



## *Gretchens and the German Garrison*

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**Abstract:** Women in Germany played a role in the rise and fall of the Nazis. Many historians have written about the various roles of women before and during the Third Reich. However, there are many different categories that historians write about including: politics, genetics, race, ideology, and class, that played a part in active or non-active roles women took. Specific women; Magda Goebbels, Leni Riefenstahl, Eva Braun, Marlene Dietrich, Gertrud Scholtz-Klink and Traudl Junge are explored for their roles and sometimes, contradictions, in Nazi doctrine. Even before the rise of the Nazis, Germany was always more male-dominated than other European industrialized societies. Women worked and were more independent, only to have their roles totally reversed. Historians agree that the Nazis had a criteria of who the ideal Nazi woman was, but it is unlikely that every woman fit or followed this criteria. Women outnumbered men by two million. A woman's most important role, as mother, was also linked to the Nazi obsession with genetics and pure Aryan blood. Women with the right genes were encouraged to reproduce as many children as they could, and children born out of wedlock were not looked down upon. Before the Nazis, the German Nationalist People's Party (DNVP) encouraged women in politics. Many of the party's ideals were similar to those of the Nazis and could explain why women from the DNVP joined the Nazis. According to the Nazis, women had no place in politics. Unfortunately, there is little evidence concerning voting, but many historians conclude that women were influenced by male figures. Women joined Hitler groups, which contradicted their home life. How could they be at home while taking part in these meetings? While the men were at war they joined, or were forced into the labor force, many women tried to get out of it. A look into Hitler's relationships with women and his family background also gives insight into his policies towards women. These are all just a few of the many categories that link women and the rise of Hitler; nothing is black and white.

*If Germany today is arising once more from despair and adversity towards faith and hope, then it is German mothers who are playing an important and momentous part in this —Magda Goebbels<sup>1</sup>*

Germany after World War II was in shambles. The allies had defeated Hitler's

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<sup>1</sup> Guido Knopp. *Hitler's Women*. (New York: Routledge, 2003).

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Jaclyn Foster graduated from Emmanuel College in 2006 with two Bachelor of Arts degrees in history and secondary education. "Gretchens and the German Garrison" was written during her senior year for Historiography, a course taken with Dr. Javier Marion in the spring semester of 2006. Dr. Melanie Murphy encouraged the submission of her paper for the Kingston-Mann Award. Jaclyn's interests include; music, biographies, history, movies, historical documentaries, writing and traveling. She enjoys researching, reading, sunshine, the outdoors, dessert and the company of friends. In June of 2006, Jaclyn traveled to Amsterdam, The Netherlands and Berlin, Germany, finally experiencing the places she had read about during her research on the Third Reich. Why is Jaclyn interested in the relations of Women and the Nazis? The horrors of the Holocaust is an event in human history that cannot be easily explained in a few words or pages. The public often remembers the names of high ranking male Nazi officials. The Nazis saw men as warriors, the essence of the Fatherland, while women were mothers who maintained the home. Women did more than just maintain the home; some were involved in Nazi programs, some stood by and lived a quiet life, while others were in the resistance. Then there were some who were just as evil as those high ranking officials. It is important to remember that both males and females, as a society, impacted Germany and the Third Reich.

Third Reich, and Germany was once again blamed for another war. During those fateful days of the Twentieth Century, German men were constantly called to the front. However, women in Germany had their own battle to fight.

What exactly, according to historians, was the role of women in the rise of the Nazi party? Have women been correctly portrayed by historians? Who was the "ideal" Nazi woman? Names like Magda Goebbels, Leni Riefenstahl and Eva Braun conjure up glamorous images of the time that contradicted Nazi doctrine. Do historians have a right to place millions of German women into defined categories? How many categories are there with the little evidence that is out there? Guido Knopp in his book *Hitler's Women*, was correct in stating that "history is not a black and white affair—it shimmers in many different shades of grey."<sup>2</sup>

According to Richard Evans in his article "German Women and the Triumph of Hitler," the Weimar Republic neglected women before the Nazis came to power, the reason being that "German society had long been more male-dominated than most other industrialized societies." He continued that one common feature in historical writing about the Third Reich was "the total neglect of the larger part of the population—the female part...it has not attracted a great deal of attention from historians."<sup>3</sup> Many societies referred to their countries as the "motherland" while Germans called theirs the "Fatherland."<sup>4</sup>

Under the Reich, which came to power in 1933, women had to fit a particular mold that the Nazis preferred and demanded. Can it be proven that every German woman accurately followed the Nazi doctrine? They outnumbered men by two mil-

lion. It is unlikely that every woman followed every rule, for many of the rules were unrealistic, but failure to comply could have meant imprisonment or death. Many of the sources agree on the criterion the Nazis enforced. Otto D. Tolischus, summed it up best in his *New York Times* article when he wrote in 1933 that "...the self-interest of the male combine to drive the German woman back to the three "Ks"—Kinder, Küche, Kirche, meaning children, kitchen, church."<sup>5</sup> In *The Face of the Third Reich: Portraits of Nazi Leadership*, Joachim Fest described the German woman or "Gretchen-type" as "a blonde apotheosis beneath hair tied in a bun or plaited in a diadem; of heavy-hipped, athletic woman in a long full skirt, wearing flat heels...[having] a figure lacking intimacy...strikingly unnatural and radiating a discouraging pseudo-rustic jollity."<sup>6</sup> According to Matthew Stibbe in his article "Women and the Nazi State," women were accused of "...rational thinking and an unhealthy preoccupation with sexuality...and the destruction of Christian-Germanic existence and family life."<sup>7</sup> Stibbe, Burleigh and Wipperman, Sigmund, Fest and Meissner agreed that vanity, like makeup and foreign dress, were prohibited, as was smoking.

Women were seen as consumers which, was and is, still a female stereotype. Stibbe, Meissner and Klabunde stated that Magda Goebbels wanted to start the Women's Fashion Bureau, but it was rejected. In her book review, Yvonne Houy summarized Irene Guenther's findings from her book *Nazi Chic: Fashioning Women in the Third Reich*. Guenther wrote:

#### The political importance of Ger-

<sup>5</sup> Otto Tolischus. *The New York Times*, "Women's Place in the Manly Nazi State", September 10, 1933.

<sup>6</sup> Joachim Fest. *The Face of the Third Reich: Portraits of the Nazi Leadership*. (New York: Da Capo Press, 1999).

<sup>7</sup> Matthew Stibbe. "Women and the Nazi State." *History Today* (1993): 35-41.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Richard Evans. "German Women and the Triumph of Hitler." *The Journal of Modern History* (1976): 123-175.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

man designed modern fashions was to promote the illusion of continuity after the National Socialist take over in 1933. However this illusion of continued consumerism became impossible for the average German woman after the war broke out... Fashion was economically important...because German-made popular fashion...displaced the popular Parisian fashions.<sup>8</sup>

The Nazis contradicted themselves again; they did not want women to be spending money or time on fashionable things when children and family were most important. Historians agreed that the elite had to look better than the lower classes. These clothes were not usually German and did nothing to help the economy or promote German fashion, but instead promoted French haute couture.

Genetics and pure Aryan men and women for creating children were Nazi obsessions, for "the birth rate is the most important indication of a nation's vitality and fitness for survival."<sup>9</sup> Stibbe agreed: "in marriage...love was replaced by the principle of racial awareness...those considered to be racially or socially unsuitable for motherhood were denied the relative benefits afforded to 'racially desirable' women."<sup>10</sup> Anna Maria Sigmund in her book, *Women of the Third Reich*, stated that in 1943, "...women up to the age of thirty-five would be obliged to conceive four children with racially pure German men. As soon as a family had reached that magic number, the husband would then have to make himself available to the program,"<sup>11</sup>

which meant fathering more children with another woman. Michael Burleigh and Wolfgang Wipperman studied numerous cases of doctors sterilizing women in their book, *The Racial State: Germany 1933-1945*. These women were classified as "schizophrenic" or "feeble-minded" because of small disabilities, past history, gossip or lack of education; "these measures served the objective of encouraging the birth of racially 'valuable' ethnic comrades, while preventing the reproduction of the 'asocial' and racially 'worthless.'"<sup>12</sup>

Politics was the most important aspect of understanding Nazi Germany. It was how the Nazis came to power and it was how they fell. Before the Nazis, according to Raffael Scheck in his article "Women on the Weimar Right" there was the German Nationalist People's Party (DNVP). The DNVP encouraged women to take part in politics. This group was very anti-Semitic, and produced documents concerning women and "marriage, morality and culture, and a much longer one on work...woman should guard and cultivate the race..."<sup>13</sup> Scheck was correct in pointing out the many similarities between some of the ideals of the DNVP and the Nazis; perhaps this was why some women joined Hitler; "...whoever argues that the DNVP helped prepare the German bourgeoisie for Nazism can look to the politics of the DNVP's women politicians for a good example."<sup>14</sup> In 1921, the Nazis voted that "a woman can never be accepted into the leadership of the party and into the governing committee."<sup>15</sup> Stibbe continued, "the modern emancipated woman was seen as an agent of degeneracy and national decline,

<sup>8</sup> Yvonne Houy, review of *Nazi Chic: Fashioning Women in the Third Reich*, by Irene Guenther. (New York: Berg, 2004).

<sup>9</sup> Otto Tolischus. *The New York Times*, "Women's Place in the Manly Nazi State", September 10, 1933.

<sup>10</sup> Stibbe 37.

<sup>11</sup> Anna Maria Sigmund. *Women of the Third Reich* (Ontario: NED Publishing, 2000).

<sup>12</sup> Michael Burleigh and Wolfgang Wipperman. *The Racial State: Germany 1933-1945* (Cambridge University Press, 1992).

<sup>13</sup> Raffael Scheck "Women on the Weimar Right." *Journal of Contemporary History* (2001): 547-560.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Joachim Fest, *The Face of the Third Reich: Portraits of the Nazi Leadership*, 263.

bringing in her wake the destructive forces of Bolshevism, democracy and parliamentarianism.”<sup>16</sup> He concluded that women “came to exercise very little control...even in the separate sphere assigned to them.”<sup>17</sup> Like any other constituents women voted for “the kind of future which the various parties offered them as women...”<sup>18</sup> However, Evans stated that the Nazis like many political groups before 1933 “regarded women...as a race apart. Women were supposed to have little interest in the world outside the home or problems which immediately concerned them as women.”<sup>19</sup>

For many historians, voting was very problematic to research and even harder to come to any concrete conclusions. However, women did not sit there and do nothing during the rule of Hitler. Burleigh and Wipperman, and Evans, pointed out that there were no public opinion polls and the only reliable data was ballot papers from small towns, politics were dominated by men and many women were influenced by male figures. According to Evans, women preferred religious-oriented parties, which the Nazis disliked, “they offered the first two K’s (kinder, kuche), the last thing they wanted was to encourage women to go to church.”<sup>20</sup> However there were women that did have roles; Edmund Blandford mentioned Helene Streibling, in *Under Hitler’s Banner: Serving the Third Reich*, who was hired by the Gestapo to go undercover and fraternize with an Italian Embassy employee. There were few studies of women at the time, which left historians very little to work with and no definite answer as to why women voted pro-Nazi.<sup>21</sup>

Historians agreed that there were Nazi organizations that women could join. If the

family unit was so important why were these groups formed? Were girls spending time at home learning from their mothers, or where they spending too much time with these groups for Hitler? Mothers were around, but it was the fathers who were dying at the front or who were already dead. Did the need for a father-figure push the importance of the always-present mother out of the minds and hearts of German boys and girls? Or was the motherhood life too boring? Blandford mentioned Wanda Holmeier and Elizabeth Techen who found fulfillment when they joined the female section of the Luftwaffe when Hitler allowed the conscription of women in 1943. Blandford, Burleigh and Wippermann, Meissner and Sigmund all stated girls and women were encouraged to join groups like the Hitler Youth Group, Red Swastika German Women’s Order, and the League of German Girls. Here, Gerda Klinger was able to move up in ranks to the SS and was surprised that “a woman could ever reach a higher position in such an organization...”<sup>22</sup>

Women were eventually allowed to join the labor force, which was voluntary until 1943. Jill Stephenson wrote an extensive article called “Women’s Labor Service in Nazi Germany,” which concluded it did not appeal to many women.<sup>23</sup> When Hitler came to power, two schools of thought developed over the Labor Service; those who thought it should handle “unemployed girls and...[provide] cheap assistance for overburdened farmers’ wives; and those who believed in “the primacy of the ‘educational’ function.”<sup>24</sup> The educational function was the “school of the nation, which was bringing up a new generation of straightforward, capable young women who would be fit companions of German

<sup>16</sup> Stibbe 35.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Evans 151.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Edmund Blandford. *Under Hitler’s Banner: Serving the Third Reich* (Shrewsbury: Airline Publishing Inc., 1996).

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Jill Stephenson. “Women’s Labor Service in Nazi Germany.” *Central European History* (2001): 241-265.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

men...<sup>25</sup> The standards to join were not academic, only “a clear National Socialist Conviction...racial health and a medical certificate guaranteeing physical fitness” was what a girl needed to join.<sup>26</sup> These women “were, after all, to become mothers of a new generation of Germans.”<sup>27</sup>

The Labor Service was “a scheme in which young men and women spent between three months and a year working on community projects—roads, farms [and] canals.”<sup>28</sup> The nature of work in the Women’s Labor Force was to “awaken and encourage the precious characteristics which accord with the female nature, and...at the same time serve the goals of the population and economic policy determined by the government.”<sup>29</sup> The Nazis did not use propaganda to its full extent to entice women to volunteer, which “left the burden of women’s contribution to the war effort squarely on the Women’s Labor Service.”<sup>30</sup>

Fest and Stephenson concurred that a major factor in creating the Labor Service was providing order, not skills; it “could be readily directed, [and] therefore came to be treated virtually as a general factotum in wartime...small wonder that the girls... were ill-prepared for the demands made of them.”<sup>31</sup> Even through all of the divisions, chaos and disorganization, the Women’s Labor Service “indeed gave pride of place to ‘political education’ because its only function became that of yet another instrument for the glorification...of the Nazi party’s leadership.”<sup>32</sup> Evidence pointed out that as the demand for women’s labor increased as the war wore on, and labor was now mandatory, that many women married to get out of doing the work; the few that joined were trying to get out of it,

as were those who had been forced to join for at least six months. “The Labor Service disappeared without a trace with the other institutions of National Socialism in 1945. Rightly or wrongly, its women’s branch was remembered chiefly as...a breeding ground for illegitimate children.”<sup>33</sup>

After all was said and done, were German women just hysterical? Many historians used the actual words “hysterical” or “crazy” in their writing. Why did women seem to forget everything else whenever the Fuhrer came around, or did they? If they were hysterical, was it because of love or hatred for the Nazis? Or were their social and economic changes too much?

Nathan Stoltzfus stated in his book *Resistance of the Heart: Inter-marriage and the Rosenstrasse Protest in Nazi Germany* that “German women bore the brunt of increased bombings and the rising military casualty rate... [they] faced cutbacks in goods and services...more and more women appeared in black, mourning fallen sons and husbands...”<sup>34</sup> If they were hysterical, how could they function in various women’s organizations? Some historians like Ian Sayer and Douglas Botting blamed Hitler’s “charm” in their book “The Women who Knew Hitler: The Private Life of Adolf Hitler,” while others blamed the wartime environment. Sigmund stated “...numerous patronesses and female admirers... were moved to tears by his [Hitler’s] speeches...”<sup>35</sup> These patronesses often gave the party money and provided contacts for Hitler. They were usually older and did not sleep with him.<sup>36</sup> Richard Evans concluded that “the stereotype of the submissive and emotional woman is best

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid.

<sup>34</sup> Nathan Stoltzfus. *Resistance of the Heart: Inter-marriage and the Rosenstrasse Protest in Nazi Germany* (New York: W.W Norton and Company, 1996.)

<sup>35</sup> Douglas Botting and Ian Sayer. *The Women Who Knew Hitler: The Private Life of Adolf Hitler*. (New York: Carroll and Graf Publishers, 2004).

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

regarded as part of the conservative social ideology of the politically dominant classes in early twentieth century Europe... the writers that have supported the view that Hitler won over the women of Germany to his cause by an appeal that was essentially emotional have either been German conservatives... or conservative journalists."<sup>37</sup>

Historians agreed that the lives of women in Germany had changed. According to Evans, women "in the 1920s lost status and relative independence ... industrialization was transferring women from agricultural and domestic employment to jobs in shops, factories and offices, and it was bringing an increasing number of married women into the labor force."<sup>38</sup> Men saw women as rivals for jobs and envied their slow economic emancipation. The majority of women in the workforce were unmarried and in their teens and twenties, and they were slowly becoming financially independent, especially in Berlin; [this trend] allowed the older married women to engage in paid employment when their kids grew up.<sup>39</sup>

Women held many different jobs; domestic servants, in offices, factories and department stores. The Nazis used these trends as an attack "on the existence of the German people"<sup>40</sup> and they went further than any political party to reduce the status of women in public life.<sup>41</sup> To have independence almost in the grasp of their hands, only to be taken away by the Nazis could have been devastating to many women. Not every woman voted, not every woman voted for the Nazis and some women did vote for the Nazis but not in the numbers—according to Fest, Evans, Stephenson and Stibbe—that other historians wanted the public to believe. Those who did vote for the Nazis knew their policies of women re-

turning to the home. Perhaps the fact that in their jobs, women "could be paid lower wages, they were less organized, their rate of job turnover was high and their career prospects and desire for promotion small"<sup>42</sup> made it easy for them to return home, for it gave them a sense of security unlike the gender biased workforce.

One woman, who remained in silence for over fifty years, emerged from the abyss to talk about Hitler in 2001. In Andre Heller and Othmar Schmiederer's documentary, *Blind Spot: Hitler's Secretary*, Traudl Junge unemotionally talked about her days as the Fuhrer's secretary from 1942 to 1945. Traudl stated "the longer I live the more I feel this burden, this feeling of guilt because I worked for a man and I actually liked him, but he caused such terrible suffering."<sup>43</sup>

Traudl was left out of many sources, overshadowed by Magda Goebbels, Leni Riefenstahl and Eva Braun. She probably knew the real Hitler better than anyone, for she knew him when he was or was not around officials, giving speeches or meeting dignitaries. The way she talked about Hitler, gave evidence to the spell he cast on his "hysterical" women. He was a "kindly, old gentleman...smiling...looked straight into our eyes with that famous gaze of his...said a few words with friendly, paternal air...[in a] harmless, peaceful atmosphere...women were crazy about him."<sup>44</sup>

Knopp was accurate in stating, "from the beginning Hitler was helped by women."<sup>45</sup> Some women were crazy about him while others loathed him. Historians have also focused on specific German women who liked or hated Hitler. Magda Goebbels, Leni Riefenstahl and Eva Braun usually showed up in most biographical books. However, historians agreed that

<sup>37</sup> Evans 130.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> *Blind Spot: Hitler's Secretary*, 87 min., DorFilm/Sony Pictures Classics, 2002, film.

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> Knopp, *Hitler's Women*, vii.

these three women did not fit into the mold of the ideal Nazi woman or “Gretchen type” and contradicted the historians who adamantly stuck to the idea that the Nazis greatly enforced the ideology of “kuche, kinder, kirche.”

Magda Goebbels was “well-groomed and [wore] makeup, in becoming hats and [was] elegantly dressed...”<sup>46</sup>—although she did produce seven children for the Reich. Harold was from a previous marriage to a millionaire. Five beautiful girls (Helga, Hilde, Holde, Hedda and Heidi) and a handsome boy (Helmut) were fathered by Joseph Goebbels. The Goebbels home was filled with items from museums and public collections.<sup>47</sup> Hans-Otto Meissner in his book *Magda Goebbels: First Lady of the Third Reich* mentioned that she hosted royalty, went to the best clubs and restaurants, knew several languages and lived in a huge home.<sup>48</sup> Anja Klabunde described in her biography, *Magda Goebbels*, that in Magda’s earlier days, when she gave speeches about the Nazi party, women looked down on her because she was too elegant and too intelligent.<sup>49</sup> The Nazis sent Magda to talk because of her accomplishments but they wanted other women to avoid education. Due to her role as wife of the Propaganda Minister and as a mother, Klabunde stated:

Magda seemed to take little interest in political events abroad, but as well as her role as mother to her family she enjoyed playing the part of ‘mother of the country.’...The many letters sent to Magda reveal that she enjoyed a great deal of popularity, chiefly based on her maternal role. This must have

<sup>46</sup> Sigmund, *Women of the Third Reich*, 85.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> Hans-Otto Meissner. *Magda Goebbels: First Lady of the Third Reich* (New York: Dial Press, 1980).

<sup>49</sup> Anja Klabunde. *Magda Goebbels* (United Kingdom: Clays Ltd, 2001).

something to do with the fact that she came so close to the ideal of motherhood propagated by the party.<sup>50</sup>

Unfortunately, Magda’s pride in motherhood did not stop her from poisoning her six children as the war was ending. Magda took poison and Joseph shot himself after the children were dead.

Leni Riefenstahl was fiercely independent and in constant contact with Joseph Goebbels since her films *Triumph of the Will* and *Victory of Faith* were propaganda for the Nazis. She was remarkable for as much as people hated her; she was talented and she defied the Nazi role for women. *She* edited her film, *she* shot it and *she* instructed where she wanted the cameras to be placed, even if it meant a change in the order of a rally or speech.<sup>51</sup> Men listened to her and did as they were told. She was one of the few personalities that survived the war and into the next several decades.

She spent the remainder of her life constantly defending herself, never able to make it back into film. Ray Muller made a documentary about Leni called *The Wonderful, Horrible Life of Leni Riefenstahl* in 1993. In her reflections, Leni saw herself as the victim. She stated she did not get along with Hitler or Joseph Goebbels and disliked talking about her films because she hated the conditions she had to work in. She also stated that she did not know about any of the atrocities because she was away making films.<sup>52</sup> The documentary and historians like Knopp and Sigmund used quotes from Goebbel’s diary that depicted a good relationship between himself, Hitler and Leni. Although Leni is no longer alive and she lived past the age of one hundred; historians agreed that she is still one of the most controversial women that ever lived.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Sigmund, *Women of the Third Reich*, 103.

<sup>52</sup> *The Wonderful, Horrible Life of Leni Riefenstahl*. 150 min., Omega/Nomad Films, 1993, film.

She stated “what does political responsibility mean? And to whom is one responsible? How can you tell who will assure us the right kind of future?”<sup>53</sup> With the research done by Meissner, Klabunde, Sigmund and Knopp, it appeared as though at the time Leni was linked to the people’s Fuhrer everything was perfect, but once the world saw him as a monster, suddenly Leni disliked him as well and denied ever liking him.

Eva Braun was the woman who married Hitler. Traudl Junge recalled, “she was no mannequin from a fashion magazine. Her elegance did not reflect wealth, but good taste...she used a lot of cosmetics...”<sup>54</sup> Eva never spoke about politics but the only time she did was over her dismay of the banning of makeup. “Her suits came from the best tailors in Berlin, her fur and gowns from Paris...shoes from Ferragamo in Florence...expensive jewelry...French perfumes...she would change clothes up to seven times a day...She was a heavy smoker and was thus delinquent in her duty as a German woman”<sup>55</sup> and Eva had no children. As the war was ending, Eva and Hitler married and they killed themselves like the Goebbels. Traudl Junge recalled that Eva poisoned herself because she wanted her corpse to be beautiful.<sup>56</sup> These three women did not reflect the Nazi stereotype. They were part of the elite and had access to money and power. They knew the number one man and received the advantages that came with it. The question is: to whom did the regular population of women look up to as an example?

Historians concurred that one woman, who did fit the stereotype, was ignored by the Nazi elite. Gertrud Scholtz-Klink was the Nazi women’s leader, had five children

and her first husband had been a district leader. “Her title sounded impressive and Nazi propaganda presented [her]...as a leading personality...according to Hitler’s orders, she had the rank of an office manager, with no direct representation...it became clear what little political power she had...She always lost out.”<sup>57</sup> Hitler avoided her and the “entire Nazi elite kept its distance.”<sup>58</sup> She was never invited to parties nor would anyone meet her socially. Gertrud would often quote Hitler’s speeches and she published many books and pamphlets; she was very well versed in Nazi ideals compared to Magda, Leni or Eva.

Sayer and Botting concentrated solely on the personal life of Hitler, which could have explained his feelings and policies towards women. They concluded that Hitler’s own problems with sex, his fear of syphilis, and lack of libido, were all just psychological. Hitler was a “mamma’s boy,” for his father was abusive. Women who were intimate with him told strange tales of how he was aroused. His lack of sexual development harbored resentment towards women and could only be quelled by the “obsession to make his name known.”<sup>59</sup> Joachim Fest believed that “Mein Kampf” showed Hitler’s true pathological attitude towards women—especially the chapter about syphilis and the nightmare of not being able to have a sexual relationship.<sup>60</sup> Traudl Junge said he “didn’t know that much about women... [he] felt very uneasy about anything erotic...”<sup>61</sup>

Marlene Dietrich, who had found fame in Hollywood, refused to have anything to do with him. “When the Hitler regime called upon me to return to Germany and

<sup>57</sup> Sigmund, *Women of the Third Reich*, 115.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>59</sup> Botting and Sayer, *The Women Who Knew Hitler: The Private Life of Adolf Hitler*, 19.

<sup>60</sup> Fest, *The Face of the Third Reich: Portraits of the Nazi Leadership*, 264.

<sup>61</sup> *Blind Spot: Hitler’s Secretary*, 87 min., Dor-Film/Sony Pictures Classics, 2002, film.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>54</sup> Sigmund, *Women of the Third Reich*, 166.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup> *The Wonderful, Horrible Life of Leni Riefenstahl*, 150 min., Omega/Nomad Films, 1993, film.

become the reigning queen of the German film industry, the answer I gave them is...known to everyone. What people don't know is that I couldn't resist twisting the knife in the arrogant hearts of those gentlemen."<sup>62</sup> Sigmund, Botting and Sayer, and Knopp agreed that female entertainers appealed to Hitler. Hitler did not fit into the Nazi stereotype; as Fuhrer, he did not marry right away, nor did he have children.

When the Reich fell in 1945, Berlin was in ruins and survivors, mostly women, took whatever they could find. Allied troops moved in and most likely destroyed objects out of sheer revenge. Documents had been stolen or have remained missing; so can historians really piece together any type of truth? Concerning women, the Nazis had their policies; no doubt about it. But were the majority of women living in Germany correctly portrayed by historians as themselves, or as how the Nazis wanted them to be?

Women and Nazi Germany is open to interpretation; to place the whole female population of Germany into one category is impossible and ridiculous. Only a few variables; genetics, politics, class, religion, ideology, appearance, the Nazi elite and Hitler's own relationships were briefly discussed. Some women followed Nazi doctrine while others did not. Historians have researched numerous subjects about women and the Nazi regime, but the problem was that it is virtually impossible to ask one question and get one specific answer. Evans said it best:

We have detailed, specialized or theoretically informed knowledge of a whole range of subjects; the distribution of family; the nature, extent, social basis and political role of antifeminism...the specific situation and attitudes of specific categories of women, the middle

class housewife, the female shop assistant, the working mother, the secretary ... the woman textile worker or factory operative ... the domestic servant, the prostitute ... Until we have this knowledge all that we can do is to discuss some general arguments...offer some tentative speculations... and suggest a number of ways in which research might proceed from here.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>62</sup> Knopp, *Hitler's Women*, 264.

<sup>63</sup> Evans 125.

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