Panel: “State Institutions and Extermination Practices in Nazi Germany”

Heather Dewey

**Title:** Male Homosexuality during the Third Reich: Expanded Persecution through Pre-Existing Prejudices

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Heather Dewey is a sophomore History major and Spanish minor with interest in nineteenth and twentieth century history, though she finds most areas gripping, despite a strange aversion to the eighteenth century. She participated in the Research Poster Symposium this year, and has earned several scholarships, most recently the Judie and Ralph Violette Scholarship from the Department of History. Outside of these pursuits, she is an avid creative writer, and has completed National Novel Writing Month (NANOWRIMO) three times. Sometimes she lives in a strong fantasy world, but it has yet to stop her from being grounded and thorough in her pursuits.

**Abstract**

My paper examined the Nazi persecution of homosexuals from 1933-1945, with emphasis on the social and cultural traditions and justifications used to support these efforts. A distinction is made between the treatment of men and women because female homosexuality was never officially made illegal or targeted, although many were interned in prisons or concentration camps under classifications like ‘asocial’ or for other crimes. I theorize that male homosexuals were persecuted because they failed – through stereotyping – to conform to the established gender dynamic that existed at the time. They were also seen as traitorous to the patriotic Nazi regime for being unwilling or incapable to produce more German citizens, a feat deemed necessary because of supposed Aryan superiority and an increasing need for a larger population to inhabit Europe and fight in the war. The sources I used to support this theory are mainly speeches and memorandums from Nazi officials, government documents, and memoirs and interviews by homosexuals, mostly male, from Germany and Poland who recounted their experiences and the types of prejudice they faced.

My main point about the gender dynamic tied back to older stereotypes in Germany – and other parts of the world – that had carried over into Nazi policies. A severe distinction was made between the two genders. By the Nazi ideal, men were strong, militaristic, and dominant, while women were weak, domestic, and passive. By being interested in other men, homosexual males were seen as effeminate partners in a relationship and therefore weak, drawing the scorn of others by failing to conform to the expected role. This, attached to the government’s belief that they would not marry or reproduce and were then also failing to be conscientious German citizens, was a crucial source for their persecution. They were considered undesirable in a society where being different meant death. This examination is significant because it focuses on a lesser-known group that was also targeted by the Nazis and killed during the Holocaust. Homosexuals are not given much attention in the established Holocaust narrative, and received little devotion until research started to appear in the late seventies and eighties. Even now, it can be difficult to find works about their suffering. It is also important because the gender roles that caused much
of the trouble for homosexual people, especially men, were not uncommon outside of Nazi Germany and continued to exist throughout the twentieth century. Similar to anti-Semitism, disgust or consternation was directed against homosexuality in other European countries and United States, and this lingering prejudice contributed to many victims being unwilling to share their stories because it would mean admitting who they were. Much of this consternation was directed because it was believed homosexuals were failing to conform to the ‘proper’ gender roles.

**Bibliographical Note**

The majority of my sources were either academically reviewed journals or translated primary source documents that I cross-referenced with other translations to check for biases or omitted passages. Otherwise, I used scholarly books, several of which were focused primarily on the plight of homosexuals, while others examined gender in Nazi Germany and contained passages on this subject. I also had access to some biographies from men who had decided to record their memoirs in the late seventies and eighties, when more and more people were emerging with their stories. The most intriguing sources I had were several oral histories from homosexual people who lived during this time. I used one from a man and one from a woman to gain both perspectives.