

# “Get Yourselves Under Control!”

*Youth Sexuality in the Third Reich*

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## Abstract

The Nazis were a party of youth and obsessed with controlling every aspect of the lives of young people, including their sexuality. This article explores efforts by the Nazis to divert the energies of youth into (re)productively acceptable channels, such as forced membership in organizations like the Hitler Youth and the League of German Girls, mandatory service during wartime, and legal policies centered on racial purity. However, their efforts proved incoherent, inconsistent, and largely unenforceable. As demonstrated by the increase in female sexual freedom and prostitution and homosexual activity in the military during the Second World War, young people often disregarded, and even challenged, Nazi prescriptions about sexuality and continued to engage in sexual behaviors, both “anti-social” and otherwise.

## Article

### Introduction

The Nazis were a party of youth.<sup>1</sup> The party’s membership was significantly younger than that of most other parties, from the rank and file to the leadership, “with a mean age of approximately thirty-one for all new joiners in the period from 1925 to 1932.”<sup>2</sup> And more importantly, the Nazis were the prophets of a cult of youth—obsessed with ensuring Germany’s glorious, racially sound future, of which young people were both the substance and the saviors. As pioneer of Nazi *Alltagsgeschichte* Detlev Peukert has noted, “during the twelve years of the Nazi state three separate age groups passed through adolescence, that is the years between the fourteenth and eighteenth birthdays. Each group had its own distinctive experiences.”<sup>3</sup> But common to these experiences was a level of control, or attempted control, by the Nazi state over every aspect of their lives, mostly by means of the mass youth organizations, the Hitlerjugend (Hitler Youth, HJ) and the Bund Deutscher Mädel (the League of German Girls, BDM). Some of the aspects upon which the Nazis fixated were sex and sexuality—natural and inevitable parts of youth for many people and

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<sup>1</sup> The title of this paper comes from “Sexual Indecency on Active Duty,” first published anonymously as “...Unzucht in der Soldatenzeit,” in *Das Schwarze Korps*, 5 March 1936, 8, in *The Third Reich Sourcebook*, eds. Sander L. Gilman and Anson Rabinbach (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), chapter 14 (source 162). The “younger generation” is exhorted to “Show some respect for the great men of our German history and get yourselves under control!”

<sup>2</sup> Michael Kater, *Hitler Youth* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2004), 10.

<sup>3</sup> Detlev Peukert, “Youth in the Third Reich,” in *Life in the Third Reich*, ed. Richard Bessel (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 25.

ones which had the potential to either strengthen or destabilize the totalitarian “racial state,” a power of which the Nazis were well aware. Despite propaganda efforts and bombastic theoretical pronouncements, however, the Nazis were not able to control youth sexuality as well as might be expected (or they might have hoped). Official state policies regarding youth sexuality and sex education were often contradictory and difficult to enforce; sex played an important, if unofficial, role within the HJ, the BDM, and the non-state-approved youth groups, such as the Edelweiss Pirates and the Swing Kids; Considerations of race and gender often took precedence over lofty ideological goals, further weakening the official stance(s) of the Party on youth sexuality. The Second World War and the experiences of total war also affected youth sexuality in ways which were often beyond the Party’s control, as demonstrated by the increase of female sexual freedom and prostitution and incidences of homosexuality in the armed forces. An exploration of these topics highlights the variability and inefficiency of Nazi control over the sex lives of young people.

### **Official Policy**

The Nazis came to power on the heels of what has been widely recognized as a period of liberalization and experimentation, particularly in the sexual realm: the Weimar Republic, marked by, to name only a few examples, the expansion of the science of sexology, the popularity of the nudist (or “naturist”) movement, and a push to decriminalize abortion and homosexuality. Almost immediately after Hitler’s accession, the party began attempting to undo the strides made by the reformers, physicians, and activists of the Weimar years—but the backlash was by no means total or consistent; and indeed, in some ways, the wave of liberalization continued. As historian of sexuality Dagmar Herzog has explored in her important work on sex and the Nazis, great emphasis was placed on sexual pleasure within marriage, for both males and females; contraception was more widely available than may be assumed; and pre- and extramarital sex were by no means shunned, but indeed often condoned, both tacitly and otherwise. However, underlying these positive incentives was the racial divide inherent to Nazism, which both disavowed overt sexuality as “Jewish” filth and enshrined it as a German privilege. In essence, as Herzog states, “The goal was not so much to suppress sexuality. Rather the aim was to reinvent it as the privilege of non-disabled, heterosexual ‘Aryans.’”<sup>4</sup> This uneven approach is characteristic of official Nazi policies towards sexuality; but although initially they seem so contrary as to even be hypocritical, historian of sexuality Annette F. Timm has noted that “[i]t is possible to make sense of the seemingly contradictory positions [of the regime] if one recognizes the underlying consistency of policies that were all directed toward the same goal: the creation of a racially sanitized state with the power to rule Europe and beyond. Sexuality, in other words, was viewed as a means to an end.”<sup>5</sup> This was true for young people as well as for adults. Conference minutes from the Horst Wessel School in Kassel decree on 1 December 1933 that “sex education in the classroom is banned by ministerial ordinance,” and just under three weeks later, that “[m]ore emphasis shall be placed on the study of

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<sup>4</sup> Dagmar Herzog, “Sex and the Third Reich,” *Sex after Fascism: Memory and Morality in Twentieth-Century Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 4.

<sup>5</sup> Annette F. Timm, “Sex with a Purpose: Prostitution, Venereal Disease, and Militarized Masculinity in the Third Reich,” in *Sexuality and German Fascism*, ed. Dagmar Herzog (New York: Berghahn Books, 2005), 225.

genealogy.”<sup>6</sup> Race education took precedence over sex education—but as we have seen, sex and race were inseparable for the Nazis.

Practical sexual education was far less important than imbuing youth with a sense of their place in the machinery of the Nazi regime and the future of the German people. As Geoffrey Giles notes, “their bodies were not theirs to do with as they wished, but belonged to the Aryan race, the propagation of which they held in sacred trust.”<sup>7</sup> Thus, the general tenor of Nazi policies toward youth sexuality was twofold: first, youth should be kept pure, protected from even the sight or knowledge of unacceptable manifestations of sexuality, for example sex work and homosexuality;<sup>8</sup> but second, *if* they were going to have sex, it should be with a racially appropriate partner. *If* that union happened to produce illegitimate offspring, they would at least be providing the Reich with one more Aryan soldier or citizen, as is hinted at by an order of Himmler’s issued after the invasion of Poland in September 1939: “Beyond the boundaries of perhaps otherwise still necessary bourgeois laws and customs it will also outside of marriage be an important responsibility for German women and girls of good blood, not lightly, but rather in profound moral seriousness, to become the mothers of children of soldiers who are going to the front and of whom fate alone knows whether they will return or fall in battle for Germany.”<sup>9</sup> To prevent both domestic and international controversy, however, this particular aim could not necessarily be explicitly promulgated on the home front: to do so would have been contrary to what historian Robert G. Waite calls the Nazis’ “exaggerated interest in morality.”<sup>10</sup> As summarized by Herzog, “What a reading of a broad array of Nazi writings on sex suggests is that no prior regime in history had ever so systematically set itself the task of stimulating and validating especially young people’s sexual desires—all the while denying precisely that this is what they were doing.”<sup>11</sup> Not all sexual desires were encouraged, however, and not all young people were entitled to them. Among the most problematic sites of this internal conflict were the Nazis’ own youth organizations, the Hitler Youth and the League of German Girls.

### **Sexual Double Standards in the HJ and the BDM**

As in many other areas, when it came to youth organizations, the Nazis proved themselves deeply sexist. A 1932 sex education book proclaimed that “[i]t is particularly seductive for the woman to gain power over men by means of the erotic...It is an ancient piece of wisdom

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<sup>6</sup> “Conference Minutes from Horst Wessel School in Kassel,” 1933, in *The Third Reich Sourcebook*, eds. Sander L. Gilman and Anson Rabinbach (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), chapter 9 (source 100).

<sup>7</sup> Geoffrey J. Giles, “Straight Talk for Nazi Youth: The Attempt to Transmit Heterosexual Norms,” *Paedagogica Historica* 32, no. 1 (1996): 312-313. As Giles has noted, however, “There is no indication whatever that this [sex education] literature did anything to reduce levels of homosexual activity, to curb widespread masturbation, to prevent premarital sex, or decisively to assist in building happy relationships” (307).

<sup>8</sup> Timm quotes the Nazi “VD expert” Bodo Spiethoff on the matter of sex work: “It is the duty of the state to call a halt to the appearance of prostitution in all its forms and particularly to protect children and youth from coming into contact with prostitution.” See Timm, “Sex with a Purpose,” 239.

<sup>9</sup> Quoted in Herzog, *Sex after Fascism*, 51.

<sup>10</sup> Robert G. Waite, “Teenage Sexuality in Nazi Germany,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 8, no. 3 (January 1998): 435.

<sup>11</sup> Herzog, *Sex after Fascism*, 18.

when in the very first Bible story Eve is seen to proffer the seductive fruit to the man.”<sup>12</sup> Even the girls of the BDM, custodians of the German future, were not spared from this disparaging view. Historian of the Hitler Youth Michael Kater has argued that “nominally, Hitler boys and Hitler girls were coequals, in terms of the leadership structure, the basic psychological and ideological schooling, and many of the daily tasks to be performed,” such as the wearing of uniforms, the mandatory sports encouraged by both organizations, and the participation in mass rallies demonstrating support for the Führer, but the organizations’ essential qualities and their hopes for their young members were divided along gendered lines.<sup>13</sup> Boys learned how to drill, march, and shoot, while girls sang in choirs and were taught the skills that would prepare them to be good German mothers—confirming Kater’s assessment of German boys and girls as “future biological partners who in the HJ and BDM were being conditioned for their reproductive missions.”<sup>14</sup> Most likely unintentionally, however, the official structure and activities of the HJ and BDM themselves also offered youth new sexual freedoms and a space in which to exercise them. While the boarding-school pupil Peter Brückner contended that “young people’s pleasure in using their bodies, *in fending off their sexual instincts*, their liking for physical competition, and the ideology of the Nazi state all came naturally together on the playing fields of the Third Reich,”<sup>15</sup> the official policy of the BDM subgroup, Glaube und Schönheit (Faith and Beauty), explicitly linked sports and athleticism with female beauty and sexual attractiveness: “Taking pleasure in human beauty must emanate from feminine vanity and must be accompanied by a rigorous culture of physical hygiene and a certain elegance. But participating in athletics and the desire to maintain a strong and well-trained body are part and parcel of the well-groomed appearance.”<sup>16</sup> While such emphasis on good looks and physical health may have been officially intended to promote racial awareness, driving home the superiority of the “Aryan” race to its young members, it is once again difficult to separate racial from sexual issues in this case. “Feminine vanity” and “a certain elegance” are unquestionably tied up with sex appeal, and it is highly unlikely that the young people of the HJ and the BDM would have been ignorant of this. In the youth organizations, sports were not only an outlet for sexual energies but also a tool used to prepare German youth for sexually desirable and (re)productive futures.

It would soon become apparent, however, that not all young people were willing to wait for the “future” to begin these “reproductive missions.” Spates of teenage pregnancies among BDM girls have been well-documented by Waite, Herzog, and others, including Elizabeth Heineman, who notes that “nine hundred girls from the League of German Girls...returned pregnant from the 1936 party rally.”<sup>17</sup> At first sight it may seem ironic that party rallies, the most public, fervent, and collective expressions of Nazi identity, should be the site of so

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<sup>12</sup> Quoted in Giles, “Straight Talk,” 306.

<sup>13</sup> Kater, *Hitler Youth*, 73.

<sup>14</sup> Kater, *Hitler Youth*, 103.

<sup>15</sup> Quoted in Detlev Peukert, *Inside Nazi Germany: Conformity, Opposition and Racism in Everyday Life*, trans. Richard Deveson (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 147. Emphasis mine.

<sup>16</sup> Günter Kaufmann, “Faith and Beauty,” in *The Third Reich Sourcebook*, eds. Sander L. Gilman and Anson Rabinbach (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), chapter 9 (source 115).

<sup>17</sup> Elizabeth D. Heineman, “Sexuality and Nazism: The Doubly Unspeakable?,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 11, no. 1-2 (2002): 29.

much apparently “un-Nazi” sexual behavior. But as we have seen, these instances of premarital sex between healthy young Aryans, resulting in pregnancies which would deliver still more Aryans to the Reich, were in fact by no means antithetical to Nazi ideals and goals. The diarist Victor Klemperer makes the association between teenage sex and the Nazi youth organizations abundantly clear in a 1935 entry from Dresden: “Annemarie Koehler tells us in despair that the hospitals are overcrowded with fifteen-year-old girls, some pregnant, some with gonorrhoea. The BDM. Her brother has vehemently refused to allow his daughter to join.”<sup>18</sup> Here, the BDM itself is positioned as the source of the problem—but how did these young girls *get* pregnant or infected with sexually transmitted infections (STIs) in the first place? No mention is made of the boys or young men with whom they had engaged in intercourse, revealing the myopic and misogynistic double standard that would define Nazi reactions to teenage sexuality among the ranks of its youth organizations. As Kater explains,

It is likely that boys and girls were equally responsible, acting on their own accord...But because girls had previously lacked the opportunity for this sexual freedom, the change was viewed primarily as an emancipation for girls and young women, who thus posed a threat to males. For it is generally true in any authoritarian polity that “by all those who see military discipline, self-sacrifice, austerity, and worship for the Leader as the highest social ideals, the power of female sexuality will be seen as a dire threat.”<sup>19</sup>

Considering the Nazis’ claims of “emancipation from emancipation” for women, such a stance can hardly be shocking.<sup>20</sup> Even female sexuality, however, was less feared than male homosexuality, a manifestation of youth sexuality that would be preached against and pursued within the Hitler Youth all the way until the end of the war.

In her pioneering work on girlhood in the Third Reich, German historian Dagmar Reese has explained:

While for some the demand for a community between the sexes with simultaneous strict sexual abstinence led to an atmosphere of “sterile innocence,” others feared boys could become more “effeminate” and girls more “masculine.” At the beginning of the 1920s, the debate led on the one hand to a fundamental acceptance of sexual relations and on the other hand to a more pronounced separation of the sexes.<sup>21</sup>

This separation is evident in the division of the Nazis’ mass youth organizations into girls’ and boys’ sections, the BDM and HJ respectively. In line with the fears mentioned by Reese, it is perhaps unsurprising that two organizations so rigidly separated by sex should find themselves plagued with the specter of homosexuality. Herzog and others have

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<sup>18</sup> Dagmar Herzog, “Hubris and Hypocrisy, Incitement and Disavowal: Sexuality and German Fascism,” in *Sexuality and German Fascism*, ed. Dagmar Herzog (New York: Berghahn Books, 2005), 8.

<sup>19</sup> Kater, *Hitler Youth*, 107.

<sup>20</sup> Herzog, *Sex after Fascism*, 13.

<sup>21</sup> Dagmar Reese, *Growing Up Female in Nazi Germany* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006), chapter 5.

acknowledged the problematic nature of associating fascism in general and Nazism in particular with an inherent or latent homoeroticism, and to do so is not my goal here. The possibility of homosexuality within the ranks of the HJ, and indeed the *Sturmabteilung* (Storm Detachment, SA) and *Schutzstaffel* (Protection Squadron, SS), was never denied or ignored by the Nazis: in fact, they were acutely aware of it as a looming threat, particularly after the 1934 Röhm Purge.<sup>22</sup> Goebbels went so far as to recommend the introduction of the death penalty especially for the boys of the HJ, who ranged from fourteen to eighteen years of age: “In *one* organization every case of homosexuality must be punished with death, namely, in the Hitler Youth. If that is one day going to represent the pick of the nation, then no other verdict must ever be passed within its ranks.”<sup>23</sup> Fortunately this appalling policy was never implemented, and indeed little was officially done to combat homosexuality within the HJ—for as Giles has observed, “There was a feeling that too open a discussion of homosexuality would positively encourage youths to experiment in this direction.”<sup>24</sup> The very nature of the HJ—single-sexed, with hormonal teenage boys living, playing, and sometimes (as on overnight camping trips) sleeping in close proximity, united (at least in theory) in shared, passionate idealism—was also, arguably, an encouraging factor for homosexual experimentation. But rather than accept responsibility for having created an ideological atmosphere which thrived and relied upon the power of male bonding, the Nazis chose to blame the youth groups of the Weimar and *Kaiserreich* years for setting a precedent of homosexuality.

In a 1936 article in the SS organ *Das Schwarze Korps* (The Black Corps), provocatively titled “...Unzucht in der Soldatenzeit” (Sexual Indecency on Active Duty) it is explained that in these pre-Nazi youth groups, “a few pathologically inclined leaders exploited the susceptibility of a specific age group in order to spread their viciously anti-*völkisch* tendencies. Using an exaggerated sense of camaraderie, they exalted friendship with men among these male youth,” which eventually led to overt homosexuality (“same-sex aberrations”).<sup>25</sup> Such “anti-social” expressions of sexuality were safely distanced from the morals with which Hitler Youth boys were imbued. Ironically, however, this passing of the blame onto “anti-*völkisch*” youth groups could not explain the homoeroticism in such Hitler Youth training materials as the short story “Pimpfe sind Treu” (Pimpfe are loyal) of 1941, in which one Pimpfe (a nickname for a member of the *Deutsches Jungvolk* or German Youngsters in the Hitler Youth) thinks to himself after witnessing his friend Hanne’s bravery during a forest fire, “Hanne, you’re such a great guy. From now on, I’ll go through the fires of hell for you any time!”<sup>26</sup> Such language of ardent devotion was read as an

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<sup>22</sup> More data is available for the HJ than for the BDM, reflecting a deeper Nazi anxiety about male homosexuals than about lesbians, and the focus of this section will be skewed accordingly.

<sup>23</sup> From *Die Tagebücher von Joseph Goebbels*, ed. Elke Fröhlich (Munich, 1996), 272. Quoted in Geoffrey J. Giles, “Same-Sex Incidents in Himmler’s SS and Police,” in *Sexuality and German Fascism*, ed. Dagmar Herzog (New York: Berghahn Books, 2005), 268. Emphasis in the original.

<sup>24</sup> Giles, “Straight Talk,” 312.

<sup>25</sup> “Sexual Indecency on Active Duty,” in *The Third Reich Sourcebook*, eds. Sander L. Gilman and Anson Rabinbach (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), chapter 14 (source 162).

<sup>26</sup> Anonymous, “A Hitler Youth Scout Is Loyal and True!,” first published as “Pimpfe sind Treu,” in *Sommerlager und Heimabendmaterial für die Schulungs- und Kulturarbeit* (Berlin: Reichsjugendführung der NSDAP, Summer 1941), 24–26, in *The Third Reich Sourcebook*, eds. Sander L. Gilman and Anson Rabinbach (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), chapter 5 (source 112).

expression of nationalism and loyalty to one's Hitler Youth comrades rather than as a reflection of personal feeling and especially not if those feelings might have been same-sex desire. This is in line with the Nazi state's conception of love and emotions in general, as European historian Alexander Geppert explains in his work on love letters to Hitler: "At least in theory, emotional ties and bonds were supposed to be exclusively oriented toward the State, the *Volk* and, above all, the *Führer*, and far less toward a personal 'significant other.'"<sup>27</sup> However, it is not difficult to imagine that such passionate language could easily provide an acceptable smokescreen for real, "aberrant" feelings. Whether or not they were acknowledged by the HJ or the state, homosexual incidents certainly did occur within the ranks of the youth organizations, and with such frequency that even *Das Schwarze Korps* felt bound to comment—being sure, however, to suggest that homosexual "potential" was "unconsciously" inherent in every man and was especially liable to emerge circumstantially, particularly during puberty, thus absolving young men of blame and assuring them that they were not "real" homosexuals and therefore had nothing to worry about.<sup>28</sup> The bombastic *Schwarze Korps* thus essentially admitted that combating homosexuality among the youth groups was a functionally fruitless endeavor.

Despite attempting to channel young people's sexual energies into productive, state-oriented channels such as sports and national loyalty, the Nazi youth organizations ultimately could not prevent incidences of teen pregnancy and homosexuality from occurring at an alarming rate. Some of this can likely be attributed to the sex-segregated nature of the HJ and the BDM, which both provided convenient opportunities for homosexual encounters and made the opposite sex into "forbidden fruit," likely inciting increased sexual desire which was then more easily acted upon in the youth-centered, less-supervised atmosphere of HJ and BDM activities, such as camping trips and party rallies, than it would have been at home. However, such incidents also occurred outside of the youth organizations. As Waite has noted,

the Hitler Youth organization worked hard at keeping teenagers in line, but it also contributed to a general uneasiness. Some parents held it responsible for the misbehavior of their children...Some of the children returning home got into trouble as they roamed the streets. Other teens went truant, telling their parents they were going to the meetings but in fact they hung out with friends.<sup>29</sup>

Some young people simply did not attend HJ and BDM meetings or join the groups at all—and these teenagers still found opportunities for sexual experiences, without having to worry whether these experiences conformed to Nazi ideology or were examples of appropriate behavior for young "Aryans." This can be seen for example in the

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<sup>27</sup> Alexander C.T. Geppert, "Dear Adolf!": Locating Love in Nazi Germany," in *New Dangerous Liaisons: Discourses on Europe and Love in the Twentieth Century*, eds. Luisa Passerini, Liliana Ellena, and Alexander C. T. Geppert (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010), 160.

<sup>28</sup> See Herzog, *Sex after Fascism*, 35.

<sup>29</sup> Waite, "Teenage Sexuality in Nazi Germany," 447.

countercultural youth movements, particularly the Edelweiss Pirates and the Swing Kids, as explored in the next section.

### **Sexuality in Non-Nazi Youth Groups**

In 1944 Heinrich Himmler issued a Decree on “Youth Gangs”:

Gangs are associations of youth who are not in the Hitler Youth and who lead a separate and extraordinary existence based on principles not in accordance with National Socialist ideology. They all share a rejection of or disinterest toward their obligations within the Volksgemeinschaft or the Hitler Youth; this is especially evidenced in their lack of willingness to conform to the exigencies of war. These gangs have made their appearance under a variety of names (clique, mob, gang, pack, the Platters, the Shufflers, the Edelweiss Pirates, and so on). A centralized organization does not, in general, exist. Outward association is often only very loose and irregular. Occasionally they wear special identifying insignia (for example, an edelweiss emblem, death’s-head ring, colored pins, and the like). Membership dues are usually not collected, but in some cases identification insignia are issued.<sup>30</sup>

The very fact of this decree, as well as the alarmist language of its first sentence, make clear the apparent threat which these so-called gangs posed to the regime. Like the Hitler Youth and the BDM, the countercultural youth groups represented a continuation of the (“anti-*völkisch*”) youth movement which dated back to the imperial era, including such groups as the Wandervogel (Wandering Bird) and other *bündisch* (free youth) organizations. Unlike the HJ and BDM, however, groups like the Edelweiss Pirates stuck much closer to their roots, defining themselves not in accordance with any particular set of political ideals (and often, in fact, identifying themselves apolitically), and instead devoting themselves to the more earthly pleasures of youth: hiking through the countryside, making music, taking train-trips, and more—including “bash[ing] Hitler Youth patrols doing their rounds”—with their friends.<sup>31</sup> It ought not be surprising that sex was among these pleasures. Also unlike the state-sanctioned organizations, the Edelweiss Pirates and other countercultural groups were mixed-sex, and as Peukert has noted, “The presence of girls at the evening get-togethers and on the weekend trips into the countryside gave the adolescents a relatively unrestricted opportunity to have sexual experiences.”<sup>32</sup> In his examination of the Edelweiss Pirates based on Allied intelligence archives, however, Perry Biddiscombe has pointed out that “it was suspected...that the Edelweiss [Pirates] was a gathering point for young homosexuals.”<sup>33</sup> In all likelihood, just like the teenagers of the HJ and BDM, members of the

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<sup>30</sup> Heinrich Himmler, Decree on Youth Gangs “Erllass des Reichsführers SS und Chefs der Deutschen Polizei, Heinrich Himmler,” 25 October 1944, first published in Detlev Peukert, ed., *Die Edelweisspiraten: Protestbewegungen jugendlicher Arbeiter im Dritten Reich: eine Dokumentation* (Cologne: Bund-Verlag, 1983), 123–33. See *The Third Reich Sourcebook*, eds. Sander L. Gilman and Anson Rabinbach (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), chapter 30 (source 406).

<sup>31</sup> Peukert, “Youth,” 30.

<sup>32</sup> Peukert, “Youth,” 32.

<sup>33</sup> Perry Biddiscombe, “‘The Enemy of Our Enemy’: A View of the Edelweiss Piraten from the British and American Archives,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 30, no. 1 (1995): 44.



Edelweiss Pirates were simply eager for sexual experimentation in whatever form it might take, and found such opportunities in their youth-centered activities; the countercultural groups did not even have to contend with the supervision of older “leaders,” as did members of the HJ and BDM. Additionally, as Peukert has observed,

in a comparatively high number of instances the fathers [of Edelweiss Pirates] are recorded as being dead...This seems to indicate that it was easier for those young people who were not subject to paternal authority to undertake extended weekend excursions, pick quarrels with the boss, or spend their evenings outdoors with friends in contravention of the Decree for the Protection of Young People.<sup>34</sup>

Parental absence, an unfortunate side effect of their working- or lower-middle-class status, proved a blessing in the realm of sexuality for the Edelweiss Pirates. But another countercultural group had additional advantages when it came to sexuality. The Swing Kids came from the middle- and upper-middle classes, and the privileges of their social standing extended to their opportunities for sex.

Swing Kids were aficionados of American jazz music and “English ideals, language, demeanor, [and] dress.”<sup>35</sup> Boys wore plaid jackets, “eye-catching scarves,” and “an umbrella over the arm in every kind of weather”; their hair was long, as was that of the swing girls, who penciled their eyebrows and wore lipstick and fingernail polish.<sup>36</sup> All devoted themselves, not to the Nazi state, but to “a cult of ‘casualness’ (*Laessigkeit*) and ‘sleaziness’ (*Lottern*),” and this rebellion (unpolitical and self-centered as it was) did not go unnoticed by the authorities.<sup>37</sup> In his 1944 decree, Himmler warned that “[t]he members of these gangs come primarily from the ‘upper middle class’ and want to pursue their own pleasure and sexual or other excesses. They thereby soon conflict sharply with National Socialist ideology.”<sup>38</sup> This pursuit of pleasure was made much easier by the Swing Kids’ station in life: “A relaxed regime in their parents’ houses, or lack of nighttime supervision offered ample opportunity for gaining sexual experience,”<sup>39</sup> which, according to the fear-mongering and voyeuristic reports of the Party, included group sex, sex with minors, homosexuality, and even sex with “fully Jewish girls between fifteen and eighteen.”<sup>40</sup> The Swing Kids’ transgressions included not only the passive resistance of not joining state-sanctioned youth organizations but also the explicit inversion of Reich sexual mores by (allegedly) sleeping with members of the same sex and with “non-Aryans.”<sup>41</sup> Despite the

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<sup>34</sup> Peukert, *Inside Nazi Germany*, 163.

<sup>35</sup> Himmler, “Decree on Youth Gangs.”

<sup>36</sup> Kater, *Hitler Youth*, 142.

<sup>37</sup> Peukert, *Inside Nazi Germany*, 167.

<sup>38</sup> Himmler, “Decree on Youth Gangs.”

<sup>39</sup> Peukert, “Youth,” 38.

<sup>40</sup> Kater, *Hitler Youth*, 143.

<sup>41</sup> As Peukert has noted, “sexual life in these groups was no doubt much less orgiastic than contemporary authors of official reports believed, or wanted others to believe” (“Youth,” 32). However, these examples have been chosen from among the Nazis’ many claims as being more reasonable: Jewish teenagers were accepted by the Swing Kids, and homosexuality seems a more likely occurrence than, say, frequent orgies.

internal hypocrisies and contradictions of Nazi policies on youth sexuality, it was abundantly clear that the Swing Kids, like the Edelweiss Pirates, stood in inherent contradiction to *all* of these policies because of their non-Nazi orientation. The extensive lists of exceptions and bent rules—most often granted in accordance with racial and gendered considerations—were not extended to include the Swing Kids' behavior. In this, at least, the Nazis' views on sex were consistent: those not aligned with the Nazis and their project could be almost certain to find their sexual behavior deemed transgressive. Swing Kids, however, remained a threat from within the *Volk*, while the advent of war would bring about a new host of sexual enemies from outside it.

### **Youth Sexuality on the Home Front**

On the home front, the war led to greater sexual freedom, especially for women. When the war started, many fathers, brothers, husbands, boyfriends, and other men who may previously have been able to exercise some control over the sex lives of the women in their lives were called away from home. We have already seen that the state youth organizations were not effective in controlling, and in some cases even provided opportunities for, the sexual behavior of young people; and other state apparatus—such as the Reichsarbeitsdienst (Reich Labor Service, RAD), in which all youth were supposed to serve a year—were no more conducive to sexual morality. As Herzog describes:

One woman remembered the Reich Labor Service as having a “very sexual climate...a thoroughly sexual climate.” Females in the Reich Labor Service were deliberately brought together with young military men for coed “social evenings”; the expectation was clearly that romantic pairings would occur...The overall message young people received was that Nazis were in favor of premarital sex.<sup>42</sup>

Amid the stress, excitement, and generally extenuating circumstances of wartime, it is hardly surprising that young people, especially young women, sought new sexual experiences regardless of marital status. Moreover, the new presence of foreign forced laborers—and, as the war progressed, prisoners of war—on German soil presented on one hand the threat of racial contamination, since most came from the “inferior” Slavic races of Eastern Europe, and on the other a new sexual opportunity. The Reich Ministry of Justice warned in 1943 that “German women who engage in sexual relations with prisoners of war have betrayed the front, done gross injury to their nation’s honor, and damaged the reputation of German womanhood abroad.”<sup>43</sup> However, as we have previously seen, official Reich policies did not often reflect or affect the sexual lives of its citizens, and it soon became apparent that many German women and girls were happy to indulge in forbidden relations with foreigners. For example, as Waite notes, “In Detmold, an eighteen-year-old girl was prosecuted in early 1945 for affairs with French POWs. At the same time, two school girls, ages fourteen and sixteen, came before a special court in Nuremberg because of their involvement with French POWs two years previously”; he adds that “girls involved

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<sup>42</sup> Herzog, “Hubris and Hypocrisy,” 17.

<sup>43</sup> Birthe Kundrus, “Forbidden Company: Romantic Relationships between Germans and Foreigners, 1939 to 1945,” in *Sexuality and German Fascism*, ed. Dagmar Herzog (New York: Berghahn Books, 2005), 205.

with foreigners were sometimes arrested by the Gestapo and frequently received severe jail sentences.”<sup>44</sup>

Incredibly, however, the Nazis’ sexist double standard still applied, favoring and protecting German men even when the offence was as gravely damaging to the *Volk* as sex with a foreigner. The Gestapo ruled that “sexual intercourse with female foreign workers, even when they are citizens of an enemy state and a significant affront to the public is apparent, cannot be prosecuted.”<sup>45</sup> Considered in the light of the Nazis’ overarching views—namely, that “the male’s sexual gratification was deemed to take precedence over the female’s” (and, apparently, even over “racial” considerations)—this hypocrisy makes sense.<sup>46</sup> However, the double standard did not go so far as transgressing prewar social norms, such as allowing German sex workers to ply their trade with foreign laborers. Instead, designated brothels for foreigners were soon established: “The official justification for this policy was that providing foreign workers with prostitutes (particularly when the prostitutes were themselves foreigners or ‘Gypsies’) would protect German women from sexual danger and defilement.”<sup>47</sup> With female foreigners sleeping with other foreigners or with German men (and thereby chancing the spread of German seed, at no potential legal cost for the man), young German women and girls found themselves able to take advantage of an economic opportunity: that of prostituting themselves, whether overtly or “covertly,” to German soldiers.

### **“Support Our Boys”**

The attraction of young women to soldiers was not a new or even exclusively German phenomenon—one need only look to the First World War in Britain to find ample evidence of “khaki fever,” when respectable young women were supposedly driven mad with lust by the sight of Tommies in uniform.<sup>48</sup> Coupled with the much-touted Nazi ideal of soldierly manliness and the widely propagated injunction to racially fit Aryan women to produce more children for the Führer, it is unsurprising that similar results arose when war broke out in Germany. As Waite writes:

soldiers stationed at bases near villages and cities and the frequent movement of troops through the railway stations, some local officials maintained, attracted teenage girls. The striking uniforms and demeanor of older men, some not much older than themselves, and war propaganda to “support our boys,” led some girls to shamelessly chase after the soldiers.<sup>49</sup>

Not all young women slept with soldiers for money, or at all, but enough of them did that, as Kater notes, “soldiers got to know this situation well and ruthlessly took advantage of it,

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<sup>44</sup> Waite, “Teenage Sexuality in Nazi Germany,” 455.

<sup>45</sup> See Waite, “Teenage Sexuality in Nazi Germany,” 457.

<sup>46</sup> Timm, “Sex with a Purpose,” 226.

<sup>47</sup> Timm, “Sex with a Purpose,” 247.

<sup>48</sup> For an excellent exploration of this phenomenon, see Angela Woollacott, “‘Khaki Fever’ and Its Control: Gender, Class, Age and Sexual Morality on the British Homefront in the First World War,” *Journal of Contemporary History* 29, no. 2 (1994): 325-347.

<sup>49</sup> Waite, “Teenage Sexuality in Nazi Germany,” 448.

to the point where authorities were charging them with gross irresponsibility, indecency, and rape...Because the BDM, as well as somewhat older RAD (Reich Labor Service) girls, often accepted small gifts and even money from men, authorities were inclined to speak of 'covert prostitution.'<sup>50</sup> "Covert" did not mean "harmless": Kater indicates rising rates of STIs and illegitimate pregnancies, which Waite would surely include among his assessment of the "sharp rise in immorality" during the war, including the "alarming" trend of younger and younger teenagers having sex.<sup>51</sup>

But young German women were often flippant about their "immoral" activities, with frequent (and clever) retorts to criticism including "The Führer wants more children, does not he?" and "What do you want, I'm a German mother," or even, in direct defiance of the Nazis' sexism, "The boys do this, so we can do it too."<sup>52</sup> These women perceived the loopholes and inconsistencies in Nazi sexual regulations and took full advantage of them, seizing hold of opportunities for their own gain, both material and sexual. And those "boys" were indeed "doing it," too: older HJs were drafted into the Wehrmacht and SS with the outbreak of war and encouraged to make use of military brothels like other soldiers. Herzog cites the testimony of one Christian HJ-turned-soldier who was markedly uncomfortable with the army's sexual climate: "'Every little Hans must have a little Sabine' [*Jedem Hänschen sein Sabinchen*], that was the motto. It was disgusting. The Nazis constantly insisted that sex before marriage or outside of marriage was morally acceptable, even necessary."<sup>53</sup> Even policies as "liberating" as this one—which it might be imagined would have been eagerly welcomed by young, unmarried people curious about sex—were not universally taken to heart, demonstrating once again the Nazis' inability to fully reshape the sex lives of their citizens. Overall, however, the increased sexual opportunities and license wrought by the war seem to have been eagerly (and sometimes profitably) seized upon by many young people, from freshly minted soldiers to newly unsupervised girls on the home front. Homosexuality, though, remained taboo even within the chaotic and liberalized conditions of wartime.

### **Homosexuality in the Armed Forces**

*Das Schwarze Korps's* report on "Sexual Indecency on Active Duty" was first published three years prior to the outbreak of war but soon became relevant. The article describes soldiers soliciting sex workers and then contracting venereal disease: "some foolhardy, promiscuous girls show up, the beer and the booze help things along. Many a young man who began his tour of duty pure and clean comes home with dark stains on his conscience, and perhaps even with some disease in his body."<sup>54</sup> But another threat lurked between the lines: "You're all thrown together as a group of young men, all bursting with health and brimming with the exuberance of youth—by that fact alone, there is a great risk of sexual indecency on active duty."<sup>55</sup> Even the temptations posed by "foolhardy, promiscuous" girls

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<sup>50</sup> Kater, *Hitler Youth*, 111.

<sup>51</sup> Waite, "Teenage Sexuality in Nazi Germany," 445 and 449.

<sup>52</sup> Waite, "Teenage Sexuality in Nazi Germany," 445.

<sup>53</sup> Herzog, *Sex after Fascism*, 60-61.

<sup>54</sup> "Sexual Indecency," in *The Third Reich Sourcebook*, eds. Sander L. Gilman and Anson Rabinbach (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2013), chapter 14 (source 162).

<sup>55</sup> "Sexual Indecency."

were not so severe as the danger posed by “the aberrant tendencies of youth who are attracted to members of the same sex,” merely hinted at by the euphemistic language and mention of a single-sex environment—but “which, if they are not discovered in time, can have a devastating detrimental effect on the Volk as a whole.”<sup>56</sup> As Peukert has explained, the Nazis’ “dominant image of the ‘strict’ soldierly man” was one of the sources of their homophobia; such a man was “obliged to repel with brute force all temptations to ‘soften’ the identity and sexual role indoctrinated into him,” including of course an attraction to the same sex, whether present in himself or others.<sup>57</sup> The thought that soldiers themselves might engage in homosexual acts was therefore abhorrent to the Nazis, as can be seen, for example, in the swift removal of Ernst Röhm as the head of the SA on several pretexts, his homosexuality being one which should not be ignored. Paradoxically, however, the Nazis’ party structure and ideology rested on an emotionally charged brand of male “comradeship” that had its roots in notions also borrowed by the pre-Nazi gay rights movement, specifically the idealized male community or *Männerbund*. As historian Giles has noted in his work on homosexuality and the SS,

Whether comrade or friend, many Nazis developed relationships with other men that were laden with emotion and eroticism and often ran too close to the edge of sexuality to be pulled back...The Nazis celebrated bonds with members of their own sex as more noble than relationships with women, but they were too embarrassed to admit that there was an emotional and therefore and labile and not easily controllable side to them.<sup>58</sup>

Intense, arguably homoerotic devotion to male friends, comrades-at-arms, and fellow party members gave the Nazi party and military its strength, and yet homosexual *acts* and expressions of romantic love between men were ruthlessly ferreted out and often punished quite severely, including when occurring among youths in the form of harmless “sexual horseplay” such as mutual masturbation.<sup>59</sup> But while on one hand, “the central office for combating homosexuality continued business as usual, even when the country was collapsing,” in characteristically inconsistent Nazi fashion, even punishment for homosexual offences among the armed forces—the very seat of German masculinity—was by no means evenly enforced.<sup>60</sup> Giles cites the case of two young SS men, aged seventeen and eighteen, found naked in bed together in early 1940, in which the court ruled that “lying side by side in a bed does not in itself constitute an indecent act in the sense of the criminal code.”<sup>61</sup> From this sterile legal language, Giles makes a strangely touching inference: “Perhaps [the court] realized that soldiers in wartime do sometimes sleep together, simply for warmth or companionship.”<sup>62</sup> The irregular and often irrational Nazi policies of sexuality did occasionally—even if accidentally—allow for human tenderness.

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<sup>56</sup> “Sexual Indecency.”

<sup>57</sup> Peukert, *Inside Nazi Germany*, 219.

<sup>58</sup> Giles, “Same-Sex Incidents,” 260-261.

<sup>59</sup> Giles, “Same-Sex Incidents,” 311.

<sup>60</sup> Giles, “Same-Sex Incidents,” 288.

<sup>61</sup> Giles, “Same-Sex Incidents,” 265.

<sup>62</sup> Giles, “Same-Sex Incidents,” 265.

## **Conclusion**

Youth sexuality is arguably always a slippery and frustrating issue to police, even under a repressive totalitarian regime like the Third Reich. Teenagers having sex will go out of their way to conceal this fact from their parents and from the law. As Elizabeth Heineman has wryly noted, “We can only conclude that, well, young people had sex,” despite the repressive regime that tried to stand in their way.<sup>63</sup> Even regimented organizations that lay claim to young people’s free time, like the HJ and BDM, cannot prevent youth from having and acting upon sexual desires; in some cases these very organizations may even incite sexual experiences, purely by virtue of putting plenty of young people in close quarters and removing them from parental supervision. As long as these youth did not engage in “anti-social” behaviors, such as homosexual sex or prostitution, they did not face legal consequences, even in the case of teenage pregnancy. Youth acting outside these approved constraints, however, including the Edelweiss Pirates and Swing Kids, were subject to intense scrutiny due to their alleged homosexual and cross-racial sexual contacts. The war changed the priorities of the regime to some degree, with the law’s primary focus shifting to preventing sex between foreigners and Germans in the name of maintaining the purity of German blood. But the Nazis’ inconsistency also revealed itself in cases such as casual homosexuality within the armed forces, incidences of which, despite the fiery rhetoric against it, were by no means always punished. When it came to youth sexuality, as to many other situations, the Nazis’ policies were incoherent, exaggerated, and quite often unenforced, if not unenforceable.

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<sup>63</sup> Heineman, “Sexuality and Nazism,” 29.