Polish Jew Paula Knobler illustrates, when a prisoner successfully defied attempts at sexualized violence from camp personnel, the abuser simply found another woman to abuse. When they were in Tschenstochau-Pelzery, a forced labour camp in Kielce, Poland, a *Wehrmacht* soldier came up to Paula and her sister-in-laws one day in their barracks. The women could tell that the soldier was "a little bit drunk" and tried their best to ignore him.[85] From what they could understand, the soldier was saying "that he feels sorry for us, that we have such tough life." The girls "just ignored him, [because] we were afraid of him." The soldier "talked and talked and talked" until finally, he left. About a month later, around midnight "the same German, very drunk, came upstairs" to where the women were sleeping and pulled Paula's blanket off. Her mother-in-law, aware of what was about to happen, got up, stood between Paula and the man, and said, "Paula, get up and run toward the end of the hall." Paula

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[83] Eileen Kashub, interview by Rosalie Franks.
[84] Ibid.
[85] Paula Knobler, interview by Marvin Greenberg, *USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive,* University of Southern California, Los Angeles; Boca Raton, Florida, U.S., October 25, 1995, Interview Code 7952, Tape 2, Segments 42-43.

froze, so her mother-in-law screamed, "you better get up and go!" Her mother-in-law then talked to the soldier, "asking him all kinds of questions," and while she did so, Paula got up and "ran toward the ends of the hall."[86] The soldier ended up raping another "poor girl [who] came back around four o'clock in the morning, bleeding and crying and screaming." In this instance, it was Paula's escape and her mother-in-law's verbal resistance in the form of conversation that saved Paula from abuse.[87]

In attempt to aid women, men sometimes offered advice regarding how to avoid sexualized violence. When Polish Jew Ida Scheinfeld was in Skarżysko, "every week" young girls were taken into a nearby forest and killed after being sexually abused.[88] While the women "worked on the road from the factory to the barracks", men who oversaw the factory would take down the numbers of certain women. On the weekend, the women's numbers were called and they were told that they were being transferred. The women were loaded onto a train or taken into a nearby forest where the men "did what they wanted to do… [.] They raped them, they tortured them, beat them, and they shot them." Ida often talked to another prisoner, a rabbi, who shared survival tips and told Ida "how to be smart" in the camp. The rabbi told Ida that if she was ever "taken for being raped [sic], I should jump." One day, Ida "followed his words" when she was placed on a train with other female prisoners, seemingly under the pretext of a transfer. On the train, Ida heard the men shooting and "throwing out girls… from the windows." She knew the same would happen to her if she remained on the train, so she "jumped away" from "the Nazi" who was near her, opened the train door, "and jumped out." Ida "[f]ell on trees. I was

[86] Paula Knobler, interview by Marvin Greenberg.
[87] Ibid.
[88] Ida Scheinfeld, interview by Shelly Roberts, *USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive,* University of Southern California, Los Angeles; Margate, Florida, U.S., March 7, 1996, Interview Code 13093, Tape 2, Segment 48.

bleeding all over, scratched" but did not yet know she was shot; she "just saw blood was pouring" and assumed the blood was from the fall. Although the man who shot her as she jumped out of the train car was "supposed to kill me," Ida escaped and spent the night in the forest. Despite the fact that it was winter and snowing and she was naked because her clothes were still on the train, Ida managed "not to freeze to death… [.] I survived that freezing night naked." In the morning, she saw prisoners walking to work and realized she was close to the factory in which she worked. Ida told a few of the people she saw to tell the factory guard that she was in the forest and to "bring me back to the factory. I want to work."[89] Ida exhibited agency in taking the rabbi's advice and leaping out of the train, and it was sheer luck that she survived the jump, survived the night, and made it back to the factory the next day. Ida's story, like the others above, exemplifies the ways in which chance and agency worked together to shape prisoners' fate. However, while Ida was the recipient of good luck, as is clear in examples below, bad luck also dictated the direction of one's experience in the camps, such as those slated for experimentation.

Resistance to Sterilization

As detailed in Chapter One, sterilization experiments occurred in multiple forms within the camps, including via x-ray, medication, chemicals, and surgery, often without anesthetic. Like any type of resistance in the camps, challenging sterilization was difficult. Indeed, it was sometimes harder to resist because many of those who were sterilized were unaware of what had happened to them until after the war. Still, word spread quickly in the camps and some Jews

[89] Ida Scheinfeld, interview by Shelly Roberts.

were informed by fellow inmates that sterilization procedures were being carried out in certain blocks, which made many prisoners suspicious and frightened when they were transferred to a medical block. Although it was difficult to resist, as we see below, many prisoners nevertheless challenged sterilization in a variety of ways, from avoidance to intervention. Importantly, sterilization was resisted in gendered ways by men and women, in part because of the methods of sterilization differed and because of the different levels of knowledge available to men and women regarding the procedure.

Some women prisoners used what little privilege they had in the camps to save others from sterilization. When she was in Auschwitz, Magda Blau, a Czech Jewish woman, was assigned a position as a *blockälteste* (block leader) for Block 10, an uncommon but not unheard of position for Jews to hold. One of her duties involved assigning prisoners to the doctors. Some prisoners, including Magda, believed that the experiments performed by SS doctor Carl Clauberg were less harmful in comparison to that of Dr. Władysław Dering, a Polish prisoner doctor and "a very sadistic man." Thus, whenever she could, Magda assigned as many patients "as possible to Clauberg, because that wasn't so dangerous, it wasn't so painful."[90] Although the women Magda assigned to Clauberg still underwent sterilization, she believed that the women were only partially sterilized and in the event "they survived the war", could have children.[91] Although this was not the case and many of Clauberg's victims became sterile as a result of his experiments, Magda, faced with a "choiceless choice," tried to do what she could, believing she was saving other prisoners from more intense pain, according to her testimony above.

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[90] Magda Blau, interview by Dina Brustman, *SC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive,* University of Southern California, Los Angeles; Toorak, Victoria, Australia, August 28, 1996, Interview Code 19441, Tape 5, Segments 122-128.

[91] Magda Blau, interview by Dina Brustman.

Jewish prisoner doctors often aided other prisoners whenever possible.[92] When Rose Berman, a Romanian Jew, entered Auschwitz-Birkenau, she and the other women she was transferred with were sterilized via x-ray: "They put us on the machines, there were a lot of [German] doctors. And we had no idea what they're up to." Although the women, unaware of what was going on, were "drugged up," they were hurting: "It started to burn very much, girls threw up, we were nauseous… [.] [I]t was terribly painful." Then, two female Jewish doctors, both prisoners, came into the room and expressed shock: "they said, 'oh my god, oh my god, oh my god!'" The doctors explained that the women had been sterilized. Then, one of the doctors, a woman named Edna, grabbed Rose and took her out of the room. Rose avoided further sterilization experiments while the women who remained in the room died, making the doctor's act of resistance life-saving for Rose.[93] Sheer luck in this instance can account for Rose's narrow escape from sterilization, as well as her survival. Not only did the doctors enter the room at the right time, Edna could have grabbed any woman, but she chose Rose.

After entering Stutthof concentration camp, Lithuanian Jew Lisa Contract was also taken to an experimental block. After enduring the camp intake process, Lisa and the other women were taken to a room filled with "surgical chairs" and "tall doctors" who asked the women to sit on the chairs. When they did so, the doctors donned surgical gloves, put some "medication" on the glove, and then "put it in the woman's privacy [vagina]." Lisa did not know what was happening until another woman in her transport, suspicious of the process, suggested that the women form a group and quickly exit the room together to avoid being examined.[94] The women

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[92] Chalmers, *Birth, Sex, and Abuse: Women's Voices Under Nazi Rule*, 25-26, 123.
[93] Rose Berman, interview by Lillian Gewirtzman, *USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive,* University of Southern California, Los Angeles; Bronx, New York, U.S., November 12, 1997, Interview Code 35356, Tape 5, Segment 25.
[94] Lisa Contract, interview by Renée Firestone, *USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive,* University of Southern California, Los Angeles; Beverly Hills, California, U.S., July 9, 1996, Interview Code 17054, Tape 2, Segments 60-65.

agreed and pushed the rest of the group forward. When they did so, a few of the women, including Lisa, ran out of the room, successfully avoiding examination. Perhaps in the chaos of the moment, the women's resistance went unnoticed by the doctors, or perhaps the doctors simply replaced them with other women, because Lisa does not describe any repercussions for the women's actions. Either way, Lisa attributes her own fertility to this act of resistance: she met some of the other women who had undergone examination after the war, and none of them were able to have children. The women's efforts at resistance was a "choiceless choice" situated within the grey zone, as they knew that the rest of the transport would undergo the examination and possibly face reprisals for their resistance. There was little the women could do to save anyone other than themselves in this context, and so they created an opportunity to them to save themselves.

Elizabeth Feldman de Jong, a Dutch woman who entered Auschwitz alongside her sister-in-law, managed to avoid multiple sterilization surgeries by lying to an SS doctor about menstruating. Shortly after arriving at the camp and being placed in Block 10, the SS entered with papers and told Elizabeth and the other prisoners that they were in "an experiment block." The SS told the women:

> '[Y]ou don't have to [agree]. You have to sign it. You do it out of free will. If you don't want to sign, you go tomorrow morning. The truck comes, and you go to the gas chamber. Or you sign and you let the experiments [happen].'[95]

The ultimatum given to the women is an example of a "choiceless choice," because an option between torture and death in the context of the camps was a meaningless decision when such torture might also result in death.[96] Elizabeth and her sister-in-law knew that the Germans were

[95] Elizabeth Feldman de Jong, interview by Edie Kalb, *USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive,* University of Southern California, Los Angeles; Toronto, Ontario, Canada, January 11, 1995, Interview Code 543, Tape 2, Segment 49.
[96] Langer, "The Dilemma of Choice in the Deathcamps."

losing the war, so they signed the papers and agreed to try the experiments to "stay alive." However, that night when they heard "screaming and crying" and saw people deformed from experiments, Elizabeth changed her mind. She told her sister-in-law, "I [am] not going to do that… [.] I'm not going to stay here… [.] 'I'd rather die right away.'"[97] When Elizabeth told an SS man that she and her sister-in-law wanted to leave, he told her, "no. You signed, and you have to stay."[98]

Elizabeth and her sister-in-law "were frightened like anything," especially after they found out from the other prisoners that the most common experiment was sterilization. The SS doctors took prisoners to the basement of the three-story building which contained a "laboratory" with x-ray machines where the SS doctors would:

> Give big injections in your womb… [.]And those needles were very painful. I think they, they put some burning stuff in it. I don't know what. They was blisters and bleeding. We were screaming pretty good.[99]

Elizabeth was subject to one such surgery and three injections. Many others had multiple surgeries, Elizabeth managed to circumvent the doctors in a uniquely gendered way to avoid any further surgical experiments. Although Elizabeth "never had my period again" after entering the camp, her "sister-in-law always did. Every month." The doctors would not operate on women who were menstruating, so one day, when Elizabeth was called to see the doctor, she wore her sister-in-law's unwashed undergarments and told him, "look, I have my period. I can't do it." The ruse was successful: "It worked. Two, three times, it worked. So I was really saved from the big, big operations."[100] Considering the high death rate from the surgeries, Elizabeth likely saved her life with these acts of creative resistance which were never detected by the doctor.

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[97] Elizabeth Feldman de Jong, interview by Edie Kalb.
[98] Ibid.
[99] Ibid.
[100] Ibid.

Such a form of resistance was only available to women; men could not avoid sterilization with the claim that they were menstruating. They could, however, cover or remove their genitalia from the x-ray machines used to sterilize them, which is what Polish Jew Abraham Lessman did when he found himself in the experimental block in Auschwitz-Birkenau after being transferred to the camp. Abraham volunteered for the transfer because he thought that he was enlisting "to work in a [different] block… to stay out of the cold," completely unaware of the fact that he volunteered for experimentation. After they entered the experimentation block, Abraham and the men in his transport were forced to place their genitals on the x-ray machines. Then, when the SS doctors left the room, Abraham:

> Put my hand instead of my privacy [sic] on that x-ray machine. They didn't realize that. I didn't know what I was doing. It was fate or something. Whatever it was, or somebody upstairs told me.[101]

Afterwards, the men walked out of the block. Shortly after, Abraham volunteered for a transfer to Buna, another subcamp of Auschwitz, his resistance unnoticed by the doctors. As his testimony indicates, Abraham's resistance was the result of divine intervention; he sensed danger at just the right time and acted accordingly to avoid it. Morris Dach, a Jew from Poland, was also transferred unknowingly for the purposes of sterilization experiments during his time in Auschwitz and was able to avoid sterilization as the result of a gut feeling. Immediately after the intake process, Morris and the men in his transport were taken into a room with tables where the doctors asked them "to put the[ir] privates on the table" and lean over it. The men had no idea what was happening, but somehow Morris got a "sense," pulled himself back from the table, and

[101] Abraham Lessman, interview by Fredric Neuer, *USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive,* University of Southern California, Los Angeles; Hallandale, Florida, U.S., September 11, 1996, Interview Code 19696, Tape 1, Segment 4.

"got saved[;] I don't know how, I don't know why, what, but I pulled myself back."[102] Like Abraham, Morris' resistance was a spontaneous reaction to a confusing and frightening situation, and an act which the doctors apparently did not notice.

As the examples of Abraham and Morris showcase, the resistance efforts of men chosen for sterilization vary from the actions taken by women. This is likely because the primary method of sterilization for men in the camps was x-ray, while women underwent a variety of sterilization procedures in addition to radiation, including surgery and chemical injections.[103] As a result, women and men's resistance took different forms. Additionally, while the sample size utilized in this study is small and the topic is in need of further research, survivor testimony suggests that women discussed the experiments among themselves more so than men. Perhaps this is because women were in the hospital for longer than men due to the nature of the experiments they endured and thus had more opportunities to learn the nature of such procedures. This would explain how women were seemingly more informed of the nature of the experiments, giving them an advantage when it came to resistance.

Survival as Resistance

In describing how she jumped off a train to avoid being raped and killed by authorities in Skarżysko, Ida Scheinfeld declares that she did so because "I wanted to live, that's all."[104] The desire to survive was not the only reason Jews resisted, but it was important in a context in which

[102] Morris Dach, interview by Michael Berkowitz, *USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive,* University of Southern California, Los Angeles; Columbus, Ohio, U.S., December 26, 1995, Interview Code 10554, Tape 2, Segments 46-48.
[103] Chalmers, *Birth, Sex, and Abuse: Women's Voices Under Nazi Rule*, 126-132.
[104] Ida Scheinfeld, interview by Shelly Roberts.

the goal of the Nazis was to exploit and kill them. The examples of resistance to sexualized violence outlined in this chapter are a small piece of the much larger story of resistance to Nazi oppression in the Holocaust, and together, they help us understand how Jews resisted a form of violence that was for too long neglected from the historiography of the Holocaust. They showcase the methods of resistance utilized by Jews and tell us what it meant to resist advances by camp authorities. Importantly, these examples show that resistance did not necessarily result in death; it was possible to resist sexualized violence and survive. In reviewing these examples, we also see that in many cases, saving oneself meant sacrificing the life of a fellow prisoner. Previous histories of Jewish resistance have denied Jewish agency and been quick to place blame on those who endured the Holocaust, and often on those who survived, for the actions they took in their effort to avoid death.[105] However, as Primo Levi reminds us, it is critical to suspend judgement when faced with such stories.[106] At the centre of each decision to resist was a motivation by Jews challenge the inhumanity of the situation they found themselves in, and even if such resistance did not result in saving oneself or another from sexualized violence, it challenged the power structure that the camp system relied on. The stories outlined above prove that individual acts of resistance, once perceived as insignificant in comparison to armed and organized resistance, made a great difference in the individual lives of Jews in the camps and in some cases contributed to one's survival. In this way, then, resistance to sexualized violence not only disrupted the bureaucratic system that comprised the Nazi regime, hindering the precise organization of power and control that the Nazis sought to achieve, but also resulted in the very

[105] For example, see Bruno Bettelheim, *The Informed Heart: Autonomy in a Mass Age* (Glencoe, Ill: Free Press, 1960); Raul Hilberg, The Destruction of the European Jews (Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1961); Henri Michel, *The Shadow War: Resistance in Europe, 1939-1945* (London: Deutsch, 1972).
[106] Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved: Sommersi e i Salvati. English*. First Vintage International ed. New York: Vintage International, 1989, 47.

survival of Jews, which, of course, challenged the Nazis' core goals. Ultimately, each survivor above and the stories they told are evidence that Jews defied a genocidal regime that sought to destroy both their spirit and their lives and lived to tell about it. Their stories are a gift and a reminder of the power of agency against destructive forces.[107]

[107] Gruner, "'The Germans Should Expel the Foreigner Hitler…' Open Protest and Other Forms of Jewish Defiance in Nazi Germany," 18.

CONCLUSION

Sexualized violence in the Holocaust left a devastating legacy. Those who survived such violence, like other survivors of the Nazi genocide, not only had to recover from physical wounds, but also psychological trauma. As Brigitte Halbmayr notes, counselling was not available for those who survived forced labour camps, concentration camps, and death camps. As a result, many found it difficult to process the trauma they endured. Furthermore, those who were subjected to sexualized violence were ostracized as a result of the taboo nature of their experiences, and some were even accused of working as sex workers for the SS and falsely labelled as collaborators.[1] Survivors who were rendered sterile from medical experiments faced the additional shame and anguish of being unable to bear children.[2]

Considering the lack of support available to these victims, how were survivors of sexualized violence supposed to recount the trauma they experienced?[3] They simply were not. Even when stories of sexualized violence became available on a larger scale in the 1990s when projects such as the USC Shoah Foundation collected thousands of testimonies, researchers were hesitant to examine this history. While there is now a growing literature on sexualized violence, and an enormous body of scholarship on Jewish resistance, almost nothing has been written that integrates both topics.

In this thesis, I have sought to add to our understanding of the shape that sexualized violence took in forced labour camps, concentration camps, and death camps; adding a new dimension, I also have provided examples of how it was challenged, arguing that such resistance

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[1] Robert Sommer, "Forced Prostitution in National Socialist Concentration Camps: The Example of Auschwitz," in *Forced Prostitution in Times of War and Peace: Sexual Violence against Women and* Girls, ed. Barbara Drinck and Chung-noh Gross (Bielefeld, Germany: Kleine Verlag, 2007) 133; Brigitte Halbmayr, "Violence against Women during Nazi 'Racial' Persecution," in *Sexual Violence Against Jewish Women during the Holocaust*, eds. Sonja M. Hedgepeth and Rochelle G. Saidel (Waltham, Mass: Brandeis University Press, 2010) 46.
[2] Halbmayr, "Violence against Women during Nazi 'Racial' Persecution," 46.
[3] Ibid.

was common and did not always result in the death of the resister, as was previously assumed. As detailed in Chapter One, sexualized violence was carried out against Jews in a variety of ways, beginning with one's entry into the camps. The abuse often occurred as part of the camp intake process, designed to further humiliate and demean those entering the camps. As a way to assert power over new prisoners, especially young women, camp personnel fondled the breasts and genitals of new arrivals, performed invasive searches of body cavities, and forced them to stand naked in front of strangers. Once inside the camps, more violence awaited. Sometimes SS men seized spontaneous opportunities to grab prisoners and abuse them. Other times, the SS conducted selections in which they chose women to rape who were often murdered immediately after the abuse took place. In some instances, when they felt like carrying out sexualized violence, perpetrators simply grabbed whoever was within reach. SS men sometimes sexually abused the prisoners who looked after their quarters, choosing such women either in an attempt to keep their transgressions from superiors or because they were easily accessible. There were also instances of violence in which sexual torture occurred simply for entertainment or humour. Dogs were used to abuse prisoners in such circumstances, and the violence was often carried out in front of other prisoners and camp personnel to further humiliate the victims and terrorize Jewish witnesses.

It was not only Jewish women who endured sexualized violence the hands of Nazis in the camps. Although most examples of sexual assaults and rapes by camp authorities in testimony sourced from the VHA are against Jewish women, there are many examples of men who were forcibly sterilized, oftentimes completely unaware of their sterility until after the war when they attempted to start families.

Sexualized violence in the camps was horrific and resisting it could very easily mean death. Yet, as the stories in Chapter Two illustrate, it was consistently resisted. Such resistance can be sorted into three main categories: avoidance, verbal, and physical. Although these categories are porous and prisoners often used multiple forms of resistance in their efforts to avoid sexualized violence, such a typology helps us to better understand the ways in which prisoners were able to challenge the Nazis using the resources, chances, and opportunities available to them.

Avoidance of sexualized violence played a role in some women's daily lives. Because they feared attacks, and believing appearance played a role in the motivation for such attacks, some female prisoners attempted to make themselves as unattractive as possible by dirtying themselves with soot and dirt and covering their heads with rags. Those who avoided assault attribute their safety to such measures.[4] Family, both biological and chosen, also played a role in women's avoidance of sexualized violence in the camps. As Arthur B. Shostak has noted, women formed groups or "families" in which they "adopted" children or younger girls. Such units were a form of resistance in themselves, Shostak argues, because they fostered bonds between prisoners that the Nazis sought to destroy, in part because they could result in increased resistance. Additionally, the women shared food and clothing, helped aid injuries and nurse each other, and provided comfort and emotional support.[5] Older women and those who had been in the camp for longer periods of time protected others from selections and abuse by hiding them under blankets at night or bribing other prisoners with bread for the top bunk, away from the

[4] See, for example, the testimony of Ida Russ in the VHA (Ida Russ, interview by Rachelle Cohen, *USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive,* University of Southern California, Los Angeles; Beverly Hills, California, U.S., December 2, 1997, Interview Code 35966, Tape 3, Segment 79).
[5] Arthur B. Shostak, *Stealth Altruism: Forbidden Care as Jewish Resistance in the Holocaust* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 2017), 177-178.

prying hands of aggressive, often drunk, SS men. Because some women were so conscious of the threat of sexualized violence in the camps, avoidance of such violence formed a significant part of their support networks.

Other forms of resistance were more overt, such as verbal resistance, which took many forms, including screaming, pleading, defying authorities, and even remaining silent. Some prisoners attempted to make the perpetrators identify with them by asserting their civility and humanity, while other resistance was more aggressive, such as outright defiance of one's captors to escape sexualized violence. The decision to remain quiet during an assault and not speak about one's experience after the fact, far from exemplifying compliance, constituted resistance.

The final category of resistance outlined in this thesis is physical resistance. Such challenges to the Nazis often resulted in death, but as the testimony in Chapter Two indicates, this was not necessarily always the case. Some prisoners were able to push away, fight off, and even spit on their perpetrators, while others jumped out of windows or trains to avoid abuse. In the context of sterilization experiments, male prisoners covered their genitals to protect themselves from radiation.

While all these of acts of resistance exemplify agency, it is important to note that life and death in the camps ultimately depended on luck. One's available resources or methods of resistance, too, were dictated largely by chance and whim, as is recognized by survivors who attribute their survival and avoidance of sexualized violence to luck. Luck was a key part of survival, but prisoners also demonstrated agency, which I argue is reflected in the adoption of various strategies of resistance.

Engaging in resistance, and indeed simply surviving in the camps, also meant making "choiceless choices."[6] Survivors must not be judged for the actions they took in order to survive or make life more bearable in the camps.[7] Previous histories of Jewish resistance have denied Jewish agency and been quick to place blame on those who endured the Holocaust, and often on those who survived, for their efforts to avoid death. Yet, at the centre of each decision to resist was a motivation by Jews to challenge the inhumanity of the situation in which they were placed. Importantly, even if such resistance did not result in saving oneself or another from sexualized violence, it challenged the power structure that the camp system relied on, exemplifying the importance of individual resistance in the survival strategies of prisoners.

The examples of resistance to sexualized violence outlined in Chapter Two add to our understanding of how Jews resisted a form of violence that for decades was absent from the historiography of the Holocaust. The survivor testimony cited in this chapter showcases the methods of resistance utilized by Jews and tells us what it meant to resist advances by camp authorities. Importantly, these examples show that resistance did not necessarily result in death; it was possible to resist sexualized violence and survive. This is critical, because in the face of genocide, survival was the ultimate act of defiance.

Austrian Jewish woman Lillian Small survived Auschwitz-Birkenau and Dachau. In 1996, she provided her testimony to the VHA in hopes of educating future generations on the dangers of hatred. After discussing detailed instances of sexual abuse in Dachau, Lillian remarked in a sombre tone:

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[6] Lawrence Langer, "The Dilemma of Choice in the Deathcamps," *Centerpoint: A Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies* 4, no. 1 (Fall 1980).
[7] Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved: Sommersi e i Salvati. English*. First Vintage International ed. New York: Vintage International, 1989, 47.

> You know, history don't [sic] talk about this. I don't know why, they only talk about the concentration camp[s]. But they don't talk about what they did to the people in it.[8]

Although instances of sexualized violence in the camps have been investigated much more thoroughly by scholars since Lillian's testimony was recorded, additional research needs to be conducted in order to fully realize the scope, breadth, and impact of such violence. As discussed in the Introduction, many strides have been made in recent years in regards to how sexualized violence was utilized against those in forced labour camps, concentration camps, and death camps. Such scholarship would not exist if it were not for survivor testimony such as Lillian's.

In providing examples of sexualized violence, I have offered a further look at the breadth and scope of such violence in the camps. In looking at resistance to such violence, I have attempted to broaden our understanding of the chances and opportunities prisoners had for resistance and add greater nuance to conceptualizations of resistance in the Holocaust. My work, however, only scratches the surface of this history. It is necessary to further examine the experiences of men who endured sexualized violence. Additionally, scholarship that looks at sexualized violence in other contexts, such as in hiding and in the ghettos, will help determine patterns of sexualized violence in this genocide. Studies of resistance in such contexts is also needed. Furthermore, research that looks at how survivors processed experiences of sexualized violence will strengthen our understanding of the impact of such violence on those who endured it. It is also crucial to investigate how sexualized violence impacted the postwar lives of survivors. How did they deal with the trauma inflicted by such violence? How did such trauma impact their children? These are important questions that scholars of this history have not yet begun to sufficiently explore.

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[8] Lillian Small, interview by Jody Kleinman, *USC Shoah Foundation Visual History Archive,* University of Southern California, Los Angeles; New Orleans, Louisiana, U.S., February 29, 1996, Interview Code 12562, Tape 4, Segment 115.

In the Holocaust, reasons for sexualized violence were as unique as the genocide itself. Once we have a better understanding of sexualized violence in this genocide, scholars can begin to ask new questions. It will also be possible to further compare and contrast sexualized violence in the Holocaust to that of other genocides, which will strengthen our understanding of the exceptional nature of this genocide. In order to honour survivors of sexualized violence and respect the legacies of those who endured such abuse but did not survive, we must pay sufficient attention to the full scope of their experiences. Given the increasing interest in this topic demonstrated by excellent recent scholarship, I am confident that scholars will take up this charge.

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