

“No One Will Talk”:

The Horrors of Sexual Trauma in the Holocaust

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Background



Figure 1: Nazi guards round up arriving prisoners at the Auschwitz concentration camp's unloading ramp (Masses of people getting off the trains at Auschwitz, n.d., <https://en.historylapse.org/the-holocaust>)

- Conservative estimate of over 13 million deaths
- Sexual assault was experienced by many women causing lifelong trauma
- Arguments against :
Levenkron Nomi - It diminishes the magnitude of the intended outcome

Women Were Specifically Targeted

- They were the greatest threat to the “Aryan Race”
 - Had the ability to reproduce
- The Nazis attacked their femineity as well as their bodies
- Dehumanization was designed to attack religious persons and women greatly



Figure 2: Jewish women from Subcarpathian Rus who have been selected for forced labor at Auschwitz-Birkenau, march toward their barracks after disinfection and head shaving. (Photograph by Bernhardt Walter/Ernst Hofmann, Women standing in line for role call, n.d., <https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/pa8603>)

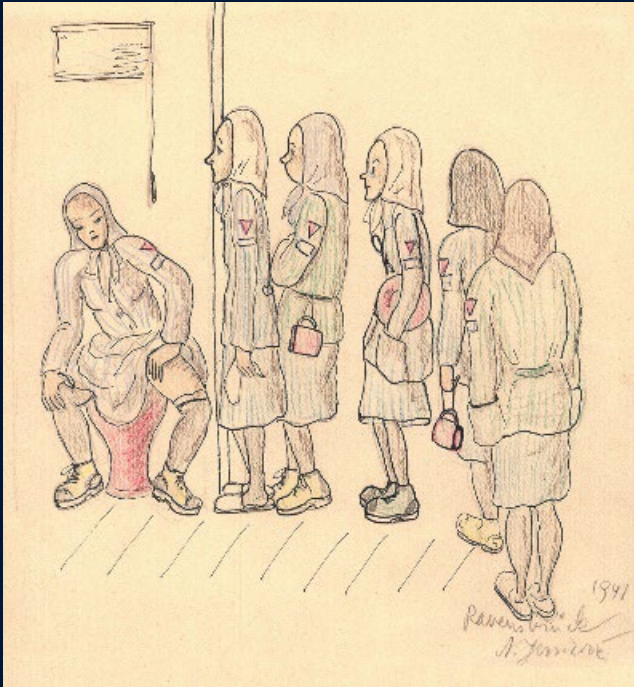
Shavings

- Full body shavings
 - Typically done naked and in the presence of men
- These were religious attacks
 - Numbers 6:5, Ezekiel 44:20, Proverbs 16:31
 - Their Judean idea of modesty
 - Paul, echoing Old Testament law, 1 Timothy 2:9
- This did not come from a sexual desire
 - Mocking women in the shower



Figure 3: Female prisoners in Auschwitz, walking in lines with their heads shaved (Bald women walking in order, n.d., <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-4976754/The-Auschwitz-BROTHEL-prisoners-rewarded.html>)

Menstruation & Pregnancy



- Women would go through amenorrhea
 - The ceasing of a woman's menstrual cycle
- Would become a source of physical and emotional pain
- If found, pregnant women were often killed immediately

Figure 4: A drawing of female prisoners waiting in line for the restroom while menstruating (drawing by Nina Jirsikova in 1941, n.d., <https://www.historytoday.com/archive/feature/menstruation-and-holocaust>)

Abortion

- Heinrich Himmler and Adolf Hitler would have contradicting views
 - Lebensborn, meaning “Fount of Life”
 - Auswahlfeier, meaning “Freedom of Choice”
- Doctors inside of camps would attempt to help

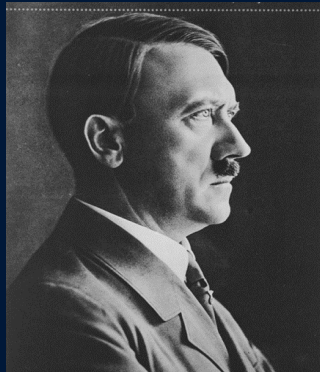


Figure 5: Studio portrait of Icucha Kaufman and her baby. (A women and her baby, n.d., <https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/pa1172865>)

Figure 6: Portrait of Reichsfuehrer-SS Heinrich Himmler. (Portrait of Himmler, n.d., <https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/pa1151323>)

Figure 7: Portrait of Adolf Hitler. (Portrait of Adolf Hitler, n.d., <https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/pa1133280>)

Beatings

- A visual display of strength
- Beatings happened for many reasons
 - Defending others
 - Bringing blankets to roll call in the winter
 - Before they would rape women
- Unsensible beatings in the camp were “frequent”

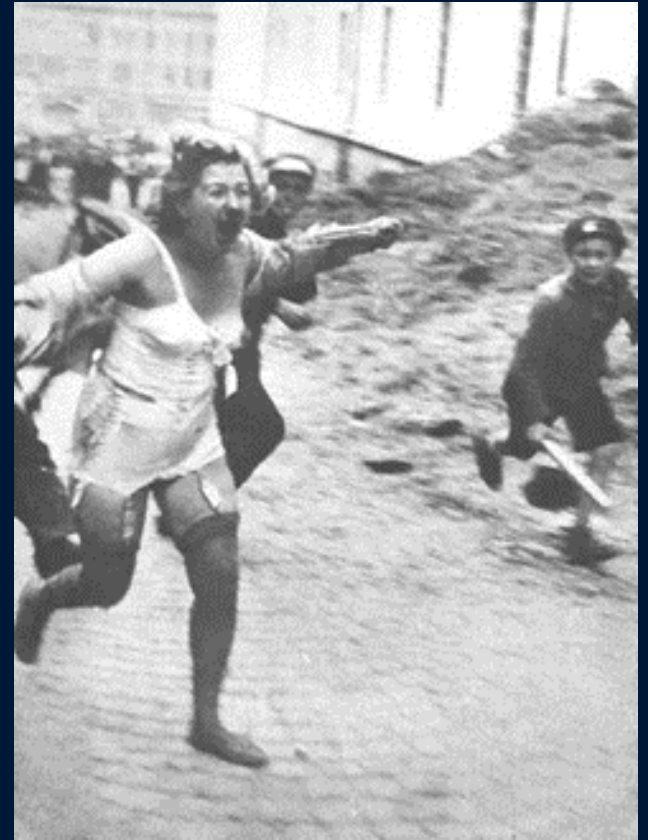


Figure 8: Jewish woman being chased by men and youths armed with clubs, Medova Street in Lviv, (Women being beaten, n.d., <https://thesocialvoiceproject.org/2019/01/06/public-history-matters-history-is-upon-us/>)



Rape

- Women being raped would happen all through out Nazi occupied Europe
- Cecile Klein-Pollack
 - She wrote “Ballerina” about a nameless dancer in the camps
- Rape culture was built into the foundation of the camps

Figure 9: Portrait of young Cecile Klein-Pollack, in black and white (Portrait of a young girl, n.d., <https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/id-card/cecilie-klein-pollack>)

Figure 10: Portrait of Cecile Klein-Pollack wearing a purple shirt with short blonde hair. (Photograph of Cecile Klein-Pollack, n.d., <https://testencyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/oral-history/cecilie-klein-pollack-describes-survival-with-her-sister-in-auschwitz#:~:text=Oral%20History%20Cecilie%20Klein-Pollack%20describes%20survival%20with%20her,In%201939%2C%20Hungary%20occupied%20Cecilie%27s%20area%20of%20Czechoslovakia.?mclid=50e185b8a59611eca9a57f69509042a9>)



Brothels & Sex Trafficking

- SS officers presented this as a volunteer position
- Promised better accommodations and food
 - “It wasn’t sex, it was bread”
- Used for a reward for fellow male prisoners as well as an attempt to “cure” gay men

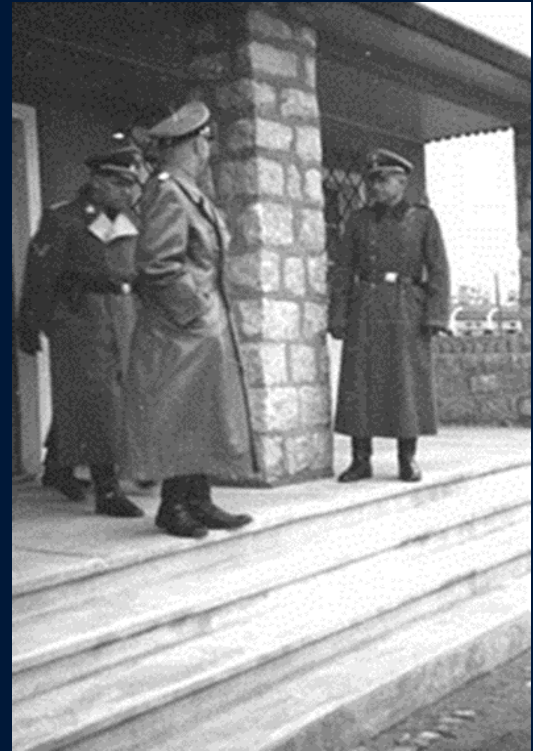


Figure 11: Himmler standing on the steps of the Mauthausen concentration camp brothel in October 1941 (Himmler at the barracks, n.d., <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-4976754/The-Auschwitz-BROTHEL-prisoners-rewarded.html>)



Figure 12: Prisoners of the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp cheerfully collect bread rations upon their liberation by British forces in April 1945. (Women receiving bread rations after liberation, n.d., <https://www.royalnavy.mod.uk/news-and-latest-activity/news/2018/january/29/180129-holocaust-memorial-day>)

Victims After Liberation

- The worry of their families knowing and going through Shanda
 - Extreme shame or pity
- An attempt to keep Kiddushin
 - Holiness of marriage
- Lost of status as a state recognized victim status
 - Could have been seen as a collaborator
- The “Hierarchy of Suffering”
 - “Is molestation important?”



Figure 13: Liberated female prisoners in the women's camp at Woebbelin. (Women smiling now that they have been liberated, n.d., <https://collections.ushmm.org/search/catalog/pa1039411>)

Conclusion

- Sexual assault effected many women in many ways
- Women would not speak out for many reasons
- In 2007, the 1st conference was held to talk about the “sexual violation” women endured
- In 2017, the #MeToo movement allowed for the conversation around sexual assault to be normalized
- Even though sexual assault was not the intend outcome, it is still important

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