

University of North Carolina at Asheville

Ravensbrück - the women's inferno.

A Senior Thesis Submitted to  
The Faculty of the Department of History  
In Candidacy for the Degree of  
Bachelor of Arts in History

By

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Ravensbrück - the women's inferno. How gender shaped the Holocaust experience.

“My mother  
she was hands, a face  
They made our mothers strip in front of us  
Here mothers are no longer mothers to their children.”<sup>1</sup>

This poem by Charlotte Delbo, a member of the French Resistance and a Ravensbrück and Auschwitz survivor, illustrates the trauma experienced specifically by women in the Nazi concentration camps. The goals of the camps were humiliation and annihilation. The *Schutzstaffel's* (SS) objective was to dehumanize the prisoners, strip them of their humanity and identities, and turn them into a dispensable number. They aimed to transform the women from mothers and daughters to expendable slave laborers. The SS were to achieve this through inhumane and humiliating living conditions. Gendered aspects such as the cutting of hair, menstruation, and prostitution were used by the SS as tools for control and degradation. Studying the camps based upon gender helps scholars understand how each sex experienced and responded to the hell that was the concentration camp. Women coped by using both verbal and non-verbal expression as a release for their suffering. The horrors of their experiences are represented in the drawings and poems, as demonstrated by Charlotte Delbo. Art and poetry not only served as a coping mechanism, it was also a way for the women to provide the world an eyewitness account of the horror. Several of the drawings serve as the only documentation available about the atrocities that occurred inside the camps. Nonetheless, many poems and

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<sup>1</sup> Charlotte Delbo, *Auschwitz and After* (New Haven: Yale University press, 1995), 12.

drawings provide us an intimate look into the affection and bond that existed between the women and their ability to nurture each other despite the demoralizing conditions.

In recent decades, scholars have asked if the concentration camps of the Holocaust can be studied out of a gendered perspective. Some scholars argue that studying the Holocaust based upon gender, trivializes the Holocaust experience. Scholars and Holocaust survivors have argued that women's experiences and unique ways of coping are trivial compared to the larger context of suffering, and mass death. One of the most outspoken critics of gendered Holocaust studies is Gabriel Schoenfeld. In response to Ofer and Weitzman's book, *Women in the Holocaust* Schoenfeld wrote *Auschwitz and the Professors*, which appeared in both the *Wall Street Journal* and *Commentary Magazine*. In the article, Schoenfeld attacks both the book and scholars who study gender and the Holocaust:

And indeed, were they just a narrow cult living somewhere on a commune and insisting on a macabre sisterhood with the dead Jewish women of Europe, they could be safely ignored. Alas, however, just as Weitzman and Ofer assert, they represent 'cutting-edge scholarship in an emerging field,' . . . If scholars who still study and teach about the Holocaust in a serious way were to speak up against [this scholarship] . . . we might yet begin to see a slow rotation of the wheel toward sanity and human decency.<sup>2</sup>

Schoenfeld's comment reflects the struggle of scholars who have chosen to study the Holocaust based upon a gendered perspective. For too long the only female voice of the Holocaust has been that of a teenage girl, Anne Frank, whereas the experiences of men has been widely documented by survivors such as Ellie Wiesel and Primo Levi. Half of the Holocaust victims were women, and due to biological differences, their experiences were different from those of men's. To call gendered Holocaust studies trivial is disrespecting the memory of all the women who perished in

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<sup>2</sup> Gabriel Schoenfeld, "Auschwitz and the Professors," *Commentarymagazine.com*, June 1998  
[http://www.commentarymagazine.com/viewpdf.cfm?article\\_id=8879](http://www.commentarymagazine.com/viewpdf.cfm?article_id=8879)

the Holocaust. As Rochelle G. Saidel concludes in her book *The Jewish Women of Ravensbrück Concentration Camp*, since the SS forced women from Ravensbrück to work as prostitutes in bordellos serving the male prisoners, there should not be a question of whether gender caused women to experience the camps differently than men.<sup>3</sup> Saidel's book is the first book that focuses exclusively upon the Jewish women of Ravensbrück, a prisoner group that previously had not been represented in the historiography of the camp. Researching the Holocaust based upon gender does not trivialize the experience or disrespect the victims of either sex, rather it provides us with a broader understanding of the suffering and horror and ensures that all the victims are remembered.

In *The Jewish Women of Ravensbrück Concentration Camp*, Saidler states that the exchange of gifts and recipes appears to have been a uniquely female phenomenon. To support her statement she points out that the memorial at Ravensbrück featured a large number of these gifts, whereas the memorial at a nearby men's camp, Sachsenhausen, showed no sign of gifts having been exchanged.<sup>4</sup> Therefore researching the gifts exchanged between the women provides researchers with an understanding how gender shaped the Holocaust.

Women were not only stripped of their individuality they were also stripped of their gender identity, thus making women an easy target for systematic dehumanization. Myrna Goldenberg, one of the premier scholars on the topic of women and the Holocaust, believes that "just as we study each concentration camp as a separate entity because each differed from the rest, we are obligated to examine separately, the lives of women and of men to determine the

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<sup>3</sup> Rochelle G. Saidel *The Jewish Women of Ravensbrück Concentration Camp* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), 213-214.

<sup>4</sup> Saidel, 209.

differences and the similarities in the way they were treated as well as in the way they responded.”<sup>5</sup> Loss of sexuality whether it was amenorrhea or the loss of hair, affected the women greatly. Looking at drawings depicting prisoners and female guards, it becomes apparent that physical beauty was important for the women. One survivor explained how she perceived the loss of her femininity as the loss of her humanity. “I was reduced to what you call an it, ... a dirty, filthy animal without food.”<sup>6</sup>

Women experienced a different horror from that of men. Although their gender gave the SS an added instrument for humiliation and degradation, it also provided the women with an additional way of survival. The same thing that made them an easy target for suffering, their gender and femininity, also helped them cope, supporting the argument that women’s experience in the camps were significantly different from that of men’s.

Joan Ringelheim, who organized the first “*Women Surviving the Holocaust*” conference in 1983, has argued in *Women and the Holocaust: A Reconsideration of Research*, that more women than men were deported and consequently perished in the camps. However, Ringelheim acknowledges that the women who survived did so based upon the mutual assistance networks and unique feminine coping skills. Rose, a survivor interviewed by Ringelheim explained that women had different instincts than men due to their tradition as homemakers. Men lacked the

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<sup>5</sup> Myrna Goldenberg, “Different Horrors, Same Hell: Women Remembering the Holocaust,” in *Thinking the Unthinkable: Meanings of the Holocaust*, ed. Roger S. Gottlieb (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1990), 152.

<sup>6</sup> Claus Füllberg-Stolberg and Martina Jung, et.al. *Frauen in Konzentrationslagern: Bergen Belsen, Ravensbrück*. (Bremen: Edition Temmen, 1994), 127. Unless otherwise noted translated by author

same motherly and friend instincts that helped the women survive.<sup>7</sup> These instincts are evident in the friendships and in the practice of exchanging and sharing recipes at Ravensbrück.

Jack G. Morrison wrote the first English language book about Ravensbrück, *Ravensbrück Everyday Life in a Women's Concentration Camp 1939-45*. Women's survival skills were addressed in the conclusion of the book and in the short chapter entitled *Friendships*. Morrison also devoted a chapter to the poems and drawings of Ravensbrück and several pages in the book featured illustrations by camp inmates. Morrison acknowledged that the artifacts created by the women, or as he referred to them "The Finer Things in Life," were important. However, Morrison fails to recognize the artifacts as a representation of mutual assistance and survival. He mainly referred to them as "an amazing and impressive outpouring of intellectual power and talent."<sup>8</sup> There is also no reference to how women's coping skills differed from that of men, instead Morrison credits much of women's survival to "pure luck" not recognizing the importance that gender-specific coping skills had for survival.

Focusing upon Ravensbrück concentration camp, the largest women's camp on German soil, and the experience of the women who were imprisoned there provides an insight into the special friendships, the so-called "camp families," established by the women as a tool for survival. In addition, the poetry, drawings, and other artifacts created by the women who were incarcerated reveal some of the ways in which women's experience differed from that of men.

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<sup>7</sup> Joan Ringelheim, "Women and the Holocaust: A Reconsideration of Research" in *Women in the Holocaust* eds. Dalia Ofer and Lenore J. Weitzman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 380.

<sup>8</sup> Jack G. Morrison, *Ravensbrück Everyday Life in a Women's Concentration Camp 1939-45* (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2000), 147.

Thus showing how drawings and poetry can be used as a tool to research gender in the concentration camps.

Scholars have long ignored the history of Ravensbrück, because the camp did not fit the mold of most concentration camps. The Nazis never intended for Ravensbrück to be an extermination camp. It was to be a prison to house women whom the Nazis deemed unfit for society. Its location within East Germany also prevented research by Western scholars after the war. It was not until the early 1990s that historians first got full access to the camp and the first scholarly book about the camp was not published until 1999. By focusing exclusively upon one camp intended for women within the SS system, one can demonstrate not only the uniqueness of the camp but also the distinctiveness of the experience of its inmates. To demonstrate the gendered Holocaust experience, scholars need to analyze the ways in which women formed special bonds with each other and the exchange of gifts and recipes.

In 1935, the Nazis implemented the *Lebensborn* program. *Lebensborn* was a network of maternity homes where single or married women who were racially pure could give birth and have their child cared for.<sup>9</sup> At the same time that abortion became illegal for racially pure women and restrictions were placed upon birth control, the Nazi government established forced sterilization programs for hereditarily inferior women.<sup>10</sup> The Nazis expected Aryan women to stay at home and raise children to advance the Germanic race. Those women who did not adhere to these ideals, or otherwise refused to follow the Nazi ideology, faced the threat of being sent to

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<sup>9</sup> Michael Burleigh and Wolfgang Wippermann *The Racial State Germany 1933-1945* (Cambridge: University press, 1992), 65

<sup>10</sup> Burleigh and Wippermann, 249

one of the new prison camps being built throughout Germany. One of those camps was Ravensbrück.

Situated 75 kilometers north of Berlin, Ravensbrück was the largest concentration camp on German soil intended especially for women. Ravensbrück began its operations on May 18 1939 when a transport of 867 German and Austrian women arrived. The camp remained operational until April 30 1945, when the Red Army liberated the remaining 3000 women.<sup>11</sup> During its six years of operation, the camp went through many transformations. Ravensbrück began as a prison camp, but over time, it evolved into a work camp. Although never directly designated as an extermination camp, it had a crematorium, and in 1944 a gas chamber was constructed. In early spring of 1945 the first of 6000 women were gassed to death at Ravensbrück.<sup>12</sup> Before the construction of the gas chamber, women had been sent for annihilation at one of the sub-camps or to Auschwitz.<sup>13</sup> As the characteristics of the camp changed so did the diversity of the prison population. At the end of its existence 132,000 women from over twenty-three nations had walked through the gates at Ravensbrück. Only 15,000 would make it out alive.<sup>14</sup> Although designated as a women's concentration camp, beginning in 1941 a small number of men were also housed at Ravensbrück. The SS transferred them from the camp at Büchenwald and kept them isolated from the women. The purpose of housing men at Ravensbrück was to have a work force for heavy construction projects and to perform masculine

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<sup>11</sup> Bernard Strebel *Das KZ Ravensbrück Geschichte Eines Lagerkomplexes* (Paderborn, Germany: Schöningh, 2003), 103. Unless otherwise noted translated by author

<sup>12</sup> Strebel, 476-477.

<sup>13</sup> "Women During the Holocaust" *Holocaust Encyclopedia*  
<http://www.ushmm.org/wlc/article.php?lang=en&ModuleId=10005176>

<sup>14</sup> Saidel, 23-24.



tasks such as automobile repair and electrical work.<sup>15</sup> Some of the men were also assigned to work in the gas chamber at Ravensbrück. On March 13, 1945, the Nazis closed the men's camp at Ravensbrück and the remaining prisoners were sent to Sachsenhausen concentration camp.<sup>16</sup>

Due to the partial survival of SS records, scholars are able to reconstruct a picture of the prison population at Ravensbrück, which is essential to the understanding of the dynamics of the camp. The majority of the women imprisoned at Ravensbrück were in their mid twenties, 78% of the women were political prisoners. 7.1% of the women were labeled as asocial and 2.8% categorized as criminal. Asocial prisoners were prisoners considered to be the “dregs of society.” They consisted of homeless women, “work-shy” women, prostitutes, alcoholics and Roma and Sinti women.<sup>17</sup> Only 12 % of the women were Jewish. The largest nationality of prisoners was Polish, followed by Soviet and German.<sup>18</sup> The SS labeled the women according to their offense by the issuing of a color-coded triangle that they were forced to stitch onto their uniform.<sup>19</sup> Even within larger classification such as the red triangles, political prisoners, the women had to stitch on a letter representing their country of origin. For example, a Polish political prisoner wore a red triangle with a P sewn on it. The only colored triangle that was not represented amongst the women was the pink triangle, which was used as identification for homosexuals. The SS did not see lesbians as a distinct prisoner category. For them lesbianism was a temporary state of mind

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<sup>15</sup> OuSArchive Document Id 4060542 accessed at United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM).See appendix I

<sup>16</sup> Morrison, 252-260.

<sup>17</sup> Roma and Sinti are two different ethnic groups who in the past were commonly referred to as gypsies

<sup>18</sup> Bärbel Schindler-Saefkow, *Gedenkbuch für die Opfer des Konzentrationslagers Ravensbrück 1939-1945*(Berlin: Metropol Verlag, 2005), 184-192. Unless otherwise noted translated by author

<sup>19</sup> USHMM On-line photo archives -- photo 29013 *A chart of prisoner markings used in German concentration camps* Credit line: KZ Gedenkstätte Dachau, courtesy of USHMM Photo Archives  
See appendix II for chart of triangles

that easily could be cured.<sup>20</sup> Although lesbianism was not considered illegal by the Nazis, lesbian women could still be arrested and placed in the asocial category.<sup>21</sup> No woman was issued a pink triangle, however some prisoners have lesbianism noted next to their name on official documents. Henny Schermann who was arrested in a raid on a lesbian bar has it noted on her internment document that she was a "compulsive lesbian."<sup>22</sup>

In the first years of the camp's existence women were housed together according to their triangle classification. In the later years of the camp women were intermixed, which caused conflicts amongst the prisoners. Nanda Herbermann, who was German and had been arrested due to her involvement with the church, described in her memoir that life was unbearable in her block due to the prostitutes.<sup>23</sup> Being a pious woman, Herbermann disapproved of the language and sexual openness of the prostitutes. She also called her fellow inmates "little pigs," complained about their personal hygiene, and longed to be together with like-minded people from other blocks.<sup>24</sup> The only prisoners who consistently were housed together were the so-called *Nacht und Nebel* (Night and Fog) or NN prisoners.<sup>25</sup> NN prisoners were foreign resistance fighters from occupied territories, the majority of whom were French.<sup>26</sup> Several drawings depict the living situation and the overcrowding of the bunkers. *Block Assignment* by Czech political prisoner Nina Jirsikova, provides us with an almost humorous depiction of the bunker. The

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<sup>20</sup> Burleigh and Wippermann, 268.

<sup>21</sup> Saidel, 38.

<sup>22</sup> USHMM, Photo Archives, photo 1389.5 HolocaustD

<sup>23</sup> Nanda Herbermann, *The Blessed Abyss: Inmate # 6582* eds. Hester Baer and Elizabeth R. Baer (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2000), 128.

<sup>24</sup> Herbermann, 177-178.

<sup>25</sup> In the concentration camps were many prisoners who were classified "Nacht und Nebel". These were entirely cut off from the world and were allowed neither to receive nor to send letters. They disappeared without trace and no announcement of their fate was ever made by the German authorities.

<http://www.yale.edu/lawweb/avalon/imt/proc/count3.htm>

<sup>26</sup> Morrison, 81.

drawing emphasizes the overcrowding that existed, causing the women to climb over each other to get to their bunks. The women in the drawing appear to have been from different ethnic backgrounds, some women are wearing babushkas and there is a wide array of ethnic features depicted. The intimacy amongst the women is apparent in the drawing, and there appears to be a strong camaraderie amongst the women despite the supposed national difference and the lack of privacy.<sup>27</sup> The women at Ravensbrück did not all have a common ethnic or religious identity, but they all shared a common female identity. This feminine identity helped them form mutual assistance networks and assisted them in their survival.

German race ideologies differentiated women's treatment in the camp by both the SS and fellow inmates. Prisoners were treated based upon a hierarchy scale according to their race. *Reichsdeutsche* (Refers to a German citizen from the German Empire, which at this time included Austria.) were at the top of the scale, followed by Scandinavians and Poles.<sup>28</sup> Either a black (asocials) or a green (criminals) triangle *Reichsdeutsche* held positions of authority amongst the prisoners. Most of the inmates detested the women who acquired a position of power within the camp. Majority of the *Blockovas*, or block managers, were asocial or criminal prisoners. Many memoirs talk about the cruelty and abuse of power by the *Blockovas*. *Blockovas* could decide who were to be punished by the SS, they would keep the best food for themselves and assign the easiest jobs to the prisoners whom they favored. Women recall having had to

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<sup>27</sup> Nina Jirsikova "Block Assignment"

[http://images.google.com/imgres?imgurl=http://assemblealegislativa.regione.emilia-romagna.it/wcm/studenticittadini/asc/citt/memo/index/p3\\_viaggio/viaggio/p2\\_percorso1/n4/p0\\_intro/\\_49/p3\\_approfondimenti/IMG\\_049.jpg&imgrefurl=http://assemblealegislativa.regione.emilia-romagna.it/wcm/studenticittadini/asc/citt/memo/index/p3\\_viaggio/viaggio/p2\\_percorso1/n4/p0\\_intro/\\_49.htm&usq=\\_\\_UdBKcL2e3e8TNI7D51gGRle4jNY=&h=1000&w=683&sz=1207&hl=en&start=3&um=1&tbnid=hgXFkZg1wpYYNM:&tbnh=149&tbnw=102&prev=/images%3Fq%3DNina%2BJirsikova%26um%3D1%26hl%3Den%26client%3Dfirefox-a%26rls%3Dorg.mozilla:en-US:official%26sa%3DG](http://images.google.com/imgres?imgurl=http://assemblealegislativa.regione.emilia-romagna.it/wcm/studenticittadini/asc/citt/memo/index/p3_viaggio/viaggio/p2_percorso1/n4/p0_intro/_49/p3_approfondimenti/IMG_049.jpg&imgrefurl=http://assemblealegislativa.regione.emilia-romagna.it/wcm/studenticittadini/asc/citt/memo/index/p3_viaggio/viaggio/p2_percorso1/n4/p0_intro/_49.htm&usq=__UdBKcL2e3e8TNI7D51gGRle4jNY=&h=1000&w=683&sz=1207&hl=en&start=3&um=1&tbnid=hgXFkZg1wpYYNM:&tbnh=149&tbnw=102&prev=/images%3Fq%3DNina%2BJirsikova%26um%3D1%26hl%3Den%26client%3Dfirefox-a%26rls%3Dorg.mozilla:en-US:official%26sa%3DG) See Appendix II

<sup>28</sup> Strebel, 183.

“tiptoe” around the *Blockovas* not to draw attention to themselves.<sup>29</sup> Most women hated or feared the *Blockovas*. This hatred was expressed in drawings from the camp. In these drawings the *Blockovas* and their cohorts were depicted as grotesque, laughing at the misery of their fellow inmates and dressed in better clothing that obviously was either stolen or acquired by corrupt means.<sup>30</sup> At the Ravensbrück trials in Hamburg after the war, two former *Blockovas* were sentenced to death because of their collaboration with the SS and assistance with sending allied women to the gas chamber. To understand the dynamics and hierarchy that existed amongst the prisoners is of significance in understanding women’s experience. The women not only dealt with the SS, they also had to navigate the social dynamics of the camp.

Survivor Germaine Tillion stated, “In the women’s camps, political and religious bonds played a less important role than the solidarity of nationalism, which for every country was quite strong.”<sup>31</sup> One can argue against this statement when reading personal accounts by devout or political women. Throughout Corrie Ten Boom’s memoir *The Hiding Place*, it is clear that the most important aspect was her religious beliefs. Ten Boom was a Protestant first and a Dutch national second. Survivor Nanda Herbermann saw herself as a Catholic first and a German second. She condemned her fellow Germans’ immoral behavior. The prisoners incarcerated because of their Communist ideology tended to bond together. Their common ideology formed a stronger bond than their national one. Communist women established special mutual assistance networks based upon their ideology. National pride was evident when the different nationalities

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<sup>29</sup> Interview no. 420. *Voices from Ravensbrück*. Lund University Library. [www3.uu.se/ravensbruck/interview420-2.html](http://www3.uu.se/ravensbruck/interview420-2.html)

<sup>30</sup> See appendix III

<sup>31</sup> Germaine Tillion, *Ravensbrück* (New York: Anchor Books, 1975), 37.

of prisoners described their own group.<sup>32</sup> One's nationality or social position determined the chance of survival in the camp.

Racial prejudices existed amongst the prisoners. In Ravensbrück memoirs, one can read how certain groups were the targets of prejudices and discriminations from fellow prisoners. The common theme was that Roma and Sinti women were dirty and that it was because of them that there was a lice infestation.<sup>33</sup> Roma and Sinti's were also described as childlike and uneducated.<sup>34</sup> In other instances, they were considered devious and criminally minded. When Charlotte Delbo's friend artificial leg was stolen, her immediate reaction was to point the finger towards the Roma and Sinti. "A gypsy woman surely, no one else would have dared."<sup>35</sup> In one vignette Delbo refused to buy meat from a Roma or Sinti woman because she was afraid that the roast originated in the crematorium.<sup>36</sup> Another common theme was prejudice against Ukrainians. Amongst the Soviet prisoners, the women regarded the Ukrainians with the most suspicion and animosity. According to survivor Dufournier, they were coarse and evil minded.<sup>37</sup> Tillion called them "the least desirable."<sup>38</sup> Another survivor when recalling the Ukrainians said, "They were just no good. They were out to take everything we had."<sup>39</sup> Both the memoirs and poems were blatant in expressing the dislike towards the gypsies and Ukrainians. There are no drawings depicting these prejudices, this does not mean that they did not exist, only that they might not have survived.

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<sup>32</sup> Denise Dufournier, *Ravensbrück the Women's Camp of Death* (London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1948), 42.

<sup>33</sup> Dufournier, 24.

<sup>34</sup> Herbermann, 189.

<sup>35</sup> Delbo, 41.

<sup>36</sup> Delbo, 187.

<sup>37</sup> Dufournier, 56.

<sup>38</sup> Tillion, 27.

<sup>39</sup> Saidel, 124.

Prostitutes were another group of prisoners who collectively were regarded as delinquent and crude. In *The Blessed Abyss*, Herbermann goes into detail about her experience as a block leader of the prostitutes. A common misconception amongst the prisoners was that the prostitutes were promiscuous. This might have had to do with the general assumption that prostitutes were sexual deviants with perverse tendencies.<sup>40</sup> They were often accused of being lesbians. Herbermann accused the prostitutes in her block of having had sexual relations with each other since in her mind, sexual relations were the only thing that they were interested in.<sup>41</sup> Cultural differences could also get women accused of being lesbians. Charlotte Delbo wrote that the French women felt uncomfortable because the Polish women kissed each other on the mouth, “as Slavs do.”<sup>42</sup> Another survivor blamed the growing rate of lesbians upon “loneliness and hysteria.”<sup>43</sup>

Just because no woman was made to wear a pink triangle does not mean that lesbians were not an open part of the population. On the contrary, most memoirists wrote about intimacy and the occurrence of sexual relationships between women. However, the sexual relations were stigmatized. Lesbians were accused of terrorizing and stealing from the other women.<sup>44</sup> Even among survivors today, there is a stigma associated with lesbian relationships. It is almost impossible to find a memoir favorably mentioning a lesbian relationship.

Amongst the lesbian couples, there also existed a subculture. *Jules* were the masculine representation of the camp, they were women who physically looked like men and dressed in

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<sup>40</sup> Dufournier, 67.

<sup>41</sup> Herbermann, 136.

<sup>42</sup> Delbo, 165.

<sup>43</sup> Interview no. 420. *Voices from Ravensbrück*. Lund University Library. [www3.uu.se/ravensbruck/interview420-2.html](http://www3.uu.se/ravensbruck/interview420-2.html)

<sup>44</sup> Herbermann, 136.

men's clothes. The *Jules* were often *Kapos*, a prisoner official. In the poem *Arrivals, Departures* Charlotte Delbo described such a relationship: "A kapo will masquerade by donning the bridegroom's morning coat and top hat, with her girlfriend wrapped in the bride's veil. They'll play "wedding" all night while the prisoners, dead tired, lie in their bunks."<sup>45</sup> Women who were in a relationship with a *Jules* could benefit from extra protection and improved living conditions.<sup>46</sup> These benefits could include easier work assignments, larger food rations, and additional clothing.

It is important to differentiate between true sexual relationships and the intimate non-sexual relationships amongst the women, the so-called camp families. In a situation where the women were forced to sleep at least three to a bed, the yearning for human intimacy sometimes prevailed. Affection amongst the women not only helped them reclaim their humanity, it also helped them survive. One inmate remembered how a prisoner named Germain Tillion on cold nights used to slip into her bed after lights-out to warm them both.<sup>47</sup> Sometimes deep friendships would develop into sexual relationships.<sup>48</sup> It was important for the women to nurture and be nurtured. Not being surrounded by their own families, they formed surrogate camp families. Scholars have said that due to the prevalence of camp families mentioned in women's memoirs, camp families can be seen as a uniquely female way of coping.<sup>49</sup> Camp families were important to the women, because it meant that someone else was dependent upon them and that they in return were able to depend and gain strength from other women. One survivor described how the

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<sup>45</sup> Delbo, 8.

<sup>46</sup> Dufournier, 67-68

<sup>47</sup> Morrison, , 130.

<sup>48</sup> Joan Ringelheim. "Women and the Holocaust: A reconsideration of Research." *Signs, Vol. 10 No. 4, Communities of Women*, (1985): 741-761. [www.jstore.org/](http://www.jstore.org/)

<sup>49</sup> Myrna Goldenberg, "Testimony, Narrative, and Nightmare: The Experience of Jewish Women in the Holocaust." *Women & The Holocaust – Personal Reflections.* " [www.theverylongview.com/WATH/essays/golden.htm](http://www.theverylongview.com/WATH/essays/golden.htm)

isolation block was difficult without her family, because she had to endure it without their loving support.<sup>50</sup>

Survivors credit mutual assistance as the prime reason for survival in camps.<sup>51</sup> This mutual assistance and intimate relationships were distinctive to women's experience. One survivor explained the different survival skills this way, "If two or three women are friends they can be closer than two or three men. Men can be nice to each other, talk to each other, have a beer with each other . . . But that is as far as it goes."<sup>52</sup> Men have credited their survival based upon knowledge and time spent in the camp.<sup>53</sup> Elie Weisel does mention camaraderie and mutual assistance as being important, yet he himself abandoned his own father.<sup>54</sup> Due to the stigma associated with male homosexuality, men were unable to form the same bonds. In contrast with lesbianism, homosexuality was considered a punishable offense according to Paragraph 175 of the German Criminal Code and criminalized by the Nazis.<sup>55</sup> Same-sex relationships, whether of a sexual or intimate nature provided the women at Ravensbrück with a tool for survival thereby making their experience distinctive from that of men.

Not forming bonds with other women would label you an outcast. That was what happened to Helen Ernst, an artist imprisoned at Ravensbrück, who was accused of being arrogant by her fellow prisoners. While imprisoned, Ernst isolated herself from the other prisoners, "I lived so much in my own world, that I not once concerned myself about what other

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<sup>50</sup> Genevieve de Gaulle Anthonioz, *The Dawn of hope: A memoir of Ravensbrück*. (New York: Arcade, 1999), 3.

<sup>51</sup> Judith Tydor Baumel, *Double Jeopardy: Gender and the Holocaust* (London: Vallentine Mitchel, 1998), 78.

<sup>52</sup> Ringelheim, "Women and the Holocaust: A Reconsideration of Research" in *Women in the Holocaust*, 380.

<sup>53</sup> Primo Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz* (New York: Touchstone, 1996), 60.

<sup>54</sup> Elie Wiesel, *Night* (New York/; Hill & Wang, 2006), 112.

<sup>55</sup> Morrison, 133.



people thought of me.”<sup>56</sup> After the war, as Ernst was trying to put the experience behind her, fellow comrades accused her of betrayal in the camp. While at Ravensbrück and after her release she drew pictures of her experience in an attempt to heal. She explained, “I must get it out of me . . . this experience seeing these people and this environment is so drastic, brought me so close to a psychological abyss, that I must first rid myself of it pictorially.”<sup>57</sup> The drawings were a way for the women to cope with the conditions of the camp.

Although Helen Ernst was accused of being reserved and arrogant, several of her drawings are a testimony to the mutual assistance and friendship that existed between the women. Several of her drawings show women tenderly embracing and comforting each other. Those drawings served as a testimony to what she observed within the camp, but was incapable of experiencing herself.<sup>58</sup>

Aat Breur was one of the most famous artists of Ravensbrück, whose drawings from inside the camp survived. Breur was a particularly talented artist and her fellow inmates came to her to have portraits drawn. In her drawings, Breur was able to capture the soul and emotion of her object. Breur drew portraits of the children in camp, which would serve as the only picture that the mothers had of their children.<sup>59</sup> Breur was not only asked to draw the living. Friends and families also asked her to draw the dead. A drawing of a deceased family member or friend was a way of honoring their memory since no funerals were held.<sup>60</sup> The women in the pictures died

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<sup>56</sup> Morrison, 158.

<sup>57</sup> Hermann Hübner, “I want to draw only the bitter truth,” *Special Exhibitions/Helen Ernst*, [www.ravensbrueck.de/mgr/english/exhibit/ernst.htm](http://www.ravensbrueck.de/mgr/english/exhibit/ernst.htm)

<sup>58</sup> Hermann Hübner, “I want to draw only the bitter truth,” *Special Exhibitions/Helen Ernst*, [www.ravensbrueck.de/mgr/english/exhibit/ernst.htm](http://www.ravensbrueck.de/mgr/english/exhibit/ernst.htm) See appendix V

<sup>59</sup> Dunya Breur *Ich lebe, weil du dich erinnerst. Frauen und Kinder in Ravensbrück*. (Berlin: Nicolai, 1997), 84. Unless otherwise noted translated by author

<sup>60</sup> Breur, 168-169.

due to extreme suffering, yet Breur managed to portray the women with peace and beauty with her drawings.<sup>61</sup>

The theme of women's poems was different than that of men's. Men were more likely to write about the hardships of camp, whereas the women more often wrote about yearning for home or family.<sup>62</sup> The women would also draw and write poems for each other. These gifts could sometimes be more valuable to the women than their ration of bread. One woman said that exchanging gifts was important because it provided her with an opportunity to exchange a smile and thus feel human.<sup>63</sup> It is admirable that the women found strength and time to create presents for each other. The women would hide the poems and drawings in their clothing or in the walls of the barracks, and had they been caught with them, it could have meant death. Therefore, whole groups of women were responsible for the safekeeping of the poems, creating solidarity in resistance. The women did not only write original poems. Women with the same national identity would get together and collect national poems, songs, and fairy tales that represented their heritage.<sup>64</sup> The gifts that survived Ravensbrück reveal the camaraderie and sense of humor that existed amongst the horror. A card given to one of the women, whom medical experiments were performed upon, shows the image of a rabbit.<sup>65</sup> The Polish victims of medical experiments were lovingly referred to as "the rabbits." A Christmas card created by Aat Breur in 1944 shows the image of a Santa Claus stepping over the camp, which bears the symbol of death. The image

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<sup>61</sup> Breur, 89. See appendix IV

<sup>62</sup> Claudia Koonz, "Consequences: Women, Nazis, and Moral Choice," in *Women in the Holocaust* eds. Dalia Ofer and Lenore J. Weitzman (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 302.

<sup>63</sup> Anthonioz, 16.

<sup>64</sup> Constanze Jaiser and Jacob David Pampuch eds., *Europa im Kampf 1939-1944 Internationale Poesi aus dem Frauen-Konzentrationslager Ravensbrück* (Berlin: Metropol Verlag, 2005), 16-17. Unless otherwise noted translated by author

<sup>65</sup> USHMM, 63555. See appendix VI

appears to be stating that there will be no Christmas for the women in the camp.<sup>66</sup> Survivors have said that they used humor and sarcasm as a tool for survival. The fact that the women managed to poke fun at their situation serves as a value judgment to their will to survive.<sup>67</sup>

Scholars can also learn much from the drawings and poems created by the women interned at Ravensbrück. Some were created while imprisoned, others were done after liberation. The drawings provide us with an insight into life at the camp. The poetry also provides an understanding of what preoccupied the women's minds, what they yearned for, and how they coped. The women used stolen materials, usually obtained while working in the factories, to draw or write on. Poems were also memorized by the women while standing *appell*, roll-call, or while marching to work.<sup>68</sup> To draw or write poetry was not only a way to cope with life inside the camp, it was a form of resistance, because it was forbidden for the women to draw or write poems.

In an environment where everything had been taken away and nothing belonged to them, the drawings and poems helped the women regain a sense of self. The drawings and poems represented an "I" which was not permitted to exist within the camps. In an environment where the goal was to dehumanize people, personal belongings became important. In the camp nothing belonged to the women, they had been stripped of their belongings, issued new clothing that was not theirs. They had been stripped of both their hair and their name. To own something served as an indication that you were someone, not just a number, to have something that belonged to you was a luxury. Personal belongings were a link to life before the camp, and a symbol of the life

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<sup>66</sup> Breur, 93. See appendix VII

<sup>67</sup> Renata Laqueur, *Schreiben im KZ Tagebücher 1940-1945*(Bremen, Germany:Donat Verlag, 1991), 64-65. Unless otherwise noted translated by author

<sup>68</sup> Jaiser and Pampuch, 14.

that was to follow the camp. Personal belongings symbolized the women's courage, ingenuity and will to survive.<sup>69</sup>

Some of the poems written in Ravensbrück were smuggled out during the war. Grazyna Chrostowska a Polish political prisoner had her poems aired on the London BBC together with other news of the camp in 1943 a year after that she was killed. In one of her poems, *And I am afraid of my dreams*, Chrostowska writes about the *rabbis*, "They took those legs that so loved movement and dancing, and removed a large section of bone from them. Then, for good measure, they injected them with bacteria. She lay there, butchered, her legs in plaster - still trying to smile."<sup>70</sup> Writing about the *rabbis* was not only a tribute to their suffering, but also a way to inform the world of the horrors which were happening at Ravensbrück. Many of the women also drew portraits of the rabbits. There are even some clandestine photographs of the rabbits.<sup>71</sup> The rabbits credit their survival to the help that they received from the other women.<sup>72</sup> Had it not been for mutual assistance networks, more of the rabbits would have succumbed to the medical experiences.

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<sup>69</sup> Breur, 6.

<sup>70</sup> *And I am afraid of my dreams*. translated from the Polish by Mary Craig,

<http://individual.utoronto.ca/jarekg/Ravensbruck/Introduction.html>

<sup>71</sup> USHMM, 69339-69343. See appendix VIII

<sup>72</sup> Art in the Ravensbrück Concentration Camp, [www.individual.utoronto.ca/jarekg/Ravensbruck/Art.html](http://www.individual.utoronto.ca/jarekg/Ravensbruck/Art.html)

*“Hunger was our closest companion. It was with us when we woke up and it went with us to bed, never leaving us for a second.”*<sup>73</sup>

Hunger was the one thing that occupied the minds of both men and women. However, how they responded to it was different. Food rations were so sparse that the prisoners could not help but to think about food. Hunger was the demon of the camp. Primo Levi said “The Lager is hunger.”<sup>74</sup> The prisoners were either worked or starved to death in the camps as a form of annihilation. What separated women and men is the way in which they dealt with this constant hunger. Many cookbooks were written while in the camps and ghettos, women wrote majority of them.<sup>75</sup> Cooking traditionally a female role, so women did not mind talking about food or sharing recipes, it reminded them of a time from before the camp and gave them hope for a future after the camp where they once again would be able to cook for their families. Men on the other hand were not traditionally in charge of cooking or kitchen work so they related talking about cooking strictly with food. Loden Vogel a camp survivor compared reading a cookbook to reading pornography. Edgar Kupfer-Koberwitz said that his food fantasies were like sexual fantasies.<sup>76</sup> For some men thoughts about food were gastronomic masturbation. Nico Rost a Dachau survivor said that he forbade himself to think about food, instead he focused all of his energy upon learning and education.<sup>77</sup> George Hartman recalls how he could not handle hearing about food and would get upset when his fellow inmates talked about food or recipes.<sup>78</sup> Many

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<sup>73</sup> Dagmar Hajkova, *Ravensbrück* (Prague: Nase Vojsko, 1960), 126.

<sup>74</sup> Levi, 74.

<sup>75</sup> Cara De Silva, *In Memory's Kitchen: A Legacy from the Women of Terezin* (Lanham: Rowan & Littlefield Publishers, 1997), xxx.

<sup>76</sup> Laqueur, 44.

<sup>77</sup> Laqueur, 37.

<sup>78</sup> Lyn Smith, *Remembering: Voices of the Holocaust. A New History in the Words of the Men and Women Who Survived*. (New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 2006), 224-225.

women recall how they used to occupy themselves with “cooking in your mind or cooking with your mouth”<sup>79</sup> *In Memory’s Kitchen*, Cara De Silva writes that women dared to think of food, of what they were missing. With their recipes, they also dared to dream of a life after the camp. Therefore cookbooks should be seen as a manifestation of defiance and will for survival.<sup>80</sup> Germain Tillion saw the recipes as the women “trying to deny the reality around them, to fight it pathetically with talk of food and recipes.”<sup>81</sup> Nanda Herbermann rarely mentions food or hunger in her memoir. Some scholars credits this to the difference of importance of food in the Jewish and Catholic tradition. Whereas food plays a central role within the Jewish community, fasting and self-sacrifice is central to the Catholic faith.<sup>82</sup> During the holidays, the women would even steal food to make traditional dishes.<sup>83</sup> The women also attempted to make cakes for each other for special occasions. The cakes were creative adaptations of traditional recipes. Some cakes were made out of mashed potatoes.<sup>84</sup> Other times non-edible materials were mixed in. One survivor described her birthday cake that her friends had made out of breadcrumbs, leaves, and decorated with twigs.<sup>85</sup> In both instances, the cakes did not represent food as much as they represented normality, yearning for a normal life and freedom. In her article *Cookbooks and Concentration Camps Unlikely Partners* Myrna Goldenberg describes the importance cookbooks played “Ironically, “food talk,” especially the exchange of recipes, boosted women’s sense of community. As women recollected recipes, they taught one another the art of cooking and baking, and, in the process of teaching, they reclaimed their importance and dignity. Thus

<sup>79</sup> Smith, 233.

<sup>80</sup> De Silva, xv.

<sup>81</sup> Tillion, 6.

<sup>82</sup> Herbermann, 41.

<sup>83</sup> Delbo, 162.

<sup>84</sup> De Silva, xxxiii.

<sup>85</sup> Anthonioz, 3.

teaching imparts a feeling of hope or optimism, and thereby helps diminish Nazi strategy of humiliation and dehumanization.”<sup>86</sup>

The condition of their physical appearance affected the women greatly, even more so than it affected the men. Everything, which defined them physically as women, was diminished during their time in the camp. Survivor Floris Bakel said that while in camp he used to yearn for “women’s laughter, affection, and floral dresses. I want silk, perfume, gold and candlelight, long hair and everything that is soft, sweet, and round.” The men in the camps desired women, however the women in the camps no longer fit this fantasy. The women no longer looked like women and it was difficult for them to accept the loss of femininity, so they felt even more effeminized.<sup>87</sup> Amongst all the horrors that the women were submitted to, the most horrific experience was the cutting of the hair. Every single memoir depicts this as the most heartbreaking and terrifying experience. The drawing by France Audoul depicts the horror, which the women experienced.<sup>88</sup>

The selection processes that picked women to be sent to different camps or to the gas chambers chose women based on their physical appearance. Thus, femininity and retaining as much of a stereotypical female body as possible could save the women from death. Not only was a feminine body important, but also anything the women did to maintain their appearance proved equally crucial. Personal hygiene and care became an important survival strategy. Aware of this, it was not infrequent that women risked their lives for some articles of clothing or do

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<sup>86</sup> Myrna Goldenberg “Cookbooks and Concentration Camps: Unlikely Partners”  
[www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Holocaust/cookbook.html](http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/Holocaust/cookbook.html)

<sup>87</sup> Laqueur, 51.

<sup>88</sup> Füllberg-Stolberg and Jung, 127. See appendix IX

modification to their uniforms to appear more attractive. The women would even exchange their ration of bread for some lipstick or other make-up.<sup>89</sup>

That their physical appearance and lack of femininity occupied the minds of the women is evident when looking at the drawings that survived the camp and reading memoirs. The women commented on the appearance of the guards, how young and well dressed and pretty they were.<sup>90</sup> In many of the drawings, the female SS guards are betrayed in a flattering manner, their hair, clothes and beauty of physical appearance is accentuated. Considering the conditions of the camp, one would assume that the SS women would be betrayed as demons or monsters, but instead it appears that the prisoners saw something that they lacked themselves and yearned for, femininity and beauty.

Based upon gender differences, women's experience in the Holocaust was unique from that of men. These differences become evident when studying the artifact that survived the camps. The artifacts, which survived Ravensbrück serves as a testimony to the horrors and gender specific survival skills that existed within the camp. As Dr Goldenberg has put it "same hell different horrors." When studying the Holocaust scholars need to take gender issues and coping skills into consideration when analyzing the experience of the victims of the Holocaust. Due to biological differences, and gender dynamics, that existed within this patriarchic society, women's experiences different greatly from that of men's. Reading women's memoirs or looking at poems or drawings from the camp, one is reminded of the biological differences between the sexes. Women's stories are filled with recollections of food, camp families, loss of femininity,

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<sup>89</sup> Füllberg-Stolberg and Jung, 126.

<sup>90</sup> <http://www3.uu.se/ravensbruck/interview449-1.html>



issues that are uniquely female. These gender-based issues shaped the women's experience in the camp and to a certain extent helped them cope with the horrors and survive. By studying the artifacts from Ravensbrück, scholars can differentiate between how women and men both experienced and survived the Holocaust. The Holocaust can be studied based upon a gendered experience, without diminishing the suffering of either sex. Researching experience of women and men in the Holocaust separately will provide scholars with a better understanding of the horrors and coping skills that each sex displayed.

## Bibliography

### Primary Sources

#### Books

**Anthonzioz, Genevieve de Gaulle. *The Dawn of Hope: A memoir of Ravensbrück*. New York: Arcade, 1999.**

The book is a useful primary source due to de Gaulle's special status as a prisoner. De Gaulle was part of the French *Night and Fog* prisoners and she was also the niece of Charles de Gaulle. Besides "regular" prisoners Ravensbrück also housed several politically important prisoners. The topic of friendship for survival is also addressed in the book.

**Delbo, Charlotte. *Auschwitz And After*. Translated by Rosette C. Lamont. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995**

Charlotte Delbo, who was part of the French resistance, survived both Auschwitz and Ravensbrück. This book is composed of three separate books that she wrote about her experience. The book contains mostly poems, but also a few short stories relating to her experience during and after the war. What makes the book such an invaluable source is the tone it is written in. Charlotte Delbo manages to relate the smells (of both the crematorium and the latrines), sounds and suffering of the camps to the reader.

**Dufournier, Denise. *Ravensbrück the Women's Camp of Death*. London: George Allen & Unwin, 1948**

This is one of the earliest written accounts of the experience at Ravensbrück. Dufournier expresses many of the prejudices that existed amongst the women. She is also a valuable source explaining hierarchy within the camp.

**Herbermann, Nanda. *The Blessed Abyss: Inmate # 6582 in Ravensbrück Concentration Camp for Women*. eds. Hester Baer and Elizabeth R. Baer Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2000.**

First hand account of a pious woman who survived Ravensbrück. The book is useful for my research because of Nanda Herbermann's expressed prejudices toward other prisoners. Especially interesting is the account of how she was block leader in the block that housed asocial and criminal prisoners. The book is also useful because it is a survival account of a German catholic who was imprisoned. Herbermann's writings and feelings about food is also different than many other survival testimonies.

**Jaiser, Constanze and Jacob David Pampuch eds. *Europa im Kampf 1939-1944 Internationale Poesi aus dem Frauen-Konzentrationslager Ravensbrück*. Berlin: Metropol Verlag, 2005.**

This is an amazing collection of poetry created by prisoners at Ravensbrück. Some of the poems were written down in camp, the rest were memorized and written down afterwards. The poems do not only address the horrible living conditions, but some of them also provide us with a glimpse of hope for the future. Unlike Delbo's poems which are extremely personal and graphic, these poems are of a more poetic nature.

**Levi, Primo. *Survival in Auschwitz*. New York: Touchstone, 1996.**

This is probably one of the ten most famous holocaust survival accounts. Levi's account is beautifully and painstakingly written. The book provides us with great insight into the horrors of Auschwitz. The book also addresses the issue of friendship and hunger and cooking.

**Smith, Lyn. *Remembering: Voices of the Holocaust. A New History in the Words of the Men and Women Who Survived*. New York: Carroll & Graf Publishers, 2006**

This is a wonderful collection of interviews with holocaust survivors. Majority of the survivors are not from Ravensbrück and several of the interviewees are men. The survival account that will be especially useful to my research is the interview with Helen Stone and Anna Bergman. Helen and Anna both address such issues as "cooking in your mind" and the importance of keeping up ones appearance.

**Tillion, Germaine. *Ravensbrück*. New York: Anchor Books, 1975.**

This might be the most thorough survival account written about Ravensbrück. Tillion has written it not only as a recollection of her experience, but also to provide the reader with a history and understanding of the lager complex. Tillion shows particular interest in the French prisoners, but she also discusses all the other national groups. The importance of camaraderie and the solidarity of nationalism are frequent topics in the book. Tillion also brings up times when other prisoners reached out beyond their national solidarity and helped other prisoners.

**Wiesel, Elie. *Night*. New York: Hill and Wang, 2006.**

*Night* is probably one of the most famous books written about survival at Auschwitz. *Night* is a good source to use comparing women and men's experiences and how gender influenced how men and women coped and survived.

## **Websites**

**[www.ushmm.org](http://www.ushmm.org)**

This is the website to United States Holocaust Museum. Many of the photographs featured in the appendix are scanned copies accessed from the Photo archive at USHMM. These photos are valuable primary documents of the artifacts created by the women at Ravensbrück.

**[http://www3.uu.se/ravensbruck/index\\_eng.html](http://www3.uu.se/ravensbruck/index_eng.html)**

This is the website to the University of Lund in Sweden. It contains both pictures and several transcripts of interviews with Ravensbrück survivors. In April of 1945 Swedish Red Cross transported several women from Ravensbrück to Sweden, these interviews were conducted with the women upon their arrival in Sweden. The women remained anonymous but they were all incarcerated at Ravensbrück.

## **Secondary Sources**

## Journal Articles

**Goldenberg, Myrna. "Lessons Learned from Gentle Heroism: Women's Holocaust Narratives."**  
*Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 548 (1996): 78-93.  
[www.jstore.org/](http://www.jstore.org/) (accessed April 12, 2008)

This article addresses the issue of gender and the holocaust. This is a great secondary source when it comes to support the thesis that women and men's experience was very different and therefore should be studied separately. It also has information on how to analyze women's and men's survival testimonies, and the specific gender differences that exist within them.

**Goldenberg, Myrna. "Testimony, Narrative, and Nightmare: The Experiences of Jewish Women in the Holocaust," 2005, <http://www.theverylongview.com/WATH/essays/golden.htm> (accessed April 12, 2008)**

This article addresses the experience of Jewish women in the camps. It is a useful source for understanding the differences between the different groups of prisoners at Ravensbrück. Goldenberg makes the statement that food and cooking was especially important amongst the Jewish women. This will be useful for me when looking at how women coped with issues of hunger.

**Goldenberg, Myrna. "Cookbooks and Concentration Camps: Unlikely Partners"**  
[www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/holocaust/cookbook.html](http://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/jsource/holocaust/cookbook.html)

Short article that will be useful as a secondary source on the topic of cookbooks within the camp. This article was used as a reference to De Silva's book.

**Ringelheim, Joan "Women and the Holocaust: A reconsideration of Research." *Signs*, Vol. 10 No. 4, *Communities of Women*, 1985 [www.jstore.org/](http://www.jstore.org/)**

Joan Ringelheim is considered to be the pioneer amongst scholars researching the holocaust based upon gender. This article is an older version than the one featured in Rittner and Roth's book. The women whom Ringelheim has interviewed for her research provide us with a gendered

insight into the holocaust experience. With these interviews Ringelheim is attempting to prove that women suffered more than men in the Holocaust.

**Schoenfeld, Gabriel. "Auschwitz and the Professors," *Commentarymagazine.com*, June 1998**

**[http://www.commentarymagazine.com/viewpdf.cfm?article\\_id=8879](http://www.commentarymagazine.com/viewpdf.cfm?article_id=8879)**

Will use this article as an example of a critic of gendered holocaust studies, and base my argument upon my disagreement with this article.

### Books

**Baumel, Judith Tydor. *Double Jeopardy: Gender and the Holocaust*. London: Vallentine Mitchel, 1998**

This book addresses the controversy of studying the holocaust based upon gender. It also touches upon the different aspects of how gender forms ones identity and how this lead to a unique identity formation within the camps. Baumel also stresses the important role which women had providing for their families both before and during the camps. It was the strength of these women that enabled many families to survive.

**Breur, Dunya. *Ich lebe, weil du dich erinnerst. Frauen und Kinder in Ravensbrück*. Berlin: Nicolai, 1997**

Written by Aat Breur's daughter, this book features many of Aat Breur's drawings. Dunya Breur also goes into detail describing some of the other artists at Ravensbrück. This book is a great source for analyzing the artifacts and drawings as a testament to women's will to survive.

**Burleigh, Michael and Wolfgang Wippermann. *The Racial State Germany 1933-1945*. Cambridge: University Press, 1992.**

It is a great book explaining some of the racial theories in Nazi Germany. Especially interesting are the chapters discussing women's role within the Third Reich. The book explains that a woman's role was to produce healthy Aryan children. This information is useful to show how Nazi views of women carried over into the camps. Chapter six of the book which addresses homosexuality and homosexuals in the camps is also insightful.

**De Silva, Cara. *In Memory's Kitchen: A Legacy from the Women of Terezin*. Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 1997.**

A unique and interesting book which despite the fact that it does not discuss Ravensbrück. Since no surviving cookbook from Ravensbrück has been published as of yet, this is the closest that I have of such a document. The book highlights the kind of recipes written by the women and explains the concept of “cooking with your mouth.”

**Füllberg-Stolberg, Claus and Martina Jung, et.al. *Frauen in Konzentrationslagern: Bergen Belsen, Ravensbrück*. Bremen: Edition Temmen, 1994.**

This book highlights the history and experience of women at two concentration camps in Germany. The book is very useful since it incorporates drawings and survivor accounts. It addresses every aspect and issue encountered by the women at Ravensbrück and serves as a general history of the camp.

**Laqueur, Renata. *Schreiben Im KZ Tagebücher 1940-1945*. Hannover: Donat Verlag, 1991.**

The topic of the book is diaries kept in the holocaust. It looks at both diaries written by men and women, their meaning and historical importance. Very useful are the chapters that deal with cooking and how men and women had different reactions towards hunger and food.

**Morrison, Jack G. *Ravensbruck: Everyday Life in a Women's Concentration Camp, 1939-45*. Princeton: Marcus Weiner, 2000.**

This is the first English language book exclusively devoted to Ravensbrück. The book contains history of the development of the camp as well as a look at the operations of the camp. Despite containing information about every aspect of the camp, much of the information is brief and does not contain the detailed information about the special bonds and survival skills established between the women.

**Ofer, Dalia and Lenore J. Weitzman, eds. *Women in the Holocaust*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998.**

This book states that by studying gender and the holocaust, we will have a better understanding of the holocaust. In the book Ofer and Weitzman has compiled articles by scholars addressing

the issue of gender studies in relation to the holocaust. The book also contains some survivor testimonies. These testimonies were especially compiled for this book.

**Röhr, Werner and Birgitte Berlekamp eds. *Tod oder überleben? Neue Forschungen zur Geschichte des Konzentrationslager Ravensbrück*. Berlin: Ed Organon, 2001**

Great source for scholarly historical research of the camp. The book also features drawings and poems made by the women while incarcerated. One of the questions addressed in the book is if gender specific coping skills helped the women survive the camp.

**Saidel, Rochelle G. *The Jewish Women of Ravensbrück Concentration Camp* Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2006**

Great book with a helpful conclusion stating the differences between women's and men's experience. This book is also helpful because it focuses upon the trauma experienced by all the women and how it related to the trauma experienced by the Jewish women.

**Schindler-Saefkow, Bärbel. *Gedenkbuch für die Opfer des Konzentrationslagers Ravensbrück 1939-1945*. Berlin, Metropol Verlag, 2005.**

What makes this book different from my other sources is that it focuses upon the victims of Ravensbrück and not the survivors. I believe that this book will be important to my research in understanding the condition and suffering for certain groups of prisoners, and understand why some survived while others did not.

**Strebel, Bernhard. *Das KZ Ravensbrück Geschichte eines Lagerkomplexes*. Paderborn, Germany: Ferdinand Schöningh GmbH, 2003.**

This book contains important data about the operations of the camp. It will provide me with information about the different transports, the origins of them and the nationalities of the women. Referencing this book I will be able to look at the diversity amongst the prisoners over the years. Strebel also provides information about the men who were imprisoned at Ravensbrück and information about the nearby youth camp.



