Nazi policy towards gay women

Paragraph 175, a German penal code introduced in 1871, outlawed homosexual acts between males. It was extended by the Nazis in 1935 to encompass behaviour, words and gestures between men, which could be construed as sexual. Lesbianism was not criminalised in Germany, nor did the Nazis extended Paragraph 175 to apply to women. This was partly due to the subordinate role of women in Germany, they were simply not seen as a social or political threat in the way that gay men were. The Nazis believed that regardless of their sexuality, women could still perform their primary role in the Third Reich which in their view was to serve as a wife and mother and have as many ‘Aryan’ children as possible.

Though gay women were not targeted by the Nazis in the same way as gay men, they were subjected to the oppression of their sexuality in Nazi Germany. As soon as the Nazis came to power in 1933 gay bars, clubs and organisations were closed, forcing gay women to meet in secret. Nazi economic policies towards women also had an adverse impact upon gay women in the Third Reich. As women in Nazi Germany were forced out of higher paid professional jobs this placed gay women at an economic disadvantage from their heterosexual, married counterparts. Some gay women entered into marriages of convenience with gay male friends for mutual protection.

Whilst the Nazis did not have a definitive policy of persecution towards gay women many were arrested and sent to concentration camps. They could be denounced by neighbours and friends, arrested and sent to the camps where unlike gay men they were listed as ‘asocials’ or ‘political prisoners’ and were not forced to wear the pink triangle. Due to this ambiguity we do not have figures for the number of gay women who were sent to camps. On the whole, whilst life in Nazi Germany was oppressive and potentially dangerous for gay women, for those willing to be discreet it was possible to avoid imprisonment and to survive.

Paragraph 175 remained in place in Germany after the war. There was no acknowledgement of the persecution that gay men had suffered or compensation and some, who had already served time in Nazi concentration camps, had to continue their imprisonment after the war. The Nazi amendments to paragraph 175 remained in effect until 1962. It was not until 1994 that Germany abolished paragraph 175.

<https://www.ushmm.org/learn/timeline-of-events/1933-1938/revision-of-paragraph-175>

<https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/lesbians-and-the-third-reich>

<https://encyclopedia.ushmm.org/content/en/article/persecution-of-homosexuals-in-the-third-reich>