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Psychology Under the Third Reich

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Psychology Under the Third Reich

Introduction

The brief existence of the Third Reich had innumerable effects on the world, many of which we still feel today. This essay will focus on the effects on the field of psychology, the scientists who researched and practiced it, and its uses in the Third Reich. Psychology began to go through a number of changes throughout the beginning of the 20th century. Many new theories were presented while older ones were being disproven. An excellent case study for this is the research that was being done on the causes of homosexuality. Much of what defined psychological theories and beliefs on the causes of homosexuality was the contemporary attitudes towards these topics. Many scientists devoted their lives to researching the human psyche and Germany in particular was the nexus of psychological research during this time.

Unfortunately many of these advancements came to a halt when the Nazis came to power in 1933 much of this changed. As Jews were driven from their posts and replaced with scientists more empathetic to Nazi ideology, psychology, like many other branches of science, came under direct control of the state and became thoroughly integrated into the German military. Many psychiatrists became the first perpetrators to use eugenics to weed out mental and psychical defects in their patients and the race as a whole as a means of bettering the German race. These practices eventually expanded to include entire races and societal groups to become what is now known as the Holocaust. After Germany lost the war some of these psychologists were prosecuted for their crimes but most were integrated into allied scientific communities and psychology as a whole had transformed into a much more professional and viable field.

Finally, this essay will examine the career of Johannes Heinrich Schultz, a psychologist famous for creating the technique of Autogenic Training and how his work before, during, and after the war relates to the shift in the psychological profession as a whole.

Psychology Leading up to the Third Reich

Psychology has been around for centuries but it first began to become a legitimate discipline in 1879, when Wilhelm Wundt founded the *Institut für Experimentelle Psychologie* in Leipzig Germany.⁽²⁷⁾ By the end of the 1800s psychology had already developed multiple schools of thought, some of which had formed strong connections to other fields such as philosophy and biology. Because of its institutionalized origins there, psychology flourished in Germany as it became the center of psychological research and by 1928, 35.4 percent of the world's psychological papers came from Germany.^(23 p.386) The practice of psychiatry also grew as scientists learned more about the human mind and body.

The advent of the Great War and Germany's subsequent loss had a large impact on many psychologists and many new schools of thought underwent dramatic changes in the following years. Holism and gestalt became particularly important concepts in German psychology during the Weimar period and they later became known by some psychologists during the Nazi reign as "Fundamental concepts of German psychology."^(14 p213) Holistic psychologists, studied by psychologists such as Max Wertheimer, Felix Krueger, and Wolfgang Köhler, examine the connections between the individual and the whole (of whatever system was being studied: i.e. family, community, nation, etc.). Gestalt in particular looked at the interactions of individual parts of the brain and their relationships to the system in its entirety. Holistic theories were still relatively new and the First World War added a new dimension to their mix: politics.

Even though holistic science began to identify its basic problems, principles, and paradigmatic research findings prior to World War I, the coming and especially the catastrophic loss of that war was a real turning point, a crisis of consciousness for workers within this science--as it was for intellectuals across German society in general. One sees the evidence for this among the holists, not only in their letters and explicit statements, but in the dramatic intensification of interest so many of them began to show to make the metaphors of wholeness extend, not just across domains of nature and culture, but into domains of pragmatic politics as well.⁽⁷⁾

Felix Krueger, who became head of the original Leipzig *Institut für Experimentelle Psychologie* in 1917, is a prime example of this effect. In an article written early in his career on developmental psychology, he examined the connections between social and genetic characteristics and the psychological development process.^(14 p199) However in the latter half of the Weimar Republic, he began applying his holistic views to the psychology of the Volk. As his theories became more about societal life, they became more and more political and in line with the National Socialistic views. Phrases like 'family units', 'leadership and faith of its followers', 'security through instinct', and 'deeper will for the community'^(14 p.208) began making their way into more of his writings and speeches. In a speech on the purpose of the individual within the whole, he said: "For every individual this means in the end to surrender himself for communal tasks with his neighbors in inner solidarity, with faithfulness; that he be prepared to sacrifice, to suffer, and if it must be, to fight obligingly for a supra-personal whole"^(14 p210) Many of his theories, especially on the psychology of the community and the concept of Volk became key concepts in National Socialist ideology once the Nazis took power in 1933.

Another concept that began to gain a lot of strength in the 1920s was eugenics¹. A key supporter of this concept was the psychiatrist Alfred Hoche. In his book *Die Freigabe der Vernichtung lebensunwerten Lebens*, he coined the phrase *lebensunwerten Lebens* (life unworthy of life) and argued that mental patients were a burden on society and should therefore be euthanized.^(5 p89) This concept and Alfred Hoche's work set the groundwork for what would eventually become the Holocaust as we know it, which will be discussed later in the essay.

Until the turn of the century, the research on homosexuality was dominated by forensic doctors and psychiatrists who were convinced that homosexuality was a pathological condition.⁽⁴⁾ Homosexuality was a topic that psychologists devoted a lot of research to,

¹ While Germany is best known for its use of eugenics, it was by no means the only country to do so. Numerous American scientists held the same beliefs on hereditary diseases and as many as 60,000 Americans were subjected to sterilization in order to prevent their spread. (27)

particularly its potential causes and cures. German research on homosexuality generally followed the path of psychology towards integration of racial Nazi ideology but was hindered from the beginning by biased research and beliefs. One of the first laws in Germany regarding homosexuality was paragraph 175, which was created in 1871 and made homosexual acts between men and bestiality illegal.^(12 p389) Since then, scientists worked to determine the causes of homosexuality and whether or not it could be cured.

The views of psychiatrist Emil Kraepelin present an accurate example of the common beliefs about homosexuality during this period. In 1899 he published the sixth edition of his book *Psychiatrie*, in which he stated that homosexuality was a disease but he believed that homosexuality “posed so little danger and was so unimportant that neither punishment nor a deeper analysis of its aetiology seemed necessary.”^(11 p324) However in 1915, when he published the 8th edition of *Psychiatrie*, he believed that homosexuality was a “disturbance based on degeneration”^(11 p324) and that “homosexuals were emotionally degenerate, barely amenable to therapy, and a serious danger to the German people”^(11 p325) After the Great War he began adopting the more extremist and prejudiced theories of his rival Alfred Hoche and began to support eugenics as a way to ‘solve the problem’ of homosexuality. While Kraepelin was relatively progressive before the First World War, his views, like those of many others, swung much further to the right during and after the war.

During the 1920s the belief that homosexuality was a sign of degeneration and that it spread through seduction began to gain a lot of momentum in both scientific and political circles. Because of these beliefs and the increasingly visible gay and lesbian culture in the Weimar Republic, many scientists started to see homosexuality as a problem. Ernst Rüdin, one of the founders of the Nazi eugenics program, believed that “homosexuals always damaged their ‘race’, whether by refusing to reproduce or, if they did, by passing on their sexual disposition to their children”.^(4 p323) These theories heavily influenced the Nazis’ official views towards homosexuality and led towards the increased persecution and even use of eugenics during the Third Reich, which will be discussed later.

Meanwhile, many advocates for homosexual rights also began to gain sway in the liberal government of the Weimar Republic. One of the most forward thinking men in this field was the noted physician and sexuality researcher, Magnus Hirschfeld. Hirschfeld dedicated his life to removing paragraph 175 from the criminal code. He believed that homosexuality was an innate condition and therefore laws such as paragraph 175 couldn’t do anything to prevent it and were unjustifiable. He also theorized that homosexuality was a ‘third sex’ in addition to heterosexual males and females.^(12 p398) He founded the *Institut für Sexualwissenschaft* in Berlin and worked with many other scientists such as the physiologist Eugen Steinach² to try to eradicate the concepts of seduction and degeneration but before he was able to get paragraph 175 repealed, the Nazis came to power and all talk of sexual reform came to a halt, and Hirschfeld was barely able to escape persecution by fleeing Germany.

¹ Eugen Steinach theorized that homosexuality could effectively be ‘fixed’ with a testicle transplant. Hirschfeld began to work closely with him, hoping to disprove his colleagues’ theories on degeneration but their work received massive criticism, which led to the ‘Steinach-Hirschfeld doctrine’ being refuted in 1926. (11 p326)

The Nazification of Psychology

After Hitler's rise to power, life in Germany began to change very rapidly. The Nazis attempted to twist almost every aspect of German society and culture towards furthering their own goals. Psychology was no different and the professions of psychology and psychiatry were greatly affected by the Nazi regime. This section of the essay will look at how these professions were affected during this time period and what it meant for those who practiced them.

One of the first and most immediately noticeable effects on psychology and science as a whole was the expulsion of Jews from universities. Due to the Nazi ideology that Jews were inferior to "true" Aryan Germans, Jewish professors and scientists were forced to leave their posts or even the country altogether. Hitler's dedication to this course of action was so absolute that when a leading, gentile scientist protested against this on grounds that it would damage German science, Hitler responded by stating, "If the dismissal of Jewish scientists means the annihilation of contemporary German science, then we shall do without science for a few years."^(1 p618) Psychology, particularly the branch of psychoanalysis³ was hit particularly hard by this because it was believed to be a largely "Jewish science"^(5 p160). In a further effort to remove the Jewish 'taint' on psychology, the Nazi government set up the *Deutscher Verein für Psychotherapie* (Germany Society for Psychotherapy) in order to unite a number of divergent schools of psychotherapy into a single unified, school of thought⁴, which the government could closely regulate.^(22 p238)

As the Nazi persecution of Jews increased, many Aryan psychologists who simply taught "Jewish forms" of psychology or protested the dismissal of their Jewish colleges, were also stripped of their post. For example, Wolfgang Köhler, one of the founders of gestalt psychology and head of the Psychological Institute in Berlin, was subjugated to extreme pressure by the SA and eventually forced to resign because he fought the dismissal of his Jewish college Kurt Lewin.^(5 p163) Even Felix Krueger, a staunch supporter of National Socialism, was subjected to much scrutiny and eventually removed from his teaching post after he reportedly spoke of 'noble Jews' in a lecture in 1936.^(14 p217-19) Due to the exile of many Jewish and philosemitic scientists and the emigration of many more, Germany soon lost its reputation as the heart of psychological research.⁵

The Nazis' anti-Semitic ideology was soon 'proved' by the psychologist Erich Jaensch, who used racial psychology to show the inferiority of the Jewish race.

² Psychoanalysis was initially developed by Sigmund Freud, whose teachings prevailed in this branch of psychology and those that were derived from it. Freud's Jewish heritage caused this branch of psychology to be greatly discredited in the Third Reich.^(5 p160)

⁴ This process was known as Gleichschaltung (coordination) and was used by the Nazis in an attempt to control almost every aspect of German society. When applied to the field of psychology, Nazis used it to eliminate the "Jewish branches".

⁵ In the years between 1928 and 1931 Germany produced 8,921 psychological publications, which accounted for 35.4% of all psychological publications produced in the world during this period. Whereas it had decreased to 3,820 publications, or 15.8% in the period between 1932 and 1935. ^(23 p386)

Erich Jaensch began organizing his biopsychological typology work around a notion of a superior "Northern integration type" (the "J" type), whose attributes he contrasted with an inferior "Jewish-liberal dissolution type" (the "S" type). The "S" type--which he increasingly called the *Gegentyp* ("anti-type")--was described as intellectually rigid and abstract, yet with a tendency to become easily fragmented.⁽⁷⁾

After this study was published in 1935, "Jews themselves could now be conceptualized as direct flesh-and-blood metaphors for the forces of mechanism and chaos⁶, to be contained and conquered by the answering racial power of German-Aryan "wholeness."⁽⁷⁾ This gave the Nazis yet another platform on which they could justify their persecution of Jews. This also allowed Jaensch to discredit competing schools of Gestalt psychology because it showed all the marks of "S" type thinking.^(22 p233)

Meanwhile, positions left open due to Jewish dismissals were assigned to supporters of the Nazi regime. For example Matthias Göring, was given control of the *Deutsche Allgemeine Ärztliche Gesellschaft für Psychotherapie* because of his relation to Heinrich Göring, a prominent Nazi official. Soon after his appointment, he announced that Hitler's book *Mein Kampf* would be the textbook of psychoanalysts in the Third Reich.^(5 p159) Many other Nazi supporters, such as Felix Kreuger and Erich Jaensch quickly gained enormous influence and power in psychological circles due to their previous ties with the Nazi party. This speedy advancement, coupled with the climate of political conformity, prompted many scientists to quickly change their political stances in order to take advantage of the system.

This opportunism was one of the defining elements in the changes in psychology and science in general during the Third Reich. Psychology began to have much more of a political voice as psychologists began including and 'proving' Nazi ideology in their research. In general, "the more philosophical a particular research, the more marked was the impact of NS ideology"^(9 p53) and National Socialistic concepts like Race, Volk, Community and Heredity became commonplace in psychological studies. In particular, social psychology, child psychology, educational psychology and the psychology of personality became increasingly aligned with the Nazis' mass mentality psychology.^(9 p53) In a German psychological magazine published in 1942, one psychologist stated, "The convention held by our national Psychological Association proved its willingness to follow the conditions prescribed by the Party for every science."^(24 p295) while another declared "The objective truth is less important than cultural stimulation."^(24 p295)

Scientists who focused their studies on such concepts quickly gained prestige for themselves, their universities, and their schools of thought. Obtaining funding is an important process in any research and "Scientists who knew how to manipulate the necessary rhetoric were adept at securing money from funding sources."^(1 p632) An excellent example of this is the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute for Brain Research, which was able to double its funding amount during the war.

Different schools of thought developed different roles under the Nazi leadership, depending on how they fit into their ideology. Gestalt psychology became a study of the 'German soul' and became one of the centers of *Rassenkunde* or race psychology.^(5 p166) Under *Rassenkunde*, scientists attempted to prove the superiority of the German race. One of the most famous examples of this is the previously mentioned *Gegentyp* study by Erich Jaensch, who

⁶ Mechanism and Chaos were concepts in Holism that led to the weakening and eventually destruction of the whole. (14 p209)

before his death in 1939, had risen to be one of the most influential psychologists in Germany.^(22 p233) Holism, led by Felix Kreuger, focused on *Volkskunde*, which studied aspects Volk and the community. These studies became incorporated into the Nazi effort to create a completely subservient populace. Once again, Kreuger wielded much influence in the psychological community (until he made a pro-Jewish remark in a lecture) due to his promotion of Nazi ideology. Both of these topics gained much support in the Third Reich and Friedrich Sander, a member of the Leipzig school of holistic psychology, stated:

Wholeness and Gestalt, the ruling ideas of the German movement, have become central concepts of German psychology . . . Present-day German psychology and the National Socialistic world view are both oriented towards the same goal: the vanquishing of atomistic and mechanistic forms of thought, vanquishing through organic thinking, in the structure of volkisch life here, in the researching of psychological reality there.⁽⁷⁾

Thus in his speech, he made the connection between these schools of psychology and Nazi ideology quite obvious. Another large topic of study examined *Erbwissenschaft* or study of heredity. Heredity became a huge part of psychiatry and helped lay the ground work for eugenic sterilization and killings, which will be discussed later. Meanwhile, fields further away from philosophical and social thought, such as physiological psychology, remained relatively uninfluenced by the Nazi leadership.^(22 p237) Generally, the level of collaboration in a field of psychology can be indicated by the amount of success it experienced in the Third Reich.

While psychotherapists and psychoanalysts have not had to confront direct participation in Nazi atrocities, their history displays some disturbing lines of professional continuity extending through the Nazi years. Under the Nazis this meant some specific as well as general violations of professional ethics, but it also fed into a longer-term and morally ambiguous trend toward adjustment of individuals to the demands of society. Agencies of the Nazi regime funded the Goring Institute⁷ generously in their mobilization of expertise to assist in rearmament and war.^(3 p209)

While opportunism and competing for funds were huge factors in the transformation of psychology, the underlying philosophies of the time period also play a large role. Psychology is heavily influenced by current theories and philosophies and many psychologists were simply conforming their studies to the current thoughts, which happened to be Nazi ideology. In this manner, many branches of science became what is now called pseudoscience, in which many studies, theories, and practices were based more on political ideology and beliefs than on science. An eerie example of how many scientists were unknowingly indoctrinated with National Socialistic ideology was apparent when “holistic biologist Adolf Meyer-Abich visited Johns Hopkins University in 1935, the naturalness of the metaphoric connection between the two concepts was so engrained that he saw nothing odd or “political” about presenting to his American hosts a scientific film meant to demonstrate a Fuhrer principle in the activities of bacteria colonies.”⁽⁷⁾ This phenomenon manifested itself in almost every branch of science under the Nazis and while many scientists purposefully collaborated with the Nazis to gain a professional advantage, “many felt that what they were doing was correct from a moral and

⁷ The Goring institute was established in 1936 by the Nazis to create a “new German psychotherapy”(3 p209).

scientific standpoint; therefore, they were not the demons and "paradigms of evil" that we perceive them to be."⁽¹⁹⁾

Perhaps one of the most commonly known Nazi perversions of science happened in the field of psychiatry. Before the Nazis came to power, medicine approached fighting illnesses in two different manners: *Fürsorge* (caring for the afflicted individual) and *Vorsorge* (preventative medicine).⁽¹⁵⁾ During this time, many psychiatrists worked directly to heal sick individuals and also researched the hereditary nature of mental illnesses and possible ways to prevent them. When the Nazis took power, they brought with them views of social Darwinism and psychiatry became almost wholly focused on preventative medicine.

Research on and prevention of hereditary defects in psychiatric patients became psychiatry's biggest function in the Third Reich and eugenics offered a solution. The common belief in psychiatric circles during this period was that most mental and physical defects were hereditary and therefore passed on through the generations. While some psychiatrists, such as Carl Schneider⁸, advocated intensive therapy and eventual reintegration into society, the vast majority believed that mental patients were incurable and even if they could be reintegrated into society to become useful, they would pass on their defects to the next generation. Some even theorized that "Propensity to specific crimes is inherited"^(24 p295) and thus criminals, homosexuals, and other 'asocials' were also believed to be afflicted by hereditary defects. These theories, along with Nazi ideology of creating a superior race and social Darwinism, led many psychiatrists to believe that sterilization or euthanasia of patients would weed out hereditary defects and create a stronger race. In this way, the use of eugenics through methods of sterilization and euthanasia became a solution to what was perceived by many to be a serious problem. A German psychological newspaper stated that, "If a man in mental difficulties cannot find his way through immediate relationship to God, the Party takes up the task, and here German psychotherapy can help. All Germans- from artists to officers- are born psychologists and teachers in this new calling."^(24 p295)

Aside from using eugenics to preserve and better the 'master race', euthanizing psychiatric patients was also considered by many to be a fiscally practical practice. In his book *Die Freigabe der Vernichtung lebensunwerten Lebens*, Alfred Hoche stated,

Reflect . . . on a battlefield strewn with thousands of dead youths. . . . Compare this with our mental hospitals, with their caring for their living inmates. One will be deeply shaken by the strident clash between the sacrifice of the finest flower of humanity in its full measure on the one side, and by the meticulous care shown to existences which are not just absolutely worthless but even of negative value, on the other. It is impossible to doubt that there are living people to whom death would be a release, and whose death would simultaneously free society and the state from carrying a burden which serves no conceivable purpose.⁽¹⁵⁾

Hoche examined the cost effectiveness of caring for mentally handicapped patients and this became a large part of the Nazi propaganda supporting killing of patients. One propaganda poster supporting medical euthanasia displayed a picture of a mental patient along with the

⁸ While Carl Schneider advocated therapy and reintegration of patients into society, he also supported euthanasia of patients deemed untreatable and in a study of 52 mentally handicapped children in Eichburg, 20 were killed so that their brains could be studied. (15)

message, “This person suffering from hereditary defects costs the community 60,000 Reichsmark during his lifetime. Fellow German, that is your money too.”⁽²⁷⁾ Cost effectiveness became a large part of German medicine during this period and was just one more justification for medical euthanasia.

While the use of eugenics had been advocated before by psychiatrists such as Alfred Hoche, it had never gained much governmental support until the Nazi regime. Hitler was a strong supporter of eugenics and declared, “Whoever is not physically or mentally fit must not pass on his defects to his children. The state must take care that only the fit produce children”⁽²²⁾ In 1933, just five months after Hitler’s ascent to Chancellor, the Law for the Prevention of Genetically Defective Progeny was passed, which mandated the sterilization of those with believed hereditary diseases including: the “weak-minded,” schizophrenics, alcoholics, the insane, the blind, the deaf, and the deformed.⁽¹⁵⁾ Within a year of its creation, 56,244 German patients were involuntarily sterilized and sterilization quickly became one of the largest medical industries in Germany.⁽¹⁵⁾ Soon sterilization was not enough and the medical killing of psychiatric patients also began to take place. In an attempt to open up 70,000 beds for casualties of war, Karl Brandt, Hitler’s personal physician, created a method using gas chambers to efficiently kill mental patients. In 1940 he tested this method in the Brandenburg psychiatric hospital and soon added gassing facilities to psychiatric hospitals in Grafeneck, Hartheim, Sonnenstein, Bernburg, and Hadamar.⁽¹⁵⁾ Although the Nazis tried to keep this out of the public eye, it was quickly noticed and despite Hoche’s argument that “Idiots have no right to life because they lack the essential qualities that make life sacred. To terminate the life of an idiot is not to kill in the commonly accepted legal understanding of the act.”^(5 p89) and intense propaganda campaign supporting euthanasia, the Nazis had to discontinue the use of gas chambers in psychiatric wards in order to stem the public outrage. Even after this setback, psychiatrists continued to kill patients through neglect, starvation, and lethal injection.⁽¹⁵⁾ From 1939 to 1945 over 180,000 psychiatric patients were killed in Germany⁽¹⁵⁾ and many of the methods used to kill them, such as gas chambers, were applied in concentration camps to help fulfill the ‘Final Solution’ and bring about the Holocaust as we know it.

Although psychiatrists did play a vital role in the mutilation and killing of thousands of patients and helped lay the groundwork for the Holocaust, it is once again important to see that psychiatry is heavily influenced by modern ideology.

Psychiatry by nature incorporates contemporary ideology in its approach to the individual and society, and psychiatrists during that period were in essence state-controlled. All of these factors may have led to their tendency to objectify patients. Thus, these psychiatrists were primed to become involved in furthering Nazi ideology.⁽¹⁹⁾

They did what they did based on flawed evolutionary biology and the belief that they were bettering humanity.^(3 p207,15) While this does not justify their crimes, it shows how easily faulty theories can be twisted by modern ideology into a basis for committing crimes against humanity.

While most branches of science were twisted under the Nazis, the effects weren’t always detrimental. Psychology in particular underwent an enormous amount of development and professionalization during the Third Reich. “The rising demands of a modern industrial nation gearing up for war afforded psychology a unique opportunity in Nazi Germany: to transform itself from a marginal academic discipline into a state-recognized and –sanctioned profession.”⁽⁶⁾

⁹ Like other sciences, psychology was used by the Nazis in their effort to gear up for war. In particular, the German Wehrmacht and Luftwaffe employed psychology to profile recruits to determine their mental 'fitness' and aptitudes. All officers underwent rigorous psychological testing to make sure they would make good leaders and up until 1942, those who were deemed psychologically unfit were not allowed into the army⁹. The Wehrmacht's use of psychology allowed it to prosper immensely. In 1930 there were only 30 professional psychologists working in public organizations in Germany but by 1940 the Wehrmacht alone employed over 450 psychologists.^(6 p186) Remarking on the growth of psychology, Oswald Kroh, the chairman of the German Society for Psychology, stated:

It is becoming... plain that psychology has ceased to be a science for connoisseurs. With activities such as selection, evaluation, control, guidance and care for mental hygiene of healthy members of our people, with aid and advice for the susceptible, the endangered and the inefficiently functioning, it is becoming deeply involved with the necessary tasks of regulating, maintaining, and strengthening the *Volkskraft* as a whole.^(6 p1)

While psychology flourished in the army, wartime stress also created an increasing need for public psychologists and after the collapse of psychology in the Wehrmacht, many psychologists either worked privately or joined other government organizations such as the *Nationalsozialistische Volkswohlfahrt*.¹⁰

Along with the increasing numbers of psychologists being employed in the Third Reich came the increasing need for professionalization and regulations. In the latter half of the 1930s the legitimacy of psychology as a profession began to grow in universities and many new courses were created to accommodate the larger numbers of people studying psychology.^(6 p74) In 1940 a professional qualification exam was proposed and in 1941 the Diploma Examination Regulations were created as a way to fill this need.^(6 p186) These examinations, known as DPO or *Vordiplom Prüfung* in German, mark the birth of psychology as a legitimate profession in Germany and are still being used (albeit modified) today.⁽²⁵⁾

As it was during the time preceding the National Socialist government, homosexuality remained an important topic of research in psychology and psychiatry. In comparison to other topics of study, research on homosexuality remained relatively unchanged during the Third Reich. Its main causes were still thought to be hereditary defects, degeneration, or seduction. The seduction theory gained great support as Heinrich Himmler, head of the SS and self-proclaimed expert on homosexuality,^(12 p402) strongly supported and propagandized this idea. While there were some studies that attempted to connect the Nazi theories on race superiority and homosexuality¹¹, most scientific theories pertaining to homosexuality remained the same.

In general, discourse on homosexuality changed a lot more in the political arena than it did in scientific circles. While homosexuality was viewed by the Nazis as an immoral and even criminal behavior, their main reason for rejecting it was the perceived dangers it presented to the state. The first and foremost 'danger' of homosexuals was that they reduced the reproduction rate. Nazis believed that it was every generation's responsibility "to maintain and propagate

⁹ In 1942 the Wehrmacht and Luftwaffe disbanded their use of psychological selection and began taking in all recruits due to the increasing need for more troops on both fronts. (6 p233)

¹⁰ The *Nationalsozialistische Volkswohlfahrt* or NSV was a social welfare organization, which took on a number of governmental responsibilities, such as child labor, during the war. (6 p5)

¹¹ A couple of researchers in the 1930s tried to prove that homosexuality was the result of racial mixing. (21 p463)

itself."^(21 p460) by reproducing in order to strengthen their country and race. Under the slogan, '*Gemeinnutz geht vor Eigennutz*' (General need before personal greed), Nazis claimed that homosexuality was immoral and hurt the good of the whole. In private conversations regarding homosexuality, Hitler stated "that homosexuality had destroyed ancient Greece with its 'infectious activity', which spread 'with the certainty of a natural law among the best and most masculine natures; . . . it cut off from propagation precisely those whose offspring a people depended upon"^(13 p191). Thus it was believed that homosexuality could weaken and eventually even destroy the Third Reich by slowing population growth¹² and corrupting the elite.

Another reason why homosexuals were perceived as dangerous stemmed from the belief that homosexuality was pathological and was spread through seduction. Himmler vehemently supported this argument and gave a number of speeches pertaining to the 'dangers of seduction'. He even went so far as to promote prostitution¹³ in the army because as he said in a speech to SS commanders in 1937,

In this area [prostitution] we will be as tolerant as we can possibly be, since one cannot on the one hand wish to prevent the entire male youth from deviating into homosexuality and on the other hand leave them no alternative.^(20 p238)

It was believed that homosexuals could seduce a heterosexual man into becoming homosexual, who would then go and seduce more heterosexual men. Himmler believed that, "all men, including Nazis themselves, could succumb to such behaviour."^(13 p194) so if left unchecked, homosexuality could spread like a virus and corrupt the entire German population. This fear was only further compounded whenever the police discovered "a web of alleged homosexual activities that involved a large number of teens"^(21 p465) and when they [the police] concluded that "this type of homosexual offense spreads like a disease that is not found in other criminal acts."^(21 p 467) They even warned people of this danger of homosexuality in propaganda, for example in 1943, a pamphlet was handed out in Hitler's Youth saying that,

'homosexual lapses' were particularly dangerous, 'due to their epidemic effect'. 'On occasion one individual seduces ten or more youths or infects an entire group. Many who have been seduced later become seducers so that often . . . an endless chain of infection occurs.'^(13 p195)

A third reason the Nazis feared homosexuals was their 'ability' to create cliques. They thought one homosexual in power would gather or seduce a number of other homosexuals around him and create a secret state within a state. As stated in a propaganda pamphlet, "Homosexual ties, because they rest on the bonds of sexual relations, are stronger than the responsibility of honor owed to the Volk, to the state, and to the family"^(21 p461), homosexuality could supposedly destroy a man's ties and loyalty to the state. Hitler was paranoid of a 'homosexual conspiracy' that might form, undetected, and try to take power from him. He used

¹² This fear only pertained to gay men. Lesbians were perceived as "nevertheless capable of reproducing" and could always be called on to reproduce, whereas it was believed that homosexual men were likely to become "psychologically impotent". For this reason lesbians weren't nearly as persecuted as gay men and were exempt from paragraph 175 (12 p403)

¹³ Himmler, along with a number of adolescent psychologists believed that the cramped living quarters and promotion of strong male bonds in the army, coupled with the lack of female contact, led to sexual experimentation and eventually homosexuality. (21 p463)

this belief as propaganda when he purged the SA of Ernst Röhm (see below), an open homosexual and other leaders. All of these fears caused the Nazis to persecute and combat homosexuality in order to preserve the Third Reich.

Contrary to common belief however, persecution of homosexuals was not nearly as wholesale as it was for Jews or foreign nationals. In fact, in the beginning, the Nazis took a relatively neutral stance on homosexuality. While they publicly rejected homosexuality because of their beliefs that it would weaken the nation, it was initially tolerated partially because it was relatively well known that Ernst Röhm, head of the SA, and a number of other SA officials¹⁴ were openly homosexual.^(12 p401) Eventually Röhm became politically ambitious and tried to increase the military power of the SA. Hitler and Himmler, believing Röhm was growing too powerful, planted evidence and news stories claiming Röhm was going to overthrow the government. In June 1934, in what is called 'Nacht der langen Messer' (Night of the long knives), the SA was purged of its leadership and Röhm was killed. Afterwards, Hitler used the planted evidence to publicly claim that the SA was planning to overthrow the government and used the homosexuality of its leaders in propaganda to show the danger of the 'homosexual conspiracy'.^(13 p195) This marked the end of the Nazis' tolerance of homosexuality.

Soon after the 'Röhm-Putsch', paragraph 175 was revised to not only include intercourse but 'any form of same-sex immorality'. This included simple acts of physical contact such as walking hand in hand or even "gazing with lustful intention".^(12 p402) Due to this revision, prosecution of homosexuals increased by over 500 percent between 1934 and 1939.^(21 p458) While the number of prosecutions increased drastically, the degree of punishment varied widely and was dependent on a number of things. First, whether the defendant was a 'seducer' or was 'seduced' played a huge role. Because of the belief that homosexuality was a pathology, many, including Himmler, believed that it could be cured through intense psychiatric and psychotherapeutic treatments and that homosexuals could be released back into society as productive, heterosexual men.^(13 p194) Therefore first time offenders and people who were 'seduced' were often sent to be rehabilitated by psychotherapists. It was also theoretically possible to avoid serious sentence by voluntarily being castrated^(13 p191) (which doesn't fully coincide with Nazi population policies) or even to simply promise not to commit a homosexual act again^(12 p403). On the other hand, 'seducers' were punished much more harshly, especially if they had committed multiple homosexual acts.¹⁵

Acts of homosexuality were also treated much more harshly when discovered in the army or Nazi organizations. After 1942 the punishments in these organizations increased drastically, due to Hitler's paranoia and anyone discovered committing a homosexual act in the army could be sentenced to death. Besides paranoia of the 'homosexual conspiracy', it was also believed that if word got out, especially to Allied propaganda, about the extent of homosexuality in the army, morale and the reputation of the German military would suffer greatly.^(21 p473) Afterwards, punishments became much more severe and instead of attempting to rehabilitate convicted homosexuals, they were sent directly to concentration camps and Himmler imposed a death sentence for any SS members caught in an act of homosexuality.^(13 p203)

¹⁴ Many homosexuals initially supported the NSDAP because of its supposedly anti-bourgeois doctrines, male comradeship (Männerbund), and the glorification of masculinity, youth and physical prowess and beauty. A number of homosexuals joined the SA and Hitler youth because of this. (13 p190)

¹⁵ In 1940 Himmler decreed that all 'seducers' who had 'seduced' multiple men would be transferred to a concentration camp after their prison sentence was up.(13 p202)

Because of their beliefs regarding the causes of homosexuality, the Nazis thought they could eliminate homosexuality with a combination of harsh punishments as deterrents and psychotherapeutic remedies. While the laws and regulations created to combat homosexuality were harsh, the persecution of homosexuals wasn't nearly as thorough or systematic as the persecution of other groups such as Jews. And while their actions were despicable, they were based as much, if not more on fear than on hatred.

Psychology in the Aftermath of the Second World War

After the war ended, much of Germany was in total chaos; its government and much of its infrastructure had been destroyed and German citizens were forced to rebuild their lives. During this period and for a number of years after, many Nazi collaborators were convicted for the crimes they had committed under the Nazi leadership but many more seamlessly integrated back into society, either picking up their lives where they left off in 1933 or starting anew in the allied countries.

While many doctors and scientists were being tried for crimes against humanity, most psychologists remained unscathed during this process. In fact, many psychologists simply continued their work and because of the trauma of the war, psychologists (psychotherapists in particular) were in high demand in after the war. Due to the desperate need for therapists to help German citizens cope with the war, very few psychologists were moved to Allied countries or were prosecuted in comparison to other branches of science¹⁶. As a result of the need for psychologists to help postwar restoration, psychology continued to grow as a profession under the guidelines and regulations¹⁷ set up during the Third Reich.⁽¹⁴⁾ Most of the psychologists who emigrated to Allied countries (mainly America) had already done so in the 30s when the Nazis came to power. A number of psychologists actually returned to Germany after the war, where they returned to their old posts.

Psychiatrists were hit the hardest by prosecutions because of their participation in the eugenics program but even they were given plenty of leniencies. A number of German psychiatrists who had participated in the involuntary sterilization and euthanasia were actually absolved of guilt because the courts ruled that they believed that their program was legally constituted.⁽¹⁴⁾ Even psychologists who were known to have committed crimes were forgiven if they helped rebuild Germany. For example, Dr Elizabeth Hecker, a pioneer of child and adolescent psychiatry in Germany, directed an adolescent psychiatric clinic during the Third Reich. This clinic was one of the first to be dedicated solely to adolescent psychiatry. Delinquent and 'abnormal' children there were tested and any who performed below standards in intelligence or behavior tests were sent to a "special department" where they would be studied, examined and usually killed. Despite this, Hecker was never punished and was appointed an honorary member of the German Association of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry because of her postwar work.⁽⁸⁾ Many others, such as Ernst Rüdin, continue to be quoted and referred to in modern medical papers without any reference to the context of their work.⁽¹⁰⁾

¹⁶ In other branches of science (especially rocketry and nuclear physics), many scientists were able to escape conviction by joining Allied countries. (1)

¹⁷ The DPO (psychological qualification exam), which was established in 1941 actually remained unchanged until well into the 60s.

After the war, Germans were doing their best just trying to survive and very few psychologists or psychiatrists confronted their own recent past. Some psychiatrists, such as Klaus Dörner, went looking for family members of the mentally ill patients who had been killed by the Nazis⁽¹³⁾, in an attempt to apologize for their actions and those of their colleagues. However, the majority chose to repress and ignore their past.⁽¹³⁾ However as Germany stabilized, and new generations of scientists joined the field, many branches of psychology and psychiatry were forced to recognize the Nazi taint on their professions and what had been done 'in the name of science'. Different branches of psychology handled their collective past in various manners. Psychotherapists had a hard time coming to terms with their past because the very nature of psychotherapy is based on downplaying the past and concentrating on the present. Meanwhile psychoanalysts have had more success confronting their past because "Psychoanalysis, unlike psychiatry or psychotherapy in general, is based on detailed excavation of the past."⁽¹³⁾ It was also easier for psychoanalysts to do so because psychoanalysis was largely discredited by the Nazis due to its being a 'Jewish Science' and therefore they didn't collaborate as much with the Nazi government.

There has also been some infighting between the branches of psychology on this matter. When psychologists were accused of Nazi collaboration in 1960, the director of the German Society of Psychology responded by arguing that psychotherapists had compromised themselves to a much greater degree.⁽¹³⁾ On the other hand, the majority of psychiatrists have largely repressed their professional history until recently. Unlike in other branches of psychology, psychiatrists haven't distanced themselves from their predecessors, but rather "focused with some humility on those processes and structures for dealing with the mentally ill that contribute now as then to inhumanity"⁽¹³⁾. Many current psychiatrists believe that psychiatry under the Nazis should be brought into the open, not hidden, so that future generations can learn from their mistakes and how they went so wrong.⁽¹⁹⁾

Johannes Heinrich Schultz

Now we will examine the life of Johannes Heinrich Schultz, a psychologist whose career is an excellent example of the changes in psychology during the Third Reich. Schultz was a German psychiatrist and psychotherapist who was born in June, 1884 and practiced and published articles on psychiatry and psychotherapy before, during and after the Third Reich. While he is world renowned for the psychotherapeutic technique of Autogenic Training he developed, his career shared a huge number of parallels with the course of psychology and psychiatry as a whole.

Schultz began his career studying medicine at the universities of Breslau, Lausanne, and finally Göttingen, where he earned his doctorate in 1907⁽²⁶⁾. After earning his degree, he worked in clinics all over Germany, including: Göttingen, Frankfurt am Main, Frankfurt, Chemnitz, and Jena. In 1915 he earned his habilitation and published his first article, *Neue Wege und Ziele der Psychotherapie* (New ways and goals of Psychotherapy). His career began to take off after World War I when he became a professor of psychiatry in Jena in 1919 and as he became a founding board member of the *Allgemeine Ärztliche Kongress für Psychotherapie* (General Doctors' Congress for Psychotherapy) in 1926.

His crowning achievement came in 1932 with the publication of his book *Das Autogene Training*. Earlier in life, Schultz suffered from extreme asthma attacks, which he was only able

to eliminate through the “konzentrierte Selbstentspannung” (concentrated self-relaxation) of self hypnosis.⁽⁸⁾ He began to first collect evidence of the effects of ‘self suggestion’ when he worked in a Belgian sanatorium during the First World War.⁽⁸⁾ Thus he took this concept and began to experiment and perform clinical trials in 1920 to prove the powers of hypnosis.

Autogenic training involved using words to calm the body, reduce stress, and help alleviate illnesses. In one example patients repeated,

I am completely calm... my arm is becoming very heavy... my arm is becoming comfortably warm... my breath is becoming calm and steady... my heart is beating calmly and steadily... I am totally relaxed, unwound and loose, completely calm. (8)

until they were in a completely hypnotic and sleeplike state. While it was a process of relaxation, Schultz stated that “it is not a sleepy submersion into relaxation but rather an active process of letting go”⁽⁸⁾ and that a trained psychologist should always be present when attempting to perform Autogenic Training. He finally published findings in 1932 and Autogenic training has since become a staple in psychotherapy.

The year after Shultz published *Das Autogene Training* the Nazis came to power and heralded the beginning of the Third Reich. While Schultz is not believed to be a true supporter of Nazi¹⁸ ideology and his research on Autogenic Training didn’t have a place in Nazi ideology unlike other research being done in Germany at the time, Schultz became a prominent figure in the psychological circles. Even though he continued to do more work with Autogenic training and published a follow up book called *Übungsheft für das Autogene Training (konzentrierte Selbstentspannung)* in 1935, he also began to follow a different line of research that was more aligned with Nazi ideology. In 1933 he began research on his guidebook on sexual education, *Geschlecht, Liebe, Ehe*, in which he focused on homosexuality and explored the topics of sterilization and euthanasia⁽¹³⁾. In 1935 he published an essay titled “Psychological consequences of sterilization and castration among men”, which supported compulsory sterilization of men in order to eliminate hereditary illnesses. Soon after he was appointed deputy director of the Göring Institute in Berlin, which was the headquarters of the *Deutsches Institut für psychologische Forschung und Psychotherapie* (German institute for psychological research and psychotherapy).

There he began to test many of his theories on homosexuality. Schultz strongly believed that homosexuality generally was not hereditary and that most homosexuals became so through perversion. He stated on numerous occasions that homosexuals displayed “scrubby and stunted forms of personality development”^(2 p4). Consequently he also believed that homosexuality was curable¹⁹ through intense psychotherapy. During his time at the Göring Institute, 510 homosexuals were recorded to have received numerous psychotherapeutic treatments and 341 were deemed to be cured by the end of the treatments.^(2 p4) Most of his subjects were convicted homosexuals brought in from concentration camps. After treating his patients, Schultz tested the treatments’ effectiveness by forcing them to have sex with prostitutes. In a case study he later released, in which he briefly discussed the process of determining whether a young SS soldier, who had been sentenced to death for homosexual acts, was ‘cured’, Schultz stated:

¹⁸ He was actually initially scrutinized by the Nazi party because his first wife was Jewish. (8)

¹⁹ If an individual was deemed to be ‘incurable’, then and only then, he believed that the homosexuality was genetically based. This apparently applied to roughly one in five of his patients. (2 p5)

With the consent of the detention office, X could go to a prostitute after approximately a 1/4 year where he was, at 22, completely and with pleasure potent, for the first time in his life, so that—although the guards with rifles stood in front of the door and he was aware of his extremely life threatening situation — he could be together with her several times. (2 p4)

Those who were considered incurable were sent back to the concentration camps but ‘cured’ homosexuals, such as the previously mentioned SS soldier, were pardoned and released into military service. In this way Schultz actually saved numerous accused homosexuals from the hellish life of a concentration camp but he stated later that “successfully treated subjects were sent to the front, where they most probably were killed in action.”^(2 p4)

After the war, the Göring Institute was disbanded but Schultz faced no repercussions for his more dubious research and methods during the past decade. In fact he released a case study on his work with homosexuals in 1952 titled, *Organstörungen und Perversionen im Liebesleben*, in which he admitted to the inhumanity of some of his experiments but also still supported their results. In fact he continued to support his findings and even continued to advocate paragraph 175 for the rest of his life.^(2 p5) He also continued researching his main topics of psychotherapy and hypnosis. Reflecting the growing demand for psychotherapy, Autogenic training became a very popular method of dealing with postwar stress.⁽¹³⁾ While Schultz didn’t publish any new articles until 1951, over ten years after his previous publication, he continued to be influential in the field of psychology due the rising popularity of Autogenic training and to his post at the *Deutsches Institut für psychologische Forschung und Psychotherapie*. In 1951 he resumed publishing articles and he later became the editor of the psychotherapy journal *Psychotherapie* in 1956. In 1959 he founded the *Deutsche Gesellschaft für ärztliche Hypnose* (The German society for Medical Hypnosis) and released his last publication on neurology in 1964 before he died in September 1970⁽²⁶⁾.

As can be seen, much of Schultz’s career shares parallels with psychology as a whole and is intertwined with the Third Reich. While unlike many other psychologists, his work had nothing to do with National Socialistic ideology before they came into power, many of his actions during their reign reflect an opportunism that saturated most of the psychological community at that time.

Even though his publication of *Das Autogene Training*, which coincidentally occurred on the eve of the Nazi rise to power, propelled his career forward and gained him considerable standing in the psychological community, it was his support of Nazi ideology such as the compulsory sterilization act, which gained him his position at the Göring Institute and the ability to affect the course of the so called ‘New German Psychotherapy’ it represented. It is notable that Schultz didn’t begin his foray into this topic until 1933, the same year the Nazis came to power. During this period, Schultz conducted inhumane experiments in the name of science, which once again reflect the German scientific community as a whole. His findings on the topic of homosexuality were blatantly aligned with the biased beliefs of many high ranking Nazi officials such as Himmler and have subsequently been disproven.

Much like many other psychologists and psychiatrists, his past malfeasances and immoral experiments during the Third Reich were ignored by the victors due to the desperate need for psychologists in the aftermath of the war. Whereas the topic of eugenics in psychiatry received

immense amounts of attention and scorn from the victors to this day, the methods and studies of many other facets of psychology were overlooked, either unintentionally or deliberately and as a result many scientists were allowed to continue where they left off before the Nazis came to power. While certain psychologists and psychiatrists have come to terms with and attempted to reconcile for what either they or their profession did under the Nazi regime, few continued to openly support their dubious findings as Schultz did.

The Nazi era left a black mark on the history of psychology and specifically psychiatry. If it had not occurred perhaps German scientific findings from that period would still be held in the same regard as before they were permeated with the corruption of the opportunism and racism that flourished under the Nazi regime.

Psychology's inherent susceptibility to be influenced by contemporary beliefs and concepts allow it to be easily molded to support popular ideas. While other branches of science, such as physics and chemistry were certainly exploited by the Nazis, psychology's ambiguity, abstractness and susceptibility to contemporary ideology allowed the Nazis to thoroughly exploit on all levels. Additionally, the perception of much of psychology as being 'Jewish', coupled with the Nazis' extreme anti-Semitism, gave Hitler a pretext to purge the discipline of dissidents and fill the empty positions with scientists who were aligned with Nazi ideology. Each of the various branches of psychology were used by the Nazis in different ways: holism helped define the purpose of the *Volk* and their role in the German nation; gestalt studied *Rassenkunde* and gave the Nazis empirical 'proof' of Aryan superiority; and psychiatry delved into the study of hereditary traits, which helped lay the groundwork for the Holocaust. On an individual level, many German psychologists were co-opted by the Wehrmacht and Luftwaffe and many of those who remained in the universities clearly became corrupted by the opportunism that was so rampant during the Third Reich. As a whole, many of the broader concepts in psychology formed the basis for much of Nazi ideology. Psychology's slow shift rightwards during the Weimar Republic led to the development of many theories and even entire branches, such as mass psychology, which gave National Socialism a base from which it could perpetuate itself and form the authoritative, totalitarian state that Nazi Germany became under Hitler's rule.

Nevertheless, psychology underwent a system wide development and professionalism due to some of the laws and regulations set in place by the Nazi government. Nazi Germany's need for psychologists in the army allowed the field as a whole to prosper immensely and without these regulations and the desperate need for psychologists after the war, psychology as a profession could be different today.

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