RE-EVALUATING WOMEN’S ROLES IN THE HOLOCAUST:

FROM VICTIM TO

PERPETRATOR

by

TIFFANY A. SIDDERS

JAMES MCNAUGHTON, COMMITTEE CHAIR
LAUREN CARDON
JANEK WASSERMAN

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ABSTRACT

In 1985, Joan Ringelheim asks us, “Were women's experiences during the Holocaust different from men's in some respects?” From this moment on, feminist research on the Holocaust has increased and continued asking Ringelheim’s question. This thesis poses that question in terms of not only female victims’ experience, but female perpetrator experience and those fitting both categories. I argue that a comparative analysis approach will help us to understand how Nazi biopolitics targeted women’s bodies to encourage some women to reproduce and to prevent others from ever doing so. To conduct a comparative analysis approach on women, I argue we should turn to literature, specifically female-written and female-driven literature, both fiction and memoir. In this thesis, I chose Martha Hall Kelly’s Lilac Girls and Gisella Perl’s I Was a Doctor in Auschwitz since they both (1) incorporate new archival material and historical understanding; (2) contrast perpetrator and survivor accounts of the same event, which is crucial to understand the psychological motivations for behavior, memory, and erasure; and (3) lead to a more sensitive revision of female stereotypes that have marred the historical record. These reasons are why I turned towards literature to understand women’s experience in the Holocaust. But I also turn to literature to answer questions, such as why are women censored from certain historical and cultural records? And why does it seem that we cannot comprehend the genocidal violence committed by women?
DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my father and those who always pushed me to be my best even when I couldn’t see past the obstacles.
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INTRODUCTION

Recently, I toured one of the newest Holocaust museums in the United States: The Dallas Holocaust and Human Rights Museum. The museum impressed me, in particular the range of information; the main floor even included an entire boxcar from the concentration camp transports. As I went through the exhibits and jumped from floor to floor, I noticed an important exclusion: women. Although beautifully executed, the exhibit neglects to separate the gendered experience of the Holocaust, which was expected, but still disappointing. Not only were female victims’ experiences limited, but female perpetrators were missing. There was a single board that explained women’s experiences with scattered personal testimonies, but nothing that documented the specific crimes and the choices women made. Where are the records of women who committed sexual assault, who bartered their bodies sexually, and who practiced and received abortions? Where were the female perpetrators? When I stood face-to-face with the Nuremberg Trial exhibition panel, I hoped to see Dorothea Binz, Irma Grese, Herta Oberhauser, and others. These women committed heinous crimes against inmates from torture to medical experimentation. But the only faces that I saw were men. Why omit such a population of violent perpetrators? Why would an interactive and otherwise highly progressive museum fail to represent women’s involvement in genocidal crimes? I can talk to a Holocaust survivor through virtual reality. But for all the modern technology devoted to making perspectives available, we still can’t see the faces of the women tried at Nuremberg, the victims of medical experiments, or prisoners who were in a morally gray area. The Dallas Holocaust Museum is only one of many culprits that obscure female roles in the Holocaust. Given how recent the museum is, the absence
shows, on one hand, how little feminist scholarship has been integrated, and on the other hand, how feminist scholarship itself has not fully entertained female perpetration. This thesis aims to explain why that matters.

Female perpetrators participated in the euthanasia programs from the early 1930s all the way until liberation in 1945. The eugenics movement placed nurses in position of power and granted them agency over life and death. Nurses advocated for eugenics and were the first female biopolitical agents under the Nazi regime. For example, “The head nurse, Amanda Ratajczak… admitted to killing over 1,500 patients herself, with the last murders occurring just one day before the arrival of the Russians” (Benedict and Shields 128). Ratajczak had almost a decade of violent participation in genocide before being caught for her crimes. Her body count rivals many of the infamous male S.S. guards and soldiers, yet she is relegated to historical background. The actions of such nurses and other female perpetrators have been trivialized. But the magnitude of their involvement and crimes was substantial. Sara E. Brown points out that female guards made up about 8% of the concentration camp total, “3508 out of 41182 (total)” of death and concentration camp guards were women” (174). As the number female victims increased at the concentration camps, so grew the number of female guards. In the only all-women’s camp, Ravensbrück, female guards were the majority. And these statistics only account for female guards, not the secretaries, wives, nurses, and doctors.

Female victims experienced the Holocaust differently than their male counterparts, but until recently, their stories merged. I will return to that history of scholarship that employs gender as an important interpretative category to understand the Holocaust. But first, we should be reminded of the historical facts about women. As Susan Welch explains, women made up more than half the transports to concentration and death camps from 1941 to 1945: “On the
average transport, 56 per cent of the prisoners were women, and women comprised a majority on 72 per cent of the transports” (468 & 470). Out of the estimated six million individuals who perished during the Holocaust, women were most likely a majority. Although women were over half of the concentration camp transport population, many did not survive. Through statistical analysis, Welch discovered evidence to suggest that women were selected for immediate death more than men. In the East, “A report from the northern killing commando *Einsatzgruppen* in Lithuania and Latvia during 1941 identifies 43 per cent of their victims as women, and 27 per cent men (the rest were children)” (Welch 462). Women, too, were sent to death camps at a higher frequency than men and selected more frequently on arrival for the gas chambers at labor camps. Nazis rounded up women at high rates, especially in 1942 and 1943 when more concentration camps became operational. In 1939, Ravensbrück was built and quickly received over 1500 women prisoners; in 1942, Auschwitz established a separate women’s camp under the leadership of Johanna Langefeldt; in 1945, the final roll call of Auschwitz had 16,577 women while 3500 female prisoners survived Ravensbrück (Baer and Goldenberg xxxviii-xiv). These events exemplify how women were isolated and segregated from men. Nazis purposefully separated women due to their biological qualities, reproductive abilities, and different medical experimentation possibilities.

Given these enormous numbers, why are women’s stories absent from the canon? One reason might be high female deaths rates by the Nazis and their large transport numbers to death camps. Women, however, still survived the camps in the thousands and several wrote memoirs or even fiction novels to cope with their experience, women such as Nava Semel, Cynthia Ozick, and Ruth Kluger, to name a few. Another reason for silencing female narratives follows Roxana Ghita’s theory that “…women have been perceived as marginal in the Holocaust, or…these
distinctions have been seen as possible distractions from the central feature of the history of the Holocaust itself” (183). Ghita points out that some scholars fear that separating gender will take away from a principal narrative that the Nazis targeted Jews, regardless of gender, not all women. In 1998, Gabriel Schoenfeld even alleged female scholars had “counseled, nudged, prodded, and rebuked survivors until they believed gendered issues were important in the camp” (“Auschwitz and the Professors”). Schoenfeld not only characterizes feminist scholarship as a form of victim coercion but diminishes women's experiences as less important than the overall horrors faced by the Jews. In response, Phyllis Lassner and Danny M. Cohen assert that “What all of these accusations ignored or concealed was that there were all kinds of women who were subjected to brutal imprisonment by the Nazis, including political prisoners and dissidents, Roma and Sinti, Jehovah’s Witnesses, those with disabilities, and others” (4). Without acknowledging rape, sexual exploitation and humiliation, experimentation, or the other groups imprisoned and murdered by the Nazis, parts of the Holocaust fade. Gender cannot be ignored as an analytical category, and neither can other ethnicities or groups.

This thesis incorporates several disciplines, including literature, history, political science, and education to argue that we must combat this patriarchal unease with a gendered analysis of the Holocaust, recuperate silenced women’s voices, even when that requires historical fiction, and have the courage to acknowledge and analyze the phenomenon of female perpetration. I aim to connect biopolitics and gender in the Holocaust to depict the overarching politics regulating women’s bodies. I evaluate female perpetrators and victims together to showcase how Nazi philosophy and genocide controlled women similarly, yet with different outcomes based on ethnicity. Though I draw from history and theory, my main source texts are in fact literature. As I’ll explain below, my analysis owes to Wendy Lower and Sara E. Brown’s theories of female
perpetration, Ruth Franklin’s theory of genre, Erin McGlothin’s theory of empathy, and Primo Levi’s theory of ‘the gray zone.’ I draw from these theories to read Martha Hall Kelly’s *Lilac Girls* and Gisella Perl’s *I Was a Doctor in Auschwitz,* showcasing in particular how Kelly and Perl both readdress the female experience in terms of historical archives. Since historical archives fit into the universalized, male experience, they not only show female stereotypes, but exacerbate them. Kelly and Perl eschew female stereotypes, such as monstrous women, sexual deviants, and murderous mothers, to expound upon female agency and choice.

By sidelining female perpetrators as well as female victims, the scholarly tradition misinterprets who is capable of violence and why. In 1983, Joan Ringelheim and Ester Fitz held the “Women Surviving the Holocaust” conference, which opened the topic of what it meant to be a women in the Holocaust. Although mainly focused on female victims, Sybil Martin and Henry Friedlander introduced topics of female perpetrators through male perpetrators. It wasn’t until 1993, however, with John Roth and Carol Rittner’s *Different Voices: Women and the Holocaust* that female perpetrators and Nazi biopolitics were explored in an anthology. From the 1990s and on, female perpetrator research increased slowly, but much work remains to be investigated. As the first comprehensive feminist outlook, Wendy Lower’s *Hitler’s Furies* (2013) catalogues Nazi Germany’s female perpetrators, from guards to wives. My thesis builds upon these scholars’ work. What distinguishes my work is that I insist we analyze female victims alongside female perpetrators. Doing so helps understand the predicament of women who fit both categories.

Lower and Brown depict female perpetrators' roles and support for the Nazi Regime, which provides evidence for my argument. In *Hitler’s Furies,* Lower argues that there are consequences to forgetting women’s roles in the Third Reich. She describes how female perpetrators “reveal the darker side of female activism. They show what can happen when
women of varied backgrounds and professions are mobilized for war and acquiesce in genocide” (14). Her argument tracks how women transform from ordinary women into perpetrators, then follows their reintegration into society after liberation. With Lower’s overview, I explore female perpetration, especially in the concentration camps, and the minimal repercussions female perpetrators received for their actions. Alongside Lower’s scholarship, I utilize Brown’s articles on female perpetration and comparative genocide studies to demonstrate the gendered pattern in genocide. Brown reflects on “the impact of gendered understandings of women perpetrators on women’s post-genocide trajectories, narratives, and invisibility and exposes that impact on our understanding of genocide and its prevention” (Brown 157-158). Brown argues that when we meld women into other categories (i.e., Jewish, victim, perpetrator), they become forgotten (156). She also argues, a claim that I build upon, how when women are separated it is often on the basis of stereotyping, in the form of monsters, mothers, or whores. When gender has been employed as an analytical category, it has often appeared in a naïve and stereotypical form. I pinpoint these stereotypes through literature, with an aim to both expose such obvious interpretative pitfalls and advocate for holding female perpetrators accountable beside, instead of behind, their male counterparts.

Female perpetrators embodied a violent transformation from ordinary women to Nazi supporter, but their stories meld into the general term, “perpetrator,” a masculine-leaning phrase. When I say female perpetrators, I mean, guards, wives, secretaries, doctors, nurses, and any job that placed women in a position of power. Lower argues that during the after-war trials, “hundreds of women had been called to testify…[but] prosecutors were more interested in the heinous crimes of their male colleagues and husbands than those of the women” (2). Lower argues how men in Nazi society and in the international tribunal treated women as operating
underneath men. However, female perpetrators committed widespread violence: from beating prisoners in concentration camps or establishing Nazi hunting parties, to even skinning prisoners alive for personal enjoyment (Bartrop and Grimm 31 & 172). Due to their status as women, many were not tried for their crimes nor punished. These women re-integrated into society if they were either found not guilty, or not even charged. Without punishment and media attention, we will not know them, but their stories need to be told. Their stories will give us insight into why women turned to genocidal violence, what roles women played, and how gender affected perpetration. In this thesis, I hope to open the conversation to both the female victims and perpetrators of Holocaust history.

In Holocaust literature and scholarship, as seen with Gabrial Schoenfeld, stereotyping shrinks female agency and reduces the female experience into a universalized history. For instance, in *The Reader* (1995), one of the first Holocaust fiction novels that includes a female perpetrator, Bernard Schlink characterizes Hanna through the eyes of men, stereotyping her throughout the book. Stereotyping, as Laura Sjoberg and Caron E. Gentry layout, impacts female sexuality and societal ideas surrounding female agency and violence. There is an important distinction between male and female perpetration; Sjoberg and Gentry argue that when women commit violence, “their actions are portrayed to the public in stories that emphasize their singularity and deny their agency in their own violence” (64). They claim the media interprets these women as interrupting the normalized female behavior and labeled them as a deviant. Female violence, specifically in times of mass genocide, turns into normal behavior, but as seen with the Holocaust and the little scholarship on female perpetrators, that violence becomes hidden.
Through uncovering female perpetrators, I turned to literature to analyze women’s experience. Literature, whether fiction or non-fiction, crafts a deeper ethical and moral reader connection to the characters and encounters. Literature also identifies and connects gender segregation, perpetration, and biopolitical ideology to create literary and historical agency in modern readers. That is why I am going to analyze a popular fiction novel and a memoir that incorporate perpetrators next to victims. There are reasons for caution. As Ruth Franklin notes, there is “something ethically dubious, so the usual argument goes, about using—literally or figuratively profiting from—atrocity as an inspiration for literature, or indeed any form of art” (Franklin 3). Franklin acknowledges the arguments against fiction, such as Michael Wyschogrod claiming that “Art takes the sting out of suffering. . . . Any attempt to transform the Holocaust into art demeans the Holocaust and must result in poor art” (qtd. in Franklin 6). Franklin understands scholars hesitating to turn to fiction for fear of profiting from atrocity or demeaning the event. But she also identifies the importance of Holocaust fiction, including Alvin Rosenfeld, Lawrence Langer, and her own argument that "Every canonical work of Holocaust literature involves some graying of the line between fiction and reality" (Franklin 11). Her defense of fiction and graying Holocaust literature supports analyzing Lilac Girls for biopolitics and gender. By incorporating Franklin's genre theory, I establish a basis for literature unveiling female perpetrators, and victims, especially in the fiction genre. As an extension of Franklin's argument, Erin McGlothlin illustrates how literature evokes perpetrator emotions and appeals to readers' emotional connection. McGlothlin explores “how texts narrated by Holocaust perpetrators have both mobilized and managed reader identification and the ethical issues that arise from it” (254). Her theory of empathetic identification recognizes the importance of understanding the mind of perpetrators, like Herta Oberhauser. In my chosen books, empathy and agency interconnect to
curate a 'gray zone' in literature, and intensifies emotions, such as anger, confusion, and fear. McGlothlin helps me prove the ethical imperative and emotional contradictions of having a perpetrator's and victim's perspective side-by-side.

The thesis is sectioned into three chapters. In Chapter One, I consider the theoretical and historical background developed on women in the Holocaust and how *Lilac Girls* and *I Was a Doctor in Auschwitz* re-define those women’s experiences. The chapter examines who perpetrators, inbetweens, and victims are, and the roles they embodied. An inbetween, like Gisella Perl, is my phrase for prisoners who gained privilege in the concentration camps and sought to help other camp prisoners, even though they had to perform perpetrator-like acts. Levi calls this state of complicity a “gray zone,” and I argue that ideas of justice and culpability must be understood through gender as well. Through these discussions, I examine the nuances of victimhood and show how the entanglement of innocence and guilt owes to the specific biopolitical pressures placed on women from Nazi ideology. Following Lower and Brown, I acknowledge female perpetrators’ agency and their voluntary participation in the Third Reich. Then, I analyze the stereotypical responses to female behavior and the narratives placed on both female victims and perpetrators for deviating outside the norm. By exposing the gendered stereotypes, this chapter will help readers understand the implications of treating women as submissive to their male counterparts. It will also give background into why women historically are treated differently.

In Chapter Two, I transition into analyzing *Lilac Girls* (2016) and *I Was a Doctor in Auschwitz* (1948). I argue that *Lilac Girls* helps readers take women in the Holocaust more seriously. My reading of *Lilac Girls* helps us to understand that both “universal” and “individual” perspectives avoid the category of gender. *Lilac Girls*, published in 2016, follows
three women. Kasia is a political Polish prisoner at Ravensbrück Concentration Camp and her character is based on Janina Iwanska, a real world Ravensbrück experiment survivor. Herta Oberhauser mirrors her real-life counterpart and Kelly incorporates her perspective to capture female perpetrators' intentions and justifications for their actions. Finally, Caroline Ferriday provides an outsider prospective as an American philanthropist. I implement Franklin’s genre theory and McGlothlin’s theory of empathetic connection to contradict scholars who argue that Holocaust fiction is only harmful. Although Kelly has no direct connection to the Holocaust, her seminal novel allows us to question the role of women in the Holocaust from victim to perpetrator and is one of the first novels to do so in a comparative analysis approach. Her novel provokes poignant responses to Nazis exploiting the biological and physical differences of women.

In comparison to Lilac Girls, I Was a Doctor in Auschwitz challenges what we now consider a normal Holocaust narrative by showcasing female perpetrators and victims effected by biopolitical reproductive laws. Perl’s memoir, written in 1948, describes the abortions she had to perform and the choices she had to make as a gynecologist to help mothers and herself survive Auschwitz. Although this memoir was published in 1948, it never gained popularity in the Holocaust canon, an example of the extended silencing of women’s stories, especially when those stories address the biopolitical targeting of women’s bodies. Perl reflects on her intimate interactions with female perpetrators, such as Irma Grese, and makes morally questionable decisions to save her fellow female prisoners. Throughout this section, I confront the biopolitical nature of Nazi eugenics and examine how women’s bodies were exploited for experimentation and reproduction. I also challenge the argument that women had little to no agency or power in the Third Reich by concentrating on Perl’s images of female perpetrators. As a whole, this
chapter evaluates these two literary works for how they present women of the Holocaust, the roles they played, and their place in the historical record.

In Chapter Three, I assess Holocaust education in the United States and advocate for literature’s importance in restructuring Holocaust curriculum. By reading the Claims Conference statistics, I note a distinctive issue with Holocaust education in the United States and the underlying consequences arising: an increase in prejudice, an inability for students to bear witness, and slim preventative measures against genocide. I advocate that we blend History and English classrooms to emphasize, within a general Holocaust education, how gender shaped the Holocaust from general political structures into individual lives. I describe the skills students could potentially gain from this form of Holocaust education, such as historical agency, an ability to identify genocidal practices, and even kindness. According to the Jewish Virtual Library and the United States Holocaust Museum, only 20 states require Holocaust education, as of 2021, with three states, Alabama, Pennsylvania, and Washington encouraging it. Not even half of the United States is required to teach the Holocaust, which allows for antisemitism and Holocaust denial to go unnoticed. Holocaust literature can teach us about other genocides, such as the Rwandan genocide. Literature can teach preventative measures through genocidal patterns, and help students gain historical agency to encourage uprooting prejudice. Through a re-imagining of Holocaust education, gendered experience, including that of female perpetrators, should be integrated into the teaching of the Holocaust. Ultimately, this chapter encourages we change the current Holocaust curriculum to include topics of gender, and explore ideas of culpability, agency, and justice.

These chapters argue that the bulk of Holocaust scholarship does not distinguish gender, but universalizes, and misses key ideas about how women were treated differently, regardless of
their ethnicity. By applying an analytical framework of gender to the general understanding of the Holocaust, we can explore both crimes against women and crimes committed by women, and so doing recognize how the Nazis’ biopolitical agenda operated on different groups. Until the 1980s, what makes female experience distinct, was left out of the narrative or mischaracterized, and this is especially still so in the case of female perpetrators. As seen with the Dallas Holocaust Museum, women’s singular experiences continue to be downplayed. I argue we need to re-evaluate the historical account to filter out the male-dominant discourse and build a curricula that incorporates several disciplines and perspectives to incorporate how gender modulates the Holocaust. To do this, I insist that turning to Holocaust literature offers the connection that will lift the censorship of women and elucidate gender as an investigative tool.
CHAPTER 1 – WOMEN’S ROLES AND HISTORICAL REPRESENTATION

…we saw our women and our children leave towards nothingness; we, transformed into slaves, have marched a hundred times backwards and forwards to our silent labours, killed in our spirit long before our anonymous death. No one must leave here and so carry to the world, together with the sign impressed on his skin, the evil tidings of what man’s presumption made of man in Auschwitz.

-Primo Levi, *Survival in Auschwitz*

Primo Levi, an Auschwitz survivor and Holocaust scholar, famously argues that keeping one’s morality in the concentration camps is not possible. His argument relies on his experience in Auschwitz, witnessing men turn from “cultivated” to “barbarize[d]” (128). His firsthand knowledge of Auschwitz makes him an expert in the victim experience and what victims endured on a daily basis. This quote above emphasizes Levi’s position on the concentration camp mentality and what Nazis “made of man in Auschwitz” (48). He asserts that in the concentration camps, victims lived in a “gray zone,” by which he means living in an in-between state of moral and immoral. He impresses that men who are forced into hard labor without enough food to collectively survive, become cunning, if they had any hope to survive against the gas chamber, imprisonment, and Nazi ideology. They “exchange the betrayal of a natural solidary with their comrades” and unload “on to [their] underlings the injury received from above” (80). Deprived of basic human needs, men must abandon their morals, if they hope to survive. Beaten and berated by their oppressors, they take that hatred and turn it back on weaker individuals under them. Through Levi’s argument, we understand that morals and ethics were not just disregarded by the perpetrators, but the evil of Auschwitz, is that to survive, victims were compelled to abandon them as well. Levi puts the pained sense of survivor’s guilt the following way: “no one
must leave here and so carry to the world, together with the sign impressed on his skin, the evil tidings…” (47). He contends that no one should leave Auschwitz as they carry a profound shame that only survivors understand. Levi claims that those who leave Auschwitz are not innocent but had to turn towards violence and betrayal to survive. The tattoo represents a reminder of the evil tidings survivors committed and it binds them together to constantly carry the camp's evils. In other words, Levi argues, that with the rare exception of saints or those with superhuman attributes, everyone in the camp is guilty.

What Levi failed to see was how the gray zone functioned differently for women. He neglected the women’s perspective simply because Auschwitz segregated people by gender. Levi acknowledges that “our women and our children leave toward nothingness,” a blank space that demarcates death, but also a simple inability to know the women’s experience as a male witness. Levi universalizes the experience, as if in the face of widespread death, gender difference matter less to the basic narrative. Since “nothingness” becomes an experience of its own, we must identify and analyze the differences of those experiences for women and children apart from men, which is why I turn to Joan Ringelheim. Joan Ringelheim argues that “women's daily lives—vulnerability to rape, humiliation, sexual exchange, not to speak of pregnancy, abortion, and fear for one's children—cannot simply be universalized as true for all survivors” (745). Ringelheim reminds us that certain accounts often are only available to women directly, which include sexual crimes, compulsory abortions, women’s bodies, and other consequences. Though women and men both were targeted either for being Jewish or handicapped or unfit, women suffered additional persecution due to their reproductive abilities and biological differences.

This particular persecution stems from the biopolitical aspects of Nazism. Biopolitics, as defined by Michel Foucault, is “the acquisition of power over man insofar as man is a living
being…that there was at least a certain tendency that leads to what might be termed State control of the biological” (239-240). Women were seen for their bodies and what their bodies could accomplish for state population control. For populations the state deemed undesirable, they could be targeted for death to prevent reproduction. Women deemed racially fit were put under different biopolitical mandates to reproduce. For instance, in 1938, Hitler formally celebrated mothers declaring “as a visible sign of gratitude of the German nation to children-rich mothers, I establish this Cross of Honour of the German Mother” (“Hitler Decrees the Mutterkreuz”). Jewish women, on the other hand, were marked for death since they could reproduce. In order to survive both in everyday life and in the camps, targeted women were forced to choose between motherhood and self-preservation. Each woman was disciplined into thinking about the societal effects of their bodies. Since men cannot reproduce, they cannot experience the biological gray zone that women do, and the biologically driven choices women must make, such as sexual bartering, in order to survive. Women also hold a different type of survivor’s guilt surrounding biological threats, including abortions and rape, and survivors hold these evil tidings and memories on their skin in forms of physical and emotional scarring. Levi helpfully identifies a profound horror of the camps: that one has to forsake one’s humanity in order to live. But Levi was unable to recognize how biopower and the gray zone affected women differently. In this chapter, I want to push against our assumption that male experience alone can provide us the full or universal understanding of these fraught zones. And by precisely identifying the experiences of female victims and perpetrators together, we can constitute a gender inclusive counter narrative for the Holocaust. Through literature, I hope to differentiate the biopolitical nuances that shape women’s experience different from men, and the struggles women encounter due to their gender identity, both in the camps, and after the liberation.
Some critics, such as Hannah Arendt, Cynthia Ozick, and Helen Fagin, disapprove of using a gendered approach to the Holocaust since it may take away from the Jewish experience. Not only do they disapprove of singling out gender, but of singling out non-Jewish victims. The reason behind their opposition, as John Ritter and Carol Roth point out using Arendt’s, Ozick’s, and Fagin’s works, is that “focusing on the particularity of women's experiences, they [Arendt, Ozick, and Fagin] have argued, involves two dangers: 1) It may denigrate the Holocaust’s significance by turning the Shoah merely into an example of sexism. 2) It may detract from the much more fundamental fact that, as Ozick once put it, ‘The Holocaust happened to victims who were not seen as men, women, and children but as Jews’” (4). Yet, such cautions, I argue, have led us to miss the importance of acknowledging that the Holocaust did attack women at a higher rate than men due to women’s ability to reproduce. As a biopolitical movement, Nazism focused on women’s bodies and their abilities to either further the Aryan bloodline (White German women) or further the Other bloodline (Jewish, Gypsy, etc. women). What’s more, the Holocaust—although mainly aimed at Jewish populations—including political prisoners, Gypsies and Roma, the handicapped, and other populations that the Nazis deemed unfit. Women in these groups were persecuted, dissected, and targeted similar to Jewish women and to focus solely on Jewish women discredits non-Jewish women’s sacrifices. In turn, we then reduce the Holocaust to a uniform, universal experience. When describing the universal experience, Marlene E. Heinemann asserts, “Until examination has shown whether men and women experienced and wrote about the Holocaust in the same way, research which implies the 'universality' of men's writing and experience will be inadequate” (3). Men and women experienced the Holocaust differently and were systematically targeted for their biology as well as their ethnicity. I contend
that gendering the Holocaust requires that we examine all the victims to show the biopower and disciplinary power that the Nazis relied upon to separate and target women.

In historical and cultural accounts, women's stories are disconnected from the universal narrative, but we must incorporate their stories to understand gender's significance in the Third Reich. Until the 1980s, with the Women and the Holocaust conference and second wave feminism, our knowledge of women’s experiences mainly derived from literature written by men, such as Tadeusz Borowski, Primo Levi, and Elie Weisel. However, as Heineman argues, “"[To] assume that Holocaust literature by men represents the writings of women is to remain blind to the significance of gender in history and literature” (2-3). Men's writing, as seen with Levi's earlier quote, cannot observe women's experience because Nazis segregated the concentration camps by gender. Through gender segregation, female perpetrators led women's blocks, but had little interaction with male victims, hence female perpetrators limited or distorted accounts in the universal narrative. Only a few memoirs and novels, such as Gisella Perl’s *I Was a Doctor in Auschwitz* and Bernhard Schlink’s *The Reader*, specifically separate female perpetrators from male perpetrators. Because so few pieces of literature exist about female perpetrators, stereotypical representations become commonplace. From these representations, society, as Luhmann argues, create a “binary understanding of the female guards as either innocent victims or extraordinary depraved” (250). Female perpetrator binaries and female victim binaries entangle women in false narratives, so literary works must disentangle the false information, gender bias, and recognize female agency in both violence and survival. If literature includes female agency and denounces gender bias, we can then acknowledge gender as a vital category that informed the Third Reich's policies and separated men and women's
experiences. I now analyze how female perpetrators and victims experienced gender segregation differently and how gender biases affected our understanding of them.

Female perpetrators seemingly have been universalized into male stories, such as Tadeusz Borowski’s *This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen* (1946), and universalizing functions as a way for these women to escape liability and ultimately, get away with murder. Therefore, women involved in concentration camps, medical experimentation, and general violence go unrecognized. Since violent women alter passive, heteronormative feminine ideals, they “are not [seen to be] women at all, but singular mistakes and freak accidents” and “very few researchers actually depict violent women as rational actors, even though scholars often characterize violent men as rationally or logically motivated” (Sjoberg and Gentry 13). Some societies even uphold female passivity to rid women of agency and culpability in violent actions, but as seen with several women, like Lisolette Meier, Herta Oberheuser, and Dorothea Binz, the opposite is true.

Through Nazi biopower and body regularization, female perpetrators gained agency and increased their status by participating and accepting genocidal violence. Genocide only works if everyone contributes. As Wendy Lower argues, “Nazi Germany was a participatory dictatorship in which women fully contributed, and our standard for measuring this contribution should not be defined as we know it in a ‘man’s world’ of political office and social standing” (195). In crafting scholarships on female perpetrators, we need to acknowledge their agency and what the standards were for female perpetration. From 1942 to 1944, the number of female perpetrators increased when the mass killing of civilians accelerated. Women became the main perpetrators in some camps, such as Ravensbrück. Lower calls upon us to “understand[] the roles and behaviors of women who were agents of a criminal regime” and asks we “identify[] who they were, what
they did, and whether they were held accountable for their actions” (195). Lower identifies female perpetrators beyond how they were portrayed in the newspapers, and how the Nazis characterized them through their ability to reproduce. Women, as Lower argues, volunteered to be part of Nazi plans. Liselotte Meier, for example, “was an accomplice, serving as a secretary and lover to the District commissar of Lila and [was] overseeing the bureaucratic processes underpinning the mass murder of Jews in that region. She was also a perpetrator, planning massacres, participating in mass shootings, and joining mass hunts that often-targeted Jews” (Brown 174). Though working outside of the camps, Meier was just as barbarous as any guard. She willingly partook in killing Jews methodically, and she set up massacres, which shows that women, too, were heavily involved in the slaughter of Holocaust victims. Scholarship, like Lower's and Brown's, provide us insight into the level of responsibility and leadership female perpetrators accumulated. But to understand how that authority affected others, victim testimonies should be compared to archival records.

Although modern scholarship recognizes female contributions in Nazi society, gender bias during the Nuremberg Trials hindered prosecutors view of women as culpable agents. One notable case of gender bias was the Bergen-Belsen Trial. The trial tried the most women at 21, and three were sentenced to hanging, and the other guilty were sentenced to about 10 years in prison, many of which terms were reduced; however, out of the 24 men tried alongside the women, 8 were sentenced to death and the other guilty received 10-15 years with no appeals (Stimits 57-58, 71-72). The judge’s sentences disproportionately enacted justice between women and men who committed the same crimes. Since many trials were male-only, the Bergen-Belsen Trial represented the small portion of female perpetrators indicted. In total, only “60 female guards” out of almost 3500 “stood trial under the war crimes tribunals between 1945-1949.
Many of them [female guards] were described as more brutal than their male counterparts. A total of 21 of these women were executed.” (Smeulers 217). Only 21 women of the total 200 female and male perpetrators were sentenced to death, which means around 179 men were executed. This prosecutorial gender bias pinpoints that “women’s participation in ‘the same’ violence men participate in does not by itself mean they have a gender-equal or gender-neutral role in global politics” (Sjoberg and Gentry 65). Global politics refers to the similarities and differences world politics have and how international relations work during world-effecting events, such as the Holocaust. On an international scale, justice and culpability were affected by gender and societal bias, which allowed women to employ their gender and connections to men as a means of escaping prison and execution. Ilse Koch and Erna Petri were married and no matter how many eyewitnesses or even confessions they gave, they were still seen as performing violence per their husband's request. For example, Ilse Koch hid behind her guise of being just an S.S. wife, which acquitted her when her husband was arrested for embezzlement and executed by the Nazis (Przyrembel 377). Hence, a gender biased society actually assisted female perpetrators in escaping justice. Women, such as Ilse Koch and Erna Petri, committed violence for the Third Reich but also for personal advancement. Here, we see female perpetrators functioning in a gray zone where female advancement and political ethics clash. Nevertheless, culpability is no less diminished since female perpetrators are following their needs for advancement, not those of their husbands or other men.

Culpability was not only confused by the perpetrator’s gender, but by the gray zone that forced inmates to choose between survival and comradery. Similar to female perpetrators, certain privileged prisoners interpreted violence as power over others while inbetweens incorporated violence as a necessity to save fellow inmates’ lives. Privileged prisoners, such as Kapos,
managed inmates and even “inflicted harsh treatment on their fellow prisoners” (Jewish Virtual Library “Concentration Camps: Kapos”). Kapos were both men and women who more or less volunteered. However, Kapos and privileged prisoners differ from what I dub the “inbetween.” An inbetween flutters between the moral gray area but works towards saving fellow prisoners instead of betraying them. Primo Levi’s famous term, “the gray zone” further explains this confusing dynamic within the camps; “It is a gray zone, poorly defined, where the two camps of masters and servants both diverge and converge. This gray zone possesses an incredibly complicated internal structure and contains within itself enough to confuse our need to judge” (40). The gray zone defines victims and perpetrators collapsing the black and white dichotomy of innocent and guilty. The gray zone aligns with the inbetweens since they embody the idea of such a zone within the camp. This moral conundrum imprints hardships on individuals involved in this role as they have to live with helping and hurting others to survive.

As a notable example of a female inbetween, Gisella Perl illustrates how gender affects an inbetween's status. Perl was an educated medical professional of gynecology before entering Auschwitz and continuing her job once imprisoned. Perl confesses in her memoir that she aborted fetuses and killed newborn babies to aid in mothers’ survival. Scholars, such as Myrna Goldenberg, comment on Perl’s actions and how they were more humane than to “watch [the babies] starve to death, according to Mengele’s orders” (86). Joseph Mengele also forced Perl and other female doctors to help in his nefarious experiments and even required them to hand over the newborns for experimentation. As an inbetween, Perl supported her fellow camp inmates, but was also obliged to serve the female guards, which created a higher fear of death and confusion. Inbetweens were not perpetrators, unlike some Kapos. Levi discusses Kapos and inbetweens and how “to confuse [the murderers] with their victims is a moral disease or an
aesthetic affectation or a sinister sign of complicity; above all, it is a precious service rendered (intentionally or not) to the negators of truth” (Levi 33). Levi claims that although privileged prisoners turn towards perpetrator-like actions to survive, the choice is not one of their own making, so to confuse privileged prisoners with Nazis places the blame with the prisoners, instead the true culprits. The gray zone for inbetweens was inevitable and Gisella Perl signifies the challenge of working in a state of moral comprise. Unlike some privileged prisoners who followed orders or embodied perpetrators, inbetweens stay muddled in between the roles of savior and oppressor. Female inbetweens, unlike their male counterparts, helped women survive biopolitical targeting and crimes.

Nazi biopolitics required female victims and survivors to battle, not only for their humanity and morality, but for their bodily autonomy. These women grappled with laws directed at their wombs, which created higher death rates, encouraged reproductive experiments, and produced a gendered Holocaust experience. Women prisoners were also treated as “rewards for elite male prisoners,” which provided “a safeguard against homosexuality among German soldiers” (Ghiţă 186). Women became defined through their bodies and Nazis exploited their bodies. Since the Holocaust master narrative concentrates on the Jewish genocide, first and foremost, other biological crimes, such as rape, were silenced in the narrative. However, sexual bartering, too, was silenced in the main narrative as some male survivors cannot “see their own oppression of women” and it “results in a parallel inability to see, even to regard, the sexual abuse of Jewish women by the Nazis, and so women’s sexual violation is split off from the men’s master narrative” (Young 1784). Sexual violation becomes a causality of war, and an expected result of genocide. Young and Ghita describe the oppression of women through sexuality; Ghita discusses male victims involuntary sexual violation as a survival tactic while
Young argues that male prisoners and Nazis sexually oppressed female victims. Although women experienced sexual violations, several made a choice to sexually barter their bodies for survival. This choice preserves slight bodily autonomy for women, including women engaging in the gray zone for survival. Since women experience biopower and perform in the gray zone, their narratives become censored as it opposed the main narrative.

Biopower and the gray zone ensure men and women experienced death differently. Unlike male prisoners, “women took the real risk—the danger of becoming pregnant—because pregnant women (and women with small children) were singled out for death in every selection” (Ofer and Weitzmant 7). Women’s bodies selected them for death, and many had to choose whether to stay alongside their children or separate from them. Whether these women understood their choice to stay with their children led to death is unknown, but “This was a choice that men did not have to face because the men were segregated from the women and children as soon as they arrived at Auschwitz” (Ofer and Weitzmant 12). Some women sacrificed themselves for their children while others sacrificed their children to survive. The camp segregation evoked separate choices for men and women. Pregnancy did single women out, but it also caused women to decide between their religious beliefs and survival, yet another choice men did not have to make. Throughout this subjugation, women developed different morals. Women had to evolve their thinking about abortions and sex. Abortions became more about survival. Sex became a tool against a society that focused on biological processes instead of extramarital affairs, deviance, or ethics. Moral thinking had to expand since the Holocaust required victims to exist in the gray zone. Within the gray zone, women challenged biopower through resistance and resilience.
Historically, everyday camp resistance has been minimalized, but women’s resistance specifically has not been properly accounted for. As they had done in the ghettos before arriving, women created resistance groups in the camps to further their opposition to Nazi disciplinary power and death. In the archives, we learn that one resistance group caused severe damage when “five Jewish women deployed at the Vistula-Union-Metal Works detachment” at Auschwitz I “supplied the gunpowder that members of the Jewish Sonderkommando (Special Detachment) at Auschwitz-Birkenau used to blow up a gas chamber and kill several SS men during the uprising in October 1944” (Wagner College Holocaust Center, New York City). These five women, especially in 1944, knew the killing rate was increasing and understood that they needed to fight against the Nazis to save, at least, some lives. Normally, women “are presented as helpless (although men were no less helpless), as absent loved ones, (although the men, too, were absent), and as needing rescue (although the men, too, needed rescue)” (Horowitz 368). However, these women defied that expectation and proved women are just as capable of battling against their oppressors as men. Women resisted in attempts to survive, but also to find agency in a system that took it away. Instead of finding that agency through cruelty, they found it in resistance. These stories, whether about resistance groups or making traumatic biological choices, represents the little agency women had over their circumstances in the Nazi society. These representations provide a glimpse into women’s roles and decisions, from perpetrator to victim, and how together, it complicates our ideas of the Holocaust.

Throughout this section, I have foregrounded women’s experience and how it differs from men’s experience, which is often mistaken to be the universal narrative. Nazi biopower separated victims by gender and targeted women's bodies on account of their reproductive capabilities. In addition, I have shown that female perpetrators have been historically
underrepresented in the historical and cultural record, and that underrepresentation affects how we understand their roles, culpability, and agency. The underrepresentation, in fact, owes to female stereotypes and gender biases, to which I will now turn.

The Stereotypes

Stereotypes prevent us from recognizing women’s agency in perpetrating violence, and stereotypes obscure how we understand victimhood. The unfortunate part of gender bias is that women’s historical agency is written out. Female perpetrators get away with their crimes, and victims become helpless. These stereotypes become clear through a feminist approach. Aleksandra Ubertowska argues that a feminist approach to the Holocaust “unquestionably brings certain benefits: it benefits the one-sided ‘victimization’ of women, by revealing their varied social and historical roles” (31). Feminist approaches, as Ubertowska advocates for, re-define women’s experiences away from stereotypes and concentrate on biological crimes pointed at women, such as compulsory abortions, and female agency in violent crimes. To understand the feminist approach and what gender bias silences, we must expose narrative stereotypes and explain how they work to cover up women's agency and actions. Stereotypical narratives emerge to explain female behaviors that deviate from societal norms and become "an example of all that is rotten in the female sex" (Kennedy 240). The three most common stereotypes are the mother, monster, and whore narratives. These stereotypes can be seen in biblical narratives, such as Eve and the Apple, historical narratives, including Queen Elizabeth I, and even popular culture narratives, with The Hunger Games trilogy. Female stereotypes in accordance with the Holocaust show in newspapers, literature, and historical records that describe women through their bodily and societal functions.

I will first examine the mother narrative, which limits women to their reproductive capabilities and reads women's actions through motherhood alone. The mother narrative, as
Sjoberg and Gentry defined, "describe[s] women's violence as a need to belong, a need to nurture, and a way of taking care of and being loyal to men; motherhood gone awry" (13). Although the mother narrative stereotype focuses on perpetrator violence and motherhood, I argue that female victims experience the mother stereotype, too. Female victims had to choose between their children and their lives when arriving to concentration camps, like Auschwitz. Motherhood entangles with Nazi disciplinary power, which creates an unfortunate paradox surrounding motherhood in Nazi society. Women who embraced their motherhood and those who relinquished motherhood both gave into Nazi biopolitics. In one case:

…mothers could opt to present themselves for selection in which they might be chosen as worker, or they could go to the gas chambers with their children. This was a choice that men did not have to face because the men were segregated from the women and children as soon as they arrived at Auschwitz…all but two women of the six hundred who were given the choice decided that they could not abandon their children. (Ofer and Weitzmant 12).

Mothers, in this instance, sacrificed themselves to ensure their children were not alone in the gas chambers. Their decision identifies the gray zone paradox mothers experienced and how their sacrifice ultimately ensured the Nazis’ mission to eradicate them. Nazi biopolitics encompasses “the death of the other, the death of the bad race, of the inferior race (or the degenerate, or the abnormal)” as “something that will make life in general healthier: healthier and purer” (Foucault 255). They may have sacrificed themselves as a motherly act, but in doing so, allowed biopower to control them. Even women, who were of childbearing age, were exposed to horrendous experiments and torture due to biopolitical control. One mother describes how the S.S. guards forced her “to undress her daughter and to look on while the girl was violated by dogs whom the Nazis had specially trained for this sport” (Goldenberg 85). Several of these mothers were required to watch their children die or be a part of tortuous practices. Mothers became Nazi
targets and since female guards managed women inmates, they pinpointed these mothers for selection and torture.

Mother narratives prevent us from seeing women as more than mothers, but in certain literature, women are given honest and de-stereotyped outlooks. Some pieces, such as Art Spiegelman's *Maus* and Philippe Claudel's *Brodeck*, only "pay particular attention to women's biological roles as child-bearers and culturally-constructed roles as main child-carers" (Duffy 140). Spiegelman and Claudel characterize their main female characters, Anja and Emelia, through their bodies and motherhood, and then place them into subplots where masculine narratives maintain the central plot. However, in *Lilac Girls* by Martha Hall Kelly, one of the main characters, Kasia, who is 18 in the concentration camps, becomes a mother, after liberation, but she struggles to attach with her daughter. Kasia exemplifies the fear of motherhood that many female survivors retain since many were targeted for their reproductive biology. In the concentration camps, motherhood and pregnancy sent female victims to the gas chambers. By focusing on Kasia’s trauma and her interactions with her child, Kelly breaks the stereotypical mother narrative that constructs women as culturally caring and reproducers.

Female perpetrators, on the other hand, bear the mother narrative as a potential explanation for their actions. Sjoberg and Gentry argue that “in stories about violent women, their motherhood defines them—their inability/failure to serve as mothers is so dehumanizing (or dewomanizing) that it drives a woman to violence” (33). Sjoberg and Gentry contend that the media and literature, written through patriarchal standards, describe violent women through their (in)ability to reproduce. The two lines of narrative here are that violent women are either so obsessed with their children they kill for them or infertility causes outrage since they cannot perform women's supposedly natural role of motherhood. Critical, legal, and historical accounts
explain perpetrators based on their womanhood rather than their individuality. Although they are women and mothers, those two identifications do not always mesh. For example, Erna Petri mothered two children; however, when she saw six Jewish children on her estate, scared, she brought them into her home, fed them, and then led them to the woods where she executed them in cold blood (Bartrop and Grimm 219). Being a mother obviously did not stop her from murdering children for the Nazi regime. Petri could have stopped her plan anytime, but her beliefs and agency moved the plan along. Petri’s “capacity to kill children underlay the harshness of the court’s sentence, all the more so as she [killed] while two of her own children were living on the estate” (Lower 68). Although Petri received life imprisonment, the justice system still identified her as a wife, mother, and woman under her husband's influence, hence life imprisonment instead of the death penalty. During the trial, Petri confessed her independent initiative: “I had been conditioned to fascism and the racial laws, which established a view toward the Jewish people. I had to destroy the Jews. It was the frame of mind that I came to commit such a brutal act” (United States Holocaust Museum). It was her belief in the Nazis and their mission that predicated her violence, not her motherhood. Petri employed her gender and motherhood in attempts to receive a lesser sentence, and through stereotyping herself, she bears the mother narrative to play the patriarchal society that saw her through that identification. In female perpetrator cases, such as Erna Petri’s, mother stereotypes cannot explain away their behavior.

The mother narrative paints women through their reproductive tendencies, but the second stereotype I will examine, the monster narrative, blames female violence on lacking womanhood. The monster narratives "eliminate rational behavior, ideological motivations, and culpability from women engaged in political violence. Instead, they describe violent women as insane, in
denial of their femininity, no longer woman or human” (Sjoberg and Gentry 13). Monster narratives transform women into deviant monsters that kill without a rational mind. Female serial killers are normally characterized through monster narratives. For example, Rosemary West killed, with her husband, several young girls in the 1990s. In the media, her photo had captions, such as “The Face of Evil” (Daily Express, 23 November 1995), ‘Face of Evil’ (The Sun, 23 November 1995), and ‘Evil to the Core’ (Daily Mirror, 23 November 1995)” (Berrington and Honkaturia 62). All of the captions concentrated on how Rosemary embodied evil instead of focusing on her ideological motivations for the crimes. The media created an insane monster. In the Holocaust, Irma Grese and Dorothea Binz were also characterized by the media as monsters. Grese received the headlines: “The Shackled Monster of Belsen,’ Daily Express, (21 April 1945); ‘Belsen Beast Taken Back to Death Camp,’ Daily Worker, (22 September 1945); ‘Blonde Beastess has Confessed her Guilt,’ Daily Mirror, (6 October 1945)” (qtd. in Critchell 16). Grese transformed into a female beast and was distinguished solely by her illogical brutality. The media portrays her not as a woman or human, but as an inhuman monster.

Although portrayed as insane and illogical, female perpetrators volunteered for jobs in Nazi society, which implies agency in their actions and establishes a stable choice. Similar to their male counterparts, they wanted to advance their careers and thereby achieve greater independence in society. Women, in the camps, were “responsible for roll calls, for organizing prisoners into commandos (labor columns), and for supervision of the women inmates in the barracks and at work, the guards exercised direct power over the prisoners” (Mailander “The Violence of Female Guards”). These actions point towards agency, not insanity. Female guards ran female-section camps and women-only camps, which gave them autonomy from male colleagues. However, the monster narrative accumulates since “the idea of women as
perpetrators of genocide is at such odds with the frames of women as innocent victims and mothers” (Snow 61). Instead of thinking of women engaging in violence, the media and the law label them as monstrous or incapable of making their own decisions. Legally, women such as Herta Oberheuser and Erna Petri were considered as following their male partners' orders and were given lessened sentences than men who committed similar crimes. Female perpetrators do deviate from the norm, but the Holocaust shows us that genocide restructures the norm to include violence.

The monster narrative also intertwines the absence of empathy with violence and justifies female perpetrators’ behavior through their emotionless demeanor. The monster narrative presents a “mad/bad dichotomy” and “individualizes female violence and renders challenging ‘traditional beliefs of the human nature’ unnecessary” (Berrington and Honkatukia 54). Berrington and Honkatukia describe violent women breaking away from the norm and challenging what a woman should be. Media, such as tabloids and daily news, and male-driven literature, such as *The Reader*, implement the monster narrative to explain away female violence and take agency from women's choice to commit violence. However, when media and literature present violent women as rare and monstrous, society cannot understand mass female involvement in genocide. In genocide, female perpetration transforms from isolated incidents into everyday activities. Similar to when the media and courts portrayed Ilse Koch, an S.S. wife, through the monster narrative during her Augsburg Trial. Koch was “described as a ‘Kommandeuse,’ the ‘evil spirit of the camp’ or even as the ‘red witch’ who exerted the ‘worst influence imaginable’ over her husband and other S.S. officers…they assigned the SS wife ‘exterritorial’ powers which also rested on misogynistic cliches about female violence” (Przyrembel 384). The media depicts Koch as having supernatural powers to explain her
violence, which fits the monster narrative as she portrays a mystical creature. Instead of concentrating on her actions and why she did them, the witnesses and prosecutors focused on her monstrosity and gender.

When women commit violence, language turns to the supernatural. But when men commit violence, it is evaluated, usually by men, based on whether or not it's criminal or justified. Women, such as Ilse Koch, Irma Grese, and Herta Oberheuser lacked compassion, but they were not paranormal creatures. They were women who were career-ambitious and took advantage of the power their situation made available. Although female perpetrators were monsters under the original definition—“one who deviates from normal or acceptable behavior or character,” the normal changed into a genocidal mindset, making their violence more normal than abnormal. Unlike men, women in monster narratives are seen through their relations to others or through alleged insanity. Men, on the other hand, are characterized by their leading positions, independent actions, and high-ranking status. Zofia Sokulska-Kaczmarska's testimony characterized Herta Oberhauser as cold and leading experimental selections. Sokulska-Kaczmarska provided eyewitness proof that Dr. Oberhauser held clout over her male colleges; “Fraulein Dr. Oberheuser told us to take off our clothes. She took me to the men [doctors] She said that I am too weak, my legs too thin, the men agreed” (United States Holocaust Museum). Dr. Oberhauser influenced experimental subject choices, increased her agency, and gained reputation as a doctor. Sokulska-Kaczmarska's testimony identifies Dr. Oberhauser's cold reputation and independent actions, which establishes rational thinking and culpability. To turn to supernatural language, like Herta Oberhauser's media nickname, “der Teufel mit dem Engelsgesicht" (the devil with the face of an angel)” only denounces female perpetrator agency
and intelligence. Thus, the monster narrative hinders societal expectations about genocidal participation by women.

Alongside the mother and monster narratives, the final stereotype, the whore narrative, provides an explanation for female actions that relies on their sexuality. Whore narratives that focus “on women’s erotomania describe violent women’s sexuality as both extreme and brutal; while the whore narratives that focus on women’s erotic dysfunction emphasize either desperation wrought from the inability to please men or women as men’s sexual pawns and possessions” (Sjoberg and Gentry 13). The whore narrative is a stereotype that oversexualizes women and suggests that oversexualization makes them kill or behave violently. The media on the Holocaust adopts the whore narrative to dissuade society from the notion that women can be just as violent as men. This stereotype, as Susanne Luhmann explains that “the sexualization of (female) perpetrators creates a distance from the Nazi past and becomes a mode of mastering the kinds of affective and ethical unsettlement that a deep confrontation with genocidal cruelty might produce. Sexualizing female perpetrators—and fascism more broadly—also reinscribes gender binaries” (251). When female perpetrators become sexualized, whether by history, literature, or media, we focus on the sexual behavior instead of their violent actions. We come to explain their behavior away instead of interpreting the unsettling reality that women, too, practiced in genocide. Through the whore narrative, women perpetrators lose agency, escape consequence, and indicate deviance. Narratives then curate women into robots following men, attempting to please them, and if pleasing them included violence, then women committed violence. However, many women were single and chose to be a part of Nazi society for personal gain, not to please men.
The whore narrative attempts to condemn sexuality similar to violence and argues that women who are violent must be sexual promiscuous and morally impure. Irma Grese, pinpointed by the courts, media, and literature for her sexuality, performed gruesome acts of violence due to personal power more so than her sexuality. Certain newspapers, referred to Grese as the “Beautiful Beast of Belsen” and many newspapers still refer to her with this title, including *Medium* and the *Daily Mirror*. Historians and scholars, too, analyze Grese through her beauty and sexuality, including Daniel Brown’s *The Beautiful Beast*. In some instances, Grese subverted the whore narrative, yet witnesses like Gisella Perl describe Grese embracing sexual gratification from bodily violence. Perl recounts how “Irma Grese invariably arrived to watch the [breast] operation, kicking the victim if her screams interfered with her pleasure and giving herself completely to the orgiastic spasms which shook her entire body” (62). Perl acknowledges Grese’s sexual infatuation with operation-violence, but Grese also finds pleasure in controlling other women through their bodies. Grese not only victimizes women through torture, but sexually assaults them through voyeurism. Women committing sexual assault and rape in the camps, as Grese does in Perl’s account, disappear since Western society cannot see women committing these atrocities. This pervasive view of rape “is perpetuated through the use of misogynistic language, the objectification of women’s bodies, and the glamorization of sexual violence” (“Rape Culture”). Hence, Western society struggles to understand how women can commit sexual assault when culture believes rape is a male-on-female violence. Women, such as Grese, subverts rape culture, but also the whore narrative as her sexual pleasure is irrelevant to the mental and physical torture she executes on her victims. Sjoberg and Gentry declare that “violent women are othered and made subhuman in part by the fetishization of their existence and their actions…a woman’s violence is a sexual event” (46). Female perpetrators and female
sexuality collapse, and violence becomes only about the sexual aspects of the woman in question. Grese committed many other acts of violence besides Perl’s accounts, but turning Grese into a sexualized being, takes away from the everyday torture she inflicted on Auschwitz, Bergen-Belsen, and Ravensbrück victims.

Although female perpetrators experience the worst of the whore narrative, female victims experienced sexual exploitation from society for actions meant to ensure their survival. Genocide has an overwhelming weight and makes women think that gender-specific crimes, such as rape and sexual assault, are not worth reporting. For example, one survivor, Pauline, describes her shame revolving around the sexual assault she faced: "in respect of what happened, [what we] suffered and saw—the humiliation in the ghetto, seeing people jumping out and burned—is this molestation important?” (qtd. in Williams 84). Pauline silences herself in light of genocidal murder. In this sense, it is another instance of the master, universal narrative silencing the kinds of gender-specific crimes women experienced. When women feel silenced, unimportant, or judged due to a gender-specific crimes, "the experience may feel like a 'second assault' or a 'second rape,' a phenomenon known as 'secondary victimization'” (Ahrens 265). When society reinscribes victim-blaming and sexual stereotyping onto victims, they become re-traumatized for their involuntary experience. Although not exactly a whore narrative, female victims being stereotyped for a sexual experience expands the narrative to encompass and silence female victims' specific suffering.

Since women are subjected to victim-blaming and sexual exploitation, women who chose to barter their bodies for safety became criticized for their choice. Their choice, as Lawrence Langer defines, is a “‘choiceless choice,’ where critical decisions did not reflect options between life and death, but between one form of ‘abnormal’ response and another, both imposed by a
situation that was in no way of the victim's own choosing” (224). Langer describes victims surviving Nazi society by choosing between Nazi-made solutions. For women, that solution relied on their bodies and several women chose to copulate with Nazis or privileged prisoners for protection. In *Lilac Girls*, Kasia’s mother chooses this ‘choiceless choice’ to save her family from Nazi persecution. A Nazi officer proposed to Matka that she sleep with him or be reported for breaking the rules. There was no choice. However, women, including Matka, were sexually objectified after the war for surviving. Sexual objectification transpires since “women were the sexualized part of the gender binary, and after the war they were assumed to be at fault. Sexual bartering reveals the gender hierarchies in the ghetto: men purchased sex from women, and male prisoners… could, through their position, offer transport protection” (Hájková 528). Even female survivors found themselves subjected to sexual stereotyping, even though they were only trying to survive and escape the concentration camps. To place the label “whore” on these women in a variety of terms hints that we have not properly extended ethical thinking to women’s status during the Holocaust. For example, Perl depicted her reaction to sexual bartering: “My pride, my integrity as a woman revolted against the very idea. I begged and preached and, when I had my first case of venereal disease, I even threatened to refuse treatment if they didn’t stop prostitution” (78-79). In a negative reaction, Perl equated sexual bartering to prostitution. Unlike sex workers who have agency, women in the Holocaust sold their bodies involuntarily and understood that the only currency they had was their bodies. Another survivor, Ruth Bondy recalls how in Israel, people were suspicious she was either a Kapo or a prostitute, and Helen Lewis had a man tell her, “Isn’t it funny how only the young and pretty ones have come back?” (qtd. in Chalmers 188). In each of these instances, women are stereotyped for their sexuality and
those women who did employ their bodies, are then vilified for their actions. Through this reluctance, women become objects instead of women, secondary to the master narrative.

Holocaust Literature and A Feminist Perspective

To combat these stereotypes, we need to focus on literature that follows a comparative analysis approach of perpetrators and survivors while also separating women and men’s experiences. At the beginning of this chapter, I discussed The Reader and the stereotypical characterization of Hanna as problematic; female perpetrators need to be seen past their relationships with men and for their agency in Nazi society. It is on account of this stereotyping that I excluded The Reader from describing women's Holocaust experience. However, I omitted The Reader for two additional reasons: (1) Schlink focuses only on a single female perpetrator, and without a victim perspective, her testimony cannot be countered. (2) Schlink describes the Holocaust through a flashback, making it a secondary narrative to the male-driven romance plot. For these reasons, The Reader would not fit into my project. Many other male-driven works, such as Night, Survival in Auschwitz, Maus, and The Kommandant's Mistress followed similar grounds of exclusion as they either focus solely on the male survivor experience or curate overwhelming female stereotypical representations in the forms I laid out earlier. Per these parameters, my chosen pieces of literature, Lilac Girls and I Was a Doctor in Auschwitz identify both female victims and female perpetrators side-by-side and grant women both agency and a space to tell their version of the Holocaust. Female perspectives may better be understood through feminist theory and female-written testimony, and literature. A feminist perspective of Holocaust literature “challenges masculinized interpretations of genocide, moves beyond narratives that simplify or obfuscate women’s agency during genocide, and provided nuance and necessary space for the complicated story” (Brown 160). Adopting a feminist approach to literature gives us new perspectives on women from perpetrator to inbetween to victim.
Literature also includes a deeper affective and ethical understanding juxtaposing history and allows readers to bear witness to genocidal atrocities in a variety of ways, including sexual crimes.

Through the master narrative’s neglect of female histories, gender-specific crimes, such as sexual assault, receive the most censorship from society. Although sexual crimes present a gruesome side of war and genocide, they are a part of it and have to be talked about; otherwise, voices are lost, and stories forgotten. The censorship happened for several reasons: written documentation is limited regarding sexual violence, societies deem sexual violence unspeakable, and women hold shame about sexual violence done to them (Young 1784). The Nazis targeted women for their biological differences from men and if we censor those biological differences and crimes, we will make the Holocaust narrative similarly selective. Through censoring sexual crimes and women’s experiences, we “minimize the particular harms suffered by women in times of war and [result] in an absence of forceful precedent for future punishment of wartime sexual assaults” (Campanaro 2560). Since the justice system barely persecuted sexual crimes during the Holocaust, sexual crime victims went without justice. Hence, women are deemed less important and less justified after the war.

Literature, then, becomes an important educational way to discuss the Holocaust, and explores the gender differences in the Holocaust. Literature, for instance, provides narrative distance, invaluable to readers. Narrative distance generates “times when it’s desirable to draw your reader deep inside a character’s consciousness, and others when it’s better to pull back for a broader and more objective view of events” (Smith “Narrative distance”). With Holocaust literature, narrative distance changes according to the perspective, but also the crimes being portrayed. For example, in Lilac Girls, narrative distance narrows once Kasia and Herta are
inside Ravensbrück, but broadens to describe other characters and events. Narrative distance plays an important role in introducing readers to gender-related crimes and women’s personal experiences in the Holocaust. Authors, including Kelly and Perl, start objectively and narrow to show how “women’s war memories have been neglected and have played no role or at best a secondary role in war-related matters…With such critical insertions in weiter leben, [Ruth] Kluger repeatedly points to the exclusion of women from the public discourse in a male-dominated society” (Doerr 60). Survivors, such as Ruth Kluger, identified the exclusion of women from the master narrative and contributed to changing the narrative by inserting her gendered experience into public discourse. Kluger and Doerr question why women were neglected in Holocaust discourse. With notable exclusions, such as Perl's memoir, Kluger's Still Alive marked a changing point in public discourse about gender difference, but it took until 2001 for women's stories to be heard in the Western mainstream.
CHAPTER 2 – A LITERARY ANALYSIS OF WOMEN IN THE HOLOCAUST

Some Holocaust literature holds special explanatory power when it includes perpetrator and victim narratives together, a contrast that reveals both the faultiness of memory and the liminality of victim witnesses. Not only are survivor stories vital and more important than ever, but perpetrator accounts, too, possess crucial details about human morality and choice during genocide. A good example of what I mean comes from the exhibit at the former Ravensbrück camp, where visitors encounter perpetrator and victim testimony displayed together. Put side by side, viewers see through the distortion in perpetrator accounts and better understand female perpetrator agency. The exhibition, as Susanne Luhmann explains, must analyze perpetrator testimonies since “The historical record of the camps…exclusively represents the view of the perpetrators, including the SS…. To rectify the SS record, then, the female guard exhibition relies heavily on survivor testimony, which is set in contrast to and visually distinguished from SS records on display” (255). Luhmann describes how the museum relies on comparative analysis since perpetrator testimony tends to distort the perpetrators’ true actions. Curators include survivor testimonies to ensure museum goers cannot rest with perpetrator accounts alone. Perpetrators “tend to see themselves as victims…while displacing the victims from memory” (Luhmann 257). In their accounts, female Ravensbrück guards understate and hide their violence. Additionally, they downplay victims’ feelings and situations in the concentration camps to make camp life seem more humane than it was.

In interviews of perpetrators, we find the same tendencies toward cover up. For example, the perpetrator Anna Fest misrepresents her testimony, in hopes of protecting herself from
prosecution. When scholar, Alison Owings asked her “What about the food? Frau Fest said it was neither great nor bad, that there were many one-dish [Eintopf] meals, as well as bread, cheese, and wurst, and sometimes margarine. She said prisoners were not starved” (323). Despite what Fest says, men and women were in fact starved in this camp. A comparative-analysis approach, such as the exhibition provides and Owings attempts, helps to account for the perpetrator’s psychological motives for participating in genocide, while also ensuring we, as scholars, direct attention to the testimonial falsehoods. This same comparative approach, and the analysis it generates, forms the basis of my project. In wanting to compare perpetrator and survivor testimony side-by-side in narrative form, I turn towards fictional accounts that are capable of incorporating both views at once, in a way the testimonial memoir, rarely achieves.

Survivors and writers, such as Elie Wiesel and Saul Friedlander, argue new writers (non-survivors) should abstain from fictionalization. But Holocaust fiction allows us to contrast perpetrator testimony against survivor statements, to draw attention to older historical accounts, and to incorporate newly available historical archives into the mainstream consciousness. With the veracity of the camps being questioned, Wiesel contends experiencing and surviving the camps is a mode of ontological proof and “[o]nly those who lived [the concentration camps] in their flesh and in their minds can possibly transform their experience into knowledge.” Non-survivors, “despite their best intentions, can never do so” (“Art and the Holocaust”). Wiesel understands the importance of testimony and turning experience into written language. Yet, Wiesel does not account for the limitations of witness testimony in describing all aspects, including the women’s experience, the perpetrator’s psychological justifications, and new historical collections. Non-survivor writers can address all of these elements, but witness
testimony, for the most part, cannot, especially if the elements were not a part of their immediate experience.

Though fiction is dismissed by Holocaust memoirists, memoir itself also presents challenges familiar to fiction. Saul Friedlander argues that “There is a danger in memoir-writing, many years after the event…and I don’t know how far I could say it about my own memoir, with the passage of time one tends to reorganise the past,” (“Where memory leads”). To reorganize the past refers to processing trauma through filters of time and language. Friedlander assumes that when memoirs are written closer to the events, they identify the events more clearly, whereas memoirs written years or decades after reorganize memory and contain learned information. Hence, fiction and memoir share similar strategies of illuminating the truth by formally arranging experience into reflection, instead of presenting closer-to-time experience. Yet all genres of prose literature involve language reorganization. Ruth Franklin describes how “The historian’s anvil and the novelist’s crucible perform different functions, but they are made out of the same material. And it is for this reason that we do no favors to writers such as Borowski, Levi, or Wiesel when we continue to insist that their books are strictly, purely, factual” (16). Franklin, here, argues that memory undergoes fragmentation and revising as survivors write their accounts. To some degree, reorganization is the only option to retell events, whether memoir, history, or fiction. Yet, fiction can integrate several perspectives and records into one work. Whether or not it remains factual, and analytically truthful, depends on how well it is written.

Martha Hall Kelly’s Lilac Girls (2016) enlists the comparative-analysis approach. She crafts her novel to give the perpetrator’s mind followed by chapters from survivors perspectives. Kelly also incorporates new historical archives and brings attention to the Ravensbrück medical
experiments. Kelly contrasts three points of view: Herta Oberhauser (a camp perpetrator), Kasia Kuzmerick (based on Janina Iwanska, a victim in Ravensbrück), and Caroline Ferriday (an American philanthropist). Just as Ravensbrück effectively juxtaposes perpetrator and victim narratives, Kelly’s novel successfully switches perspectives, chapter by chapter, to understand Herta’s psychological and societal motives for staying in the camp as a doctor and to analyze Kasia’s testimony about Herta’s actions towards her. Kelly also draws from the Caroline Ferriday Collection, which informs new outlooks on Ravensbrück and includes Iwanska’s and other Ravensbrück survivors’ testimonies. Through her archival research and her interviews with survivors, Kelly could reorganize past memories with new historical information, including Nuremberg testimonies and American medical records. Kelly writes informed by these new records and pinpoints what the added information says about old accounts, including Herta’s distorted views and Caroline’s 1940s philanthropy. Although Kelly’s novel provides numerous benefits for Holocaust understanding, it is popular fiction and contains a romance plotline for Caroline.

Through the romance, Kelly was able to reach a wider, mainstream audience. But there are legitimate reasons to question this practice. Though Kelly’s work has feminist ambitions in recovering women’s stories, by linking “women and romance,” does she not keep women, we must ask, “constructed within the male order and the established tradition of prose fiction that grows out of and upholds that order”? Are her women “constructed as marginal and secondary in order to secure the dominance of men and novels,” as Laurie Langbauer says of romance novels (Langbauer 2)? More, can page-turning romance co-exist in an account devoted to the ground-zero ethical terrain of genocide? These criticisms have some validity. Though Kelly’s form remains partially bounded within heteronormative, masculine forms, I argue that Kelly
challenges other patriarchal discourses, such as the assumption that women who commit violence do so without full agency. More she shows in detail how women experienced biopower as the Third Reich regularized reproduction and women’s bodies. Without its internal comparative analysis, Lilac Girls would not create an ethical unsettlement or balanced view of female perpetrators and their victims.

We don’t have to wait for Kelly, however, to see these attributes. Gisella Perl’s I Was a Doctor in Auschwitz (1948), written immediately after the war, also reflects on how women were entangled in Nazi biopower and establishes an early and rare form of comparative views of both perpetrators and survivors in memoir. Though Perl was a survivor, her memoir also gives female perpetrators space to show human fears. Perl identifies female perpetrators who feared pregnancy and received abortions. If discovered, everyone involved would have been severely punished. However, Perl tempers sympathy we might feel for female perpetrators by describing their intimate threats and continued abuse of camp inmates. Her memoir also reflects upon the Nuremberg Trials and information she learned, which shows how time helped Perl reorganize her memoires and interpret her individual experience through as relating to women’s experience more universally. Perl wrote her memoir as a confessional, but it is rarely included in the Holocaust literature canon. Its exclusion “points to the exclusion of women from the public discourse in a male-dominated society” (Doerr 60). This thesis acknowledges the importance of her memoir since Perl recognizes female perpetrators, their agency and humanity, female victims and their morality, and women affected by biopower. In an unusual testimonial memoir, Perl’s work takes a holistic approach and distinguishes the moral gray zone female victims experience differently when placed inside the camps.
The comparative-analysis approach that Martha Hall Kelly and Gisella Perl take is uncommon enough to suggest that it owes to their female subject position, and the double perspective required to understand with nuance how Nazi biopower affected all women. Kelly and Perl write literature that (1) incorporates new archival material and historical understanding; (2) contrasts, as the Ravensbrück exhibition does, perpetrator and survivor accounts of the same event, which is crucial to understand the psychological motivations for behavior, memory, and erasure; and (3) leads to a more sensitive revision of female stereotypes that have marred the historical record. Kelly and Perl, too, interpret how womanhood connects to biopower and how biopower itself necessitates a comparative approach between Nazi-supporting women and Nazi-targeted women. These reasons are why I focus this thesis on *Lilac Girls* and *I Was a Doctor in Auschwitz* below.

*Lilac Girls* and the Women of Ravensbrück Concentration Camp

*Lilac Girls* resuscitates female histories, intersects biopower and gender, and complicates perpetrator motivations. Similar to Joan Ringelheim and Ruth Kluger, Kelly involves historical records, and becomes an author who is “recovering the experiences of women, and reshaping or nuancing Holocaust memory” (Horowitz 176). Kelly recovers the voices of women who were imprisoned not for being categorized as Jewish, but as political prisoners and Roma. Since Kelly concentrates on female minority groups targeted during the Holocaust, she brings about new historical perspectives, but also elevates the historical knowledge of modern-day readers. By reinventing historical testimony and implementing comparative analysis, Kelly retrieves women’s voices overtaken by male, Jewish memoirists. Male Holocaust memoirists did not experience female-targeted persecution or sexual-driven crimes. What’s more, James Young argues that “male writers’ inability to see their own oppression of women results in a parallel inability to see…the sexual abuse of Jewish women by the Nazis, and so women’s sexual
violation during the Holocaust is split off from the men’s master narrative” (1784). Thus, the men’s master narrative narrows genocidal crimes and silences sexual crimes derived from Nazi biopower which targeted women for reproduction. *Lilac Girls*, on the contrary, concentrates on the intersectionality of biopower and gender, and recognizes how the Nazis regularized all women’s bodies differently. As I describe in Chapter 1, biopolitics includes both biopower and disciplinary power. Disciplinary power refers to victims and the historical “emergence of techniques of power that were essentially centered on the body, on the individual body” (Foucault 242). Foucault contrasts this with regulatory power which is where biological life in general comes under state control: biopower concentrates on fertility and reproduction, which then targets women’s bodies, in particular. Kelly, then, links gender with biopower, and shows how biopower compels women to defend their bodies (resistance) and survive through their bodies (sexual bartering). Kelly further connects biopower with female perpetration: the Nazi state wanted Nazi women, including perpetrators, to reproduce. Biopower “deals with the population as a political problem,” and Nazism employed medical treatment of the masses while exterminating undesirable groups as a biological threat to the nation (Foucault 245). But because the focus is reproduction and birthrates, women’s bodies are a particular site of control. Through a comparison of survivor and perpetrator testimony, Kelly describes how biopower gave female perpetrators’ motivations to work in the concentration camps and inflict violence. Kelly, then, collapses both disciplinary and biopolitical powers to represents the terrifying fusion in the camps.

Ravensbrück Survivors: Resistance Leaders, Sexual Agents & Biological Experiments

Using historical examples, Kelly depicts women-led resistance and describes how women resisted Nazi biopower. *Lilac Girls* connects efforts of female resistance to women attempting to escape selection. Once Matka, Kasia’s mother, gets a nursing job with Dr. Herta Oberheuser, she
helps her fellow prisoners survive. Matka tells Kasia: “When [Paula] comes to deliver S.S. medicines, she slips me supplies—hair dye so the older women can look younger and escape selections. Heart stimulants so the weak can stand at Appell.” (196). Matka’s dialogue describes how selections are determined by body image and health. As a privileged prisoner, Matka had access to the hospital and was able to move about the concentration camp more freely. Kelly mirrors Matka’s privilege after actual historical prisoners, such as Alina Brewda, who “stole six morphine injections” to help women affected by x-ray sterilizations and hysterectomies at Auschwitz (Weinberger 148). Brewda, like Matka, exploited her privilege to help her fellow female inmates after they had been experimented upon and she took life-threatening risks against Nazi biopolitical policies. Kelly reflects on female resistance efforts and demonstrates the differences between male and female resistance. Women, such as Alina Brewda and Gisella Perl, saved women from selection by helping them seem younger and more viable. Kelly characterizes Matka in the same position.

For women in the concentration camps, resistance relied on sisterhood and unity, and sisterhood gave women a sense of safety and hope but also a sense of humanity. Women formed “social units” and were “willing to risk compromising their invisibility…by forming larger communal group[s] in order to heighten their chances of protection, and ultimately, survival” (Baumel 341). Communal sisterhood helped women feel less isolated and more hopeful for survival. Disciplinary control only works if Nazis can “rule a multiplicity of [wo]men to the extent that their multiplicity can and must be dissolved into individual bodies that can be kept under surveillance, trained, used, and if need be, punished” (Foucault 242). Social units, as seen in Ravensbrück, protect women from isolation as individuals and ensure a group mindset continues. Kelly depicts two instances of sisterhood resistance. The first follows when Kasia was
one of the women experimented upon which Anise, a friend of Kasia’s sister, gathered extra food for the victims and tried to get messages out to Matka (Kelly 206-207). Anise tells Kasia, ”The whole camp is up in arms over what they did to you all…The Girl Guides have organized—over a hundred strong now” (234). Anise and the whole camp resist the experimentation and help the women, dubbed Ravensbrück Rabbits, survive. Kelly implements this moment to highlight camp unity. She also instances women who sacrificed themselves for the Rabbits.

In 1944, when the Allied powers were liberating several of the concentration camps, Ravensbrück attempted to liquidate the Ravensbrück Rabbits, but several women switched their own numbers with those belonging to the rabbits, in hopes that by surviving, the rabbits would be able to give evidence against the Nazis in prosecution. Doing so, those who switched numbers would be put to death in their place. Kelly accurately portrays and emphasizes these women’s sacrifices, by drawing details from testimony by Janina Iwanska and from papers in the Ferriday collection. Kelly writes, “Everyone in the camp continued to hide the Rabbits when roll call came. Some even traded numbers with us at great peril to themselves” (Kelly 273). Iwanska’s testimony reads, “Three French women and two Norwegian women accepted voluntarily to replace us in the lot, which was to go to the gas chamber, so that we would be left as proof of what the Germans had done to us” (United States Holocaust Museum, Washington D.C.). Although Kelly refrains from specifying nationalities, she includes the resistance efforts and sacrifices to pinpoint how women’s bodies led to resistance, but also how death functioned differently for women than it did for men who focused on direct resistance against the Nazis. Kelly incorporates new archival testimony to mark the relationship between biopower and female resistance.
Kelly participates in a historical reclamation of women’s resistance and agency when she displays women turning to sexual bartering for survival. Women’s sexuality became their only source of agency and women, such as Matka, chose to barter their bodies for familial protection and personal agency. Sexual bartering ranged from “being a functionary’s lover for protection from transports to the straightforward exchange of intercourse for food” (Hájková 503). Not only does sexual bartering show the connection between biopower and women, but sexual bartering also complicates ideas about sex for women’s survival. Thus, people in the grey zone amass more power and control than other inmates, in the case of women, by employing their bodies as a means of exchange. Kelly describes how Matka, through her body, acquires power. Power “was a way of acting on bodies to effect behaviors. And it was resisted, both consciously and unconsciously, by some individuals. There were power struggles that involved some individuals squaring off against others. But these struggles also produced new individuals, meaning they produced new ways of understanding oneself” (45). Ladelle McWhorter describes how biopower targets bodies, and those targeted will resist the disciplinary action, but the struggle will change those affected. In applying biopower to sexual bartering, not only does biopower transform behaviors, but it also changes individual means of survival. Kelly describes how Matka comes to comprehend her bodily power to change her family’s situation: “Are you saying you will let this go if I come visit you?” ‘If that is what you heard—’ ‘The Germans I know are cultured people. I can’t imagine you would ask a mother of two to do that’…I’m sorry you feel that way” (Kelly 35). Matka starts a relationship with him to save her family from persecution. Kelly reveals men manipulating women through sexual trade, but also how Matka's sexual bartering is a selfless act. Kelly defines Matka’s sexual bartering as a moral imperative since “survival by any means was a form of resistance” (Cushman 110). Kelly switches the male, master narrative and
describes sexuality as a means for regaining some control and power. Here, Kelly refrains from judging women placed in the position where sexual bartering was the only option for survival both in the camps and in the ghettos. She stresses their choice as a consequence of biopower.

Kelly also portrays how sexual bartering shifted between inbetweens, like Matka, and privileged prisoners, like Nurse Gerda. In the gray zone, female privileged prisoners played dual roles to save themselves from dying in the gas chambers or at the killing wall—the designated area for mass shootings. In the camps, Matka uses her relationships to gain extra food for her daughters. Gerda, for her part, forms a sexual relationship with a head doctor for personal survival. Since “‘Gerda is Rosenthal’s girlfriend’,” she gains power over her fellow prisoners due to her status, and once “‘he did a termination on her’,” Gerda understands the feelings of medical victims, but that does not stop her from making more women victims of biopower. She “picks pet Haftlings to treat with a warm bath, complete with flowers. Combs their hair and tells them sweet stories before she brings them here[the hospital]” (Kelly 123). With Gerda’s status, she manipulates fellow women inmates by treating them with dignity and giving them back the humanity that was ripped away before she leads them to their deaths. Kelly not only complicates sexual bartering but also concentrates on the gray zone where prisoners transform into perpetrators. Gerda reminds me of Sylvia Friedmann, an Auschwitz privileged prisoner, who was dubbed “the ‘death announcer’ because she summoned the women for the experiments by calling out the subjects’ names.” She used this intimacy even though “she knew how harmful [the experiments] were and what the envisioned end result was, because she herself was one of Clauberg’s victims” (Weinberger 140-141). In her dual role of prisoner and nurse, Friedmann, too, experienced x-ray experimentation before getting power over others. As did Gerda, she controlled women’s bodies by handing them to the perpetrators who made them victims of
biopolitical regularization. Kelly complicates the moral and ethical standing of female sexuality and complicates how sexual bartering affects women differently depending on their camp designation and bartering partner.

Nazi disciplinary power targeted women for their biology and reproductive capabilities, and Kelly reanimates female medical experimentation histories to entangle disciplinary torture and biopolitical ideology. Historically, women, including Iwanska, experienced individually, what Foucault gives as state power that works en masse: “the beginnings of a natalist policy, plans to intervene in all phenomena relating to the birth rate” including “endemics, or in other words, the form, nature, extension, duration, and intensity of the illnesses prevalent in a population” (Foucault 243). Biopower also focuses on eradicating disease and infections. Under Nazism, the camps intersect this power brutally, since the standardized experimentation on camp inmates aimed to discover methods of keeping the German, Aryan bloodline healthy. Ravensbrück was known for its horrendous surgical experiments, called the sulfadimidine experiments; women’s legs were cut into, violated with outside materials, and even amputated (Weindling 89). Although historians, namely Paul Weindling, grapple with the medical experiments, scholarship is still uncommon because Nazi records were destroyed. Kelly models Kasia as a Ravensbrück Rabbit—as Janina Iwanska was—to show how in the execution of biopower, individual women were violated, controlled, and subject to intense violence.

Kelly emphasizes the consequences of experimenting on Kasia both in the short-term and long-term, and sensitively ensures that readers bear witness how biopower intersects with gender politics. Kelly compares the medical experiments, first from Kasia’s perspective, then from Herta’s, flipping chapter by chapter from a women in pain to a women at work. The contrast
reveals the extent to which Herta distorts her motives, and thinks of women, such as Kasia, as nothing more than experimental subjects. Kelly, first, describes Kasia’s reaction:

My own nausea and pain were terrible. When I first woke, I wasn’t sure I still had a leg, but then saw it was wrapped in a heavy plaster from top of my toes to the top of my thigh. I could feel some fuzzy material inside as if it was lined with cotton…Some had been operated on on their left leg, some on their right, some on both. (203)

Kasia’s testimony focuses on her feelings, the pain and numbness, and she was afraid her leg was missing, before she finds it completely plastered. Kelly crafts Kasia’s reaction first for readers to comprehend the torture felt by the perpetrator, and second to warrant against Herta’s perspective which frames torture in the calm frame of scientific discovery and career aspiration. Herta receives the War Merit Cross: “I would be among Hitler’s chosen few who’d received this honor…Was it for my participation in the sulfa experiments?” (Kelly 213). Herta acknowledges where the Cross came from and feels excited for her role in the medical torture since it boosted her career status. Kelly intertwines these perspectives to contrast biopower as an anonymous mechanism of science, the perpetrator’s perspective, with the victim’s, especially women, who receive the grueling disciplinary methods to affect such power. Kelly adopts a comparative analysis approach to give space to new records and overlooked accounts, but she also reintroduces victim’s pain alongside perpetrator testimony to make sure that the perpetrators stay culpable for their actions.

The Perpetrator Perspective: The Female Doctors, Guards, and Nurses

Kelly also illustrates the ideology that perpetrators use to justify their actions, including the most simple, career aspiration. And she presents the perpetrator’s mind next to the survivors of their violence, encouraging the reader into comparative analysis. Lilac Girls “involve[s] the reader in complex ethical engagements in which the reader must choose to align (or not) with the narrating or focalizing protagonist perpetrator” (McGlothlin 259). The perspective creates a
complicated yet realistic notion of ordinary women committing violence. Readers must decide how to engage with Herta’s perspective and her journey into Nazism. Kelly re-creates background for Herta and explains how Nazi-sympathizing women "can no longer be understood as their mobilization and victimization on the home front. Instead, Hitler’s Germany produced another kind of female character at war, an expression of female activism and patriotism of the most violent and perverse kind” (Lower 119). Kelly displays female sadism in a system also trying to control women and turn them into reproductive robots. Female victims and female perpetrators experienced the reproductive control from Nazi biopolitics, except female perpetrators were supposed to increase the population with as many babies as possible.

Women perpetrators, regardless of their role, struggled to gain notoriety and power since Nazi-society defined women as mothers instead of leaders. At Ravensbrück, Herta Oberhauser was the only female doctor and constantly had to prove herself to her male colleagues. Through the camp, Herta performed surgery, albeit illegally and without patient consent. In the Third Reich, for a woman in the medical profession to become a surgeon was rare. The concentration camps, however, allowed women, such as Herta Oberhauser, to become surgeons. It also allowed them to gain power, play out their sadistic fantasies, and increase their financial and career status (Smeulers 251). As a female doctor, Herta later argues that she could only further her career working in the camps: “she later gave evidence that it was almost impossible to join a surgical department in Germany and that it was not until Ravensbrück that she got the chance” (Bartrop and Grimm 210). At Ravensbrück, her career as a surgeon progressed and she performed many experiments. Several victims have testified about her involvement (United States Holocaust Museum, Washington D.C.). *Lilac Girls* shows Herta’s excitement to be able to operate:

“Would you like to take the lead today?”
“Operate, Doctor?”
“Why not? You’d like to practice?
“Yes, thank you, Doctor,” I said.
Was this really happening…We worked well into the evening. I was careful not to rush the closing, crafting my square knot sutures, spiky and black, like tracks of barbed wire guarding each incision. (Kelly 214-215)

Kelly compares Herta’s sutures to the barbed wire surrounding the camp. Barbed wire, designed to guard the inmates at risk of griping and tearing the skin, appears in miniature as sutures, signs of healing and care, in fact imprison harmful materials in the women’s bodies. Herta admires her surgical work through terms of imprisonment and regulation. Kelly captures the way biopower—aimed at restoring health—motivates the imprisonment and torture of medical victims. Herta is a civilian women focused on her career: “Genocide open[ed] up new avenues of action and agency for women…[and] women navigated new spaces previously closed to them. Similarities exist in the same processes, outcomes, and constrained spaces afforded to women who decided to participate” (Brown 158). In the Third Reich, women were needed to ensure the Nazis’ success. Through her support, Herta was rewarded for her role in the concentration camps and furthered her career and status as a member of the Nazi party.

Through survivor testimonies, Kelly details how Herta enacts disciplinary power on other women and interprets Herta’s motivations for the unethical and cruel treatment of the inmates. Kelly explains Herta’s callousness through her interactions with other Germans, such as Fritz, and her relationships with her non-consenting patients. Herta and her colleague Fritz discuss the medical experiments before Fritz leaves for a more honorable career on the front lines of the war. Herta tries to convince him to stay as the experiments, in her mind, are necessary: “‘This whole thing is inhumane.’ …‘It can't be helped Fritz.’ How could he let sentimentality interfere with his judgements? The operations were for the greater good of Germany” (Kelly 212). Not only does this sequence detail Herta’s cruelty, but how she has completely transformed from supporting
Nazi ideologies to enacting violent missions, from embracing Nazi biopower, to implementing its disciplinary implications. This conversation did occur in fact between Herta and fellow doctor, Schidlauski. Schidlauski, as Ravensbrück survivor, Zofia Baj-Kotowska testified, told Dr. Oberheuser when she asked “what she could do to relieve [the victims’] pains. He replied, ‘Do not operate on them and they will not suffer’” (United States Holocaust Museum, Washington D.C.). Herta performed life-altering experiments on women’s bodies that either severely maimed female victims or killed them. Yet, Herta only saw them as furthering her career as a surgeon and furthering the biopolitical mission for a healthy and robust Aryan German population. Herta’s cruelty only increased once she was able to lead the hospital and operations. Baj-Kotowska acknowledged as much: “Oberheuser told us herself that she could not give us anything to relieve our pains because it would delay the healing in our legs” (United States Holocaust Museum, Washington D.C.). Kelly places survivor testimony alongside perpetrator testimony to ensure that Herta’s victims keep their voice, even when the narration is from Herta’s perspective. Not only do the survivor testimonies keep Herta accountable, but they keep Kelly’s depiction of Herta honest.

*Lilac Girls* releases Herta from the stereotypical monster/whore female perpetrator and characterizes her as an ordinary woman with career aspirations that let greed overtake her capacity to make conscious, ethical, and moral decisions. Kelly depicts Herta’s psychological motivations through a psychologist’s checkup. The psychologist echoes the questions readers have for Herta about why she decided to continue at Ravensbrück and break the oaths she took as a doctor: “You can’t have it both ways, Herta. Kill and still be seen as a healer. It takes a toll” (Kelly 265). The psychologist’s role in the novel creates opposition to Herta and allows her to argue her reasons for staying. Kelly's psychologist connects the reader to Herta in what
McGlothlin, in a discussion about empathetic sympathy, calls “a kinetic process of identification, encouraging [them] to both cultivate and retard affective, cognitive, and ethical connections to what have conventionally been regarded as unimaginably evil figures whose viewpoints are ethically uninhabitable” (McGlothlin 270). Herta, then, becomes a human being indoctrinated by Nazi ideology and blinded by career aspirations. Herta, as Kelly depicts and Lower identifies, shows how “Genocide is also women’s business. When given the ‘opportunity,’ women too will engage in it, even the bloodiest aspects of it. Minimizing women’s culpability to a few thousand brainwashed and misguided camp guards does not accurately represent the reality of the Holocaust” (Lower 166). Women, similar to Herta, found opportunity where they could in the Nazi system. Herta’s gender gave her employment access at Ravensbrück since this camp needed women to watch women. Once inside, her choice to stay and perform surgical experiments became less about gender and more about societal advancement.

By foregrounding Ravensbrück and Herta, Kelly challenges the historical accounts of German women during the Holocaust. Kelly brings female perpetrators into mainstream consciousness and institutes their malicious actions as acts of power over others. The female guards in the novel oppose “the conceptual lens through which genocide is researched, reported on, documented and (ideally) prevented often ignores female agency and typecasts women as passive victims and/or bystanders” (Brown 451). Kelly confronts our preconceptions about female passivity by introducing female guards in a fit of rage. As Kasia arrives at Ravensbrück, she recounts how the female guards “poked and swatted us with their sticks and leather truncheons. If you’ve never been hit with a leather truncheon, it stings like you cannot believe" (Kelly 153). During Herta’s arrival to Ravensbrück, she witnesses several female guards torturing a woman: “A female guard lashed one of several prisoners gathered there with a
horsewhip…The guard in the courtyard kicked the woman in the midsection with her boot, the woman’s screams hard to ignore” (Kelly 114). Kelly establishes female guards everyday violent and sadistic actions against camp inmates. Readers come to understand the intimate struggle between female guards fight for control and power over their subjects. Olha Froliak-Eliashevska testified that “weak, emaciated bodies that could no longer stand upright [during roll call], often fell to the wet, muddy ground. At that moment, the kapo would drag the poor feeble woman forward and leave her to her fate” (Eliashevsky-Chraibi “Ukrainian Women”). The female concentration camp guards and privileged prisoners were given power through leadership roles (kapos and blockovas) and took advantage of the prisoners' status by beating, torturing, and killing them. Kasia experiences the violence while Herta has to choose whether or not she can perpetrate the same violence. The abuse goes further with the guards' insults and apparent disdain for Polish citizens, such as Kasia: "'You stink like pigs,' one guard said. 'Poles. Of course, covered in shit’” (153). German women in the role of female perpetrators believed they were above the prisoners as they were deemed an inferior race and criminals. As a perpetrator of the Third Reich, they thought, “the enemies—the Jews and other so-called racial defectives—were to be removed with surgical precision once and for all. Threats to German's existence would be overcome, the struggle resolved” (Lower 162). To the female guards, Kasia represented a threat to German culture and power. Kelly portrays these women with blind loyalty and lost morals in the concentration camps.

Whereas historical accounts, such as Cesare Lombroso’s Criminal Woman, the Prostitute, and the Normal Woman (2004) and Joycelyn M. Pollock’s Women's Crimes, Criminology, and Corrections (2014) often link female guards’ violence to “sexual deviance” (Sjoberg and Gentry 66), Kelly instead grounds their actions in their desire for power and control.
over others. Kelly, then, revises the “whore narrative” stereotype. Kelly separates violence from sexual deviance in her characterizations of female perpetrators. *Lilac Girls* represents female perpetrators as women capable of making their own choices and committing acts of violence without patriarchal influence, mental hindrances, or sexual experiences. Although Kelly concentrates on women’s agency in the camps, Nazi-sympathizing women gained power “as they went east, where they joined the governing elite,” adopting roles which included secretaries, administrators, and nurses (Lower 74). Kelly adds to a critical debate for readers about female guards during the Holocaust and their representations in history.

For readers, Kelly makes readers uncomfortable with realistic and accurate depictions of female violence. There is a risk that readers will find pleasure in the violent descriptions, but this risk must be set against the ethical obligation to reflect on the worst of human nature in the Holocaust. Kelly uses first-person perspective to attach readers with each of her characters and to deepen both the reader’s horror and trust in the fidelity. Kelly introduces readers to extreme violence through Dorothea Binz’s. Binz ripped a child away from the child’s mother, Mrs. Mikelsky, and murders the child. When the woman asks about her baby, Binz tells her, “You have no baby. You have nothing. You are only a number” (Kelly 165). By ripping away her child, Binz destroys the woman’s identity:

“I don’t know. I have nothing. I am only a number.”…
“You’re right,” [Binz] said, then drew back her arm and sent her crop across Mrs. Mikelsky’s cheek.
The cellophane slashed Mrs. Mikelsky’s cheekbone and after a quick look at Irma, Binz bent at the waist and unleashed her dog. Adeline sat motionless at first, then at the chirp of Binz's clicker lunged at Mrs. Mikelsky, ears pinned back, teeth bared. The dog clamped her mouth around Mrs. Mikelsky’s hand, shook it side to side, and pulled my teacher to her knees. The dog’s growls echoed around the square as she lunged and bit the neckline of Mrs. Mikelsky’s shift and brought her down to the snow. (Kelly 166)
This sequence parallels Myrna Goldenberg and other survivors' testimony, in which they testify that female guards used dogs to enact violence on the prisoners (Schmidt-Fels 13). Kelly even gives the dog a name, to further underscore that guards treated dogs with more respect than the prisoners. The scene eventually ends with Mrs. Mikelsky’s death. Kelly conveys such a scene to establish female guards’ sadism and power over grieving mothers.

Finally, Kelly identifies female nurses and shows how their violent practices implemented the first steps of Nazi biopolitical experimentation. Kelly’s fiction holds nurses accountable, characterizing them as perpetrators and inbetweens. Besides upper-level management, nurses were the first perpetrators of the Holocaust and "under the Nazi regime had a biopolitical task that was openly acknowledged and propagated by Nazi politicians. Seen from this perspective, nursing became a state-supporting vocation, and this obviously enhanced the status of nurses in Nazi society” (Benedict and Shields 38). Nurses received an elevated status because they helped fulfil the Nazi biopolitical mandate and they were given the freedom to murder on behalf of the Reich. Without nurses, Herta and other doctors would not have performed as many medical experiments on victims, and without them eugenic killings would not have functioned as effectively.

Kelly depicts nurses initiating the biological experiments by injecting chemicals into the chosen women. Readers are introduced to Nurse Gerda by from Kasia's perspective as a medical victim. Gerda, an actual nurse at Ravensbrück, was recorded by Baj-Kotoswka as enjoying operating on pregnant women with Rosenthal, her boyfriend (United States Holocaust Museum, Washington D.C.). Gerda, as an inbetween prisoner, assumed the role of the perpetrator, unlike Gisella Perl, who helped her fellow inmates survive. Gerda cared not for her patients and survivors testified that she gave morphine overdoses to stop patients from crying out (United
States Holocaust Museum, Washington D.C.). After Luzia dies from her operation, Dr. Oberheuser and Nurse Gerda agree to move her out of the wing, which Kasia freaks out over. Through the distraction of Dr. Oberheuser, Kasia recalls that “Nurse Gerda jabbed a needle into my thigh” (Kelly 206). Nurses infused morphine, sedatives, and even lethal injections into patients, which goes against the nurse’s oath as caregivers. Gerda became infatuated with power and greed, which turned her against the women who were supposed to be her equals. Primo Levi would describe Gerda's role as "lift[ing] oneself above the norm" (37). Gerda chose to date a male S.S. doctor and become a perpetrator to raise her status.

Kelly characterizes Gerda with the exact callous nature found in the testimony within the Ferriday collection. Once Herta marks Kasia’s block for the surgical experiments, Nurse Gerda and her assistants prep and manipulate the victims; "Gerda's helpers pried Luzia's arms from around my neck. 'It won't be so bad,' Gerda said to Luiza with a smile. 'Soon you will see flowers and hear bells” (Kelly 199). Gerda’s dialogue alludes to death through euphemistic language, such as “flowers” and “bells.” Her language attempts to settle Luzia and Kasia, but the imagery only scares them more. Gerda provides these false promises in hopes of a more straightforward procedure. Gerda's personality resonates with her training as a nurse, but the manipulation tracks with the mentality of genocide.

Kelly also depicts “Nurse Marshall,” a German woman, to demonstrate how nurses employed direct and indirect violence to maintain biopolitical control in the camps. Through my research, I have yet to come across a Nurse Marschall at Ravensbrück. Kelly most likely modeled her after another nurse who worked there. Several testimonies by survivors mention a nurse, Erika. Maria Cabaj names Erika as one of the prominent participants in her experiment (United States Holocaust Museum, Washington D.C.). Nurse Marschall most likely draws from
the historical Nurse Erika, another high-status German nurse. The archives show the likeness between the characters. When Herta details setting up a new round of experiments, she mentions how “Nurse Marschall had done an adequate job compiling the lists of patients for the experiments” (Kelly 214). Showcasing Nurse Marschall committing indirect violence provides more context for the multiple types of violence that women committed. Nurse Marschall compiles the information on which women will be operated on. She does not physically inject and manipulate them, as will Gerda and Herta, but her indirect violence still affected the inmates’ lives.

The biopolitical project of the camp required disciplinary power—surveillance: spying on one’s coworkers, neighbors, and friends. That meant female perpetrators spied on other female perpetrators to increase their status and protect the Third Reich. Many female perpetrators, and even privileged prisoners who had elevated roles in the concentration camps, fought each other to further their careers and increase their power. Although “catfight imagery pervades mainstream popular culture” as a trope, Kelly employs the trope to depict jealousy between career-driven women (Reinke 164). She shows how pettiness and jealousy get individuals killed. Nurse Marschall, for instance, jealous of the privileged status of Kasia’s mother, Halina, suspects Herta and Halina are in a lesbian relationship, and uses this leverage to exact her revenge. Nurse Marschall construes the relationship between Herta and Halina as lesbianism, but nothing physically transpires. When Lilac Girls introduces the idea for lesbianism, it tracks historical accounts. The Nazis condemned same-sex relationships; even though Nazi “did not criminalize lesbianism” as they did male homosexuality, it was still frowned upon, especially between Nazis and prisoners (Cushman 110). Kelly suggests that Herta is attracted to and fantasized about Halina; for example, late one night, Herta and Halina dance in
the Reviver, which ends when Herta "brushed a lock of hair back off Halina's forehead" (Kelly 182). Herta attempts a romantic advance, but Halina cowers in disgust, which shows Herta's fantasy to be just a fantasy. It maps lesbianism onto her own delusion that she could destroy a mother's children and still have a romantic attraction. Not much is known about Dr. Oberhauser's sexual life, but lesbian relationships were common at Ravensbrück, so Kelly’s interpretation could be valid. This interaction exhibits Nurse Marschall condemning the nature of both same-sex and perpetrator-inmate relationships, mirroring Nazi biopolitics, and demonstrating the power of female perpetrators and the cattiness between them in the camp. Kelly identifies Nurse Marschall’s jealousy over Halina and clues in readers that Marschall had a hand in Halina’s disappearance. At the end of the novel, Herta admits Marschall’s role; “‘Nurse Marschall discovered your mother took it upon herself to, well, edit it’… ‘Then Nurse Marschall told Suhren about the coal…. I never even told him she broke into the apothecary closet, but the coal was enough for Suhren’” (Kelly 472). Since coal was hard to come by during the war, Halina stealing it and editing the experiment list led to her execution. Nurse Marschall's jealousy inflicted indirect violence through her tattletale behavior and got Halina killed. Kelly illustrates both indirect and direct violence to further the understanding of genocidal violence, which includes verbal reporting.

*Lilac Girls* investigates female perpetrators, from doctors to nurses, to reveal an ostracized history of biopolitical control. The Holocaust flourished due to the participation of everyone in the Third Reich, including women. As Claudia Koonz argues, “The women who followed Hitler, like the men, did so from conviction, opportunism, and active choice” (4-5). As shown through *Lilac Girls*, the choice to stay, apply, volunteer, and harm the inmates of Ravensbrück was up to the perpetrators. The conscription might have prevented some from
leaving, but the active participation in beatings, experimenting, and killing were choices they made. Kelly acknowledges the agency of these women and how they were anything but innocent.

After Liberation: Biopolitical Trauma and Gender Culpability

Survivor stories, such as Night, usually stop after concentration camp liberation, but Kelly’s narrative continues decades after to depict gender-influenced justice, survivor’s guilt, and biopolitical trauma. In the aftermath of liberation, Kelly depicts Dr. Oberhauser and her fellow doctors at the Nuremberg Trials and illuminates the discrepancies between male and female justice during the international tribunals. Factually, Dr. Oberhauser received a light sentence and there are limited records surrounding her imprisonment and subsequent release. As with Kelly’s Herta, most female perpetrators either got off or received lighter sentences: “the international court system was blinded by imposed gender roles, unable to comprehend the agency that the Third Reich provided women” (Brown 179). The Nuremberg Trials charged a select few Nazis; most of them were male. Kelly writes the trial through Herta’s perspective and describes Herta’s emotional and psychological state. Herta’s reaction to the sentence is in line with her documented personality: “Fritz was sentenced to life in prison, and many of the others were doomed to join Gerhard at the gallows. I would be an old woman when released. In the one minute and forty seconds it took to sentence me, they stripped me of a lifetime of work” (Kelly 360). Although not much is known about how Herta reacted after the sentencing, the thoughts Kelly writes portrays her humanity, which raises questions about the relationship between justice and gender. Why did she only receive twenty years when her male counterparts received life, or even death? Did Herta repent for her actions? The questions drive feminist approaches to Holocaust scholarship, where “there seems to be a tendency to consider all males—even the unarmed ones—as combatants and the women as civilians” (Smeulers 209). Through comparative analysis, Kelly highlights how female perpetrators are seen lesser than male
perpetrators when their actions equal or even surpass men’s violence. Kelly rectifies the historical record, in line with Lower and Brown, and proves that ordinary women were not just civilians, but also combatants.

Kasia’s trauma attaches to her mother’s disappearance, and her choice to be involved in the resistance movement: “And [Halina] drew portraits for the Nazis. That’s what got her killed…I knew too well that her bringing me [Kasia] a sandwich that night at the movie theater had gotten her killed” (Kelly 312). Kasia is one of many survivors who believed their actions caused other deaths during the Holocaust. Guilt in Holocaust survivors, as Ruth Jaffee describes it, shows up in how “many survivors tend to question themselves about what they did or avoided doing or should have done differently. They persist in accusing themselves, frequently without justification. They are unable to resolve their dilemma of doubt, self-accusation, and shame” (308). Although Kasia rejoined her father, married Pietrik, and started a family, she still could not process her mother’s death. After giving birth to her daughter, Kasia is faced with Pietrik and her family deciding to name the daughter after Kasia’s mother. But Kasia has reservations: “Halina? So, she would have my mother’s name after all? As it was, I could barely look at my mother’s picture without falling to pieces. More terrifying, could the child’s name somehow cause her to follow Matka’s terrible path? To live a wonderful life, cut short?” (Kelly 363). Motherhood after the Holocaust proved difficult for many mothers as they feared infertility, that their children would be taken, and the general stress of having a family. Kasia’s inability to mother comes about when the child Halina decides she loves to paint and excels in it, a talent similar to that of Kasia’s mother. Kasia’s PTSD explodes during Halina’s art show, where Kasia, through a drunken haze, relates:

“Yes, my mother was an artist just like Halina here, but she drew portraits for bad people, Nazis in fact, if you must know.” I felt my face wet with tears. “What happened to her?
God only knows, Mrs. Art Teacher, because she never said goodbye, but take it from me, the woman in that poster is my mother.” (Kelly 450)

Kasia’s pain and pride intertwines her daughter’s love for art. Through her explanation, Kasia acknowledges her distance as a mother and how her mother’s death continues to affect her. Kelly, here, resists characterizing Kasia as a mother, instead giving her struggle to accept what happened in the concentration camps and what happened in accordance with biopower.

Kelly focuses on the biopolitical trauma experienced by women and describes how the biological targeting and experimentation affected women’s mental and psychical attitudes towards motherhood and medical help. After Anise, a Ravensbrück survivor, brings up to Caroline the horrific sulfa experiments done in the camp, Caroline develops relationships with the Rabbits through letters. With Caroline Ferriday’s help, Kasia and other Rabbits receive a chance to fix the internal damage inflicted on their legs in America. Further into Caroline’s chapters written from her perspective, she defends Kasia against the American doctors placing her on display, similar to Nazi physicians, "I took Kasia by the hand. ‘These women were victims once but will not be abused again if I’m here” (Kelly 409). Although this instance may not have transpired precisely as Kelly wrote, Caroline's advocacy fortified her diplomatic friendships with the Rabbits and helped the women get reconstructive surgery. Kasia expresses the fear these women would have had about being operated on: “‘The thought of another plaster…and how do I know I can trust them once I'm asleep?” (Kelly 423). Kasia embodies a PTSD that most all survivors carry in some capacity (Prot-Klinger). In Lilac Girls and backed by the archival correspondence, the reconstructive surgery allowed the women to limit their pain and fix the physical problems caused by Dr. Oberheuser and her fellow doctors. Kelly represents the aftereffects of liberation to describe how the pain and fear of Nazi biopower did not stop when victims left the concentration camps.
*Lilac Girls* develops a comparative perspective that implements a new meaning to the word, "universal" and that meaning includes women's voices from perpetrator to victim. Telling the Holocaust through fiction “makes a case for universality. Art makes comparisons; it encourages empathy; it awakens the imagination. In short, it emphasizes the fundamental sameness of the human condition” (Franklin 242). Kelly connects universality to women and their experiences to Nazis’ biopolitical mission to create a healthy, German Aryan population. Kelly may feed into romance tropes, such as describing her characters in connection to their love interests, but that only allows her to reach a wider audience. Unfortunately, Kelly constructing her novel this way emphasizes how “Women’s greatest oppression has lain perhaps in the way that her construction has been whipsawed between reality and representation, history and ideology, the way that the forces of oppression have resorted to either angle when their purposes demanded” (Langbauer 246). Fiction writing demands certain structures in each genre and romance genres require women to function through their bodily attraction. Kelly constructs her characters through this lens, but she also opposes these constructions and instead “disturb[s] the ready oscillations of this dynamic” through Kasia’s characterization (Langbauer 246). Kelly implements the romance to surpass patriarchal requirements in publishing, but then is allowed to show us: (1) The mind of the perpetrator (Herta) next to the mind of her victim (Kasia), (2) New historical information released in the decades after the Holocaust, and (3) a new outlook on female violence and a de-stereotyped representation of female perpetrators’ actions.

*I Was a Doctor in Auschwitz* and the Inbetweens

As an early adopter of the comparative analysis approach, Gisela Perl’s memoir, *I Was a Doctor in Auschwitz* brings an impenitent look at privileged prisoners and perpetrators in the concentration camps. Perl entered Auschwitz as a gynecologist and was tasked with performing gynecological tasks on behalf of the regime’s mission. She used what power she had as a
privileged prisoner less for the Nazis’ “intervention in terms of, the birth rate, the mortality rate, various biological disabilities, and the effects of the environment.” (Foucault 245). Instead, she saved women’s lives and future fertility through her procedures, making her an inbetween. For inbetweens, disciplinary power splits from biopower but actually saves lives. She also shows the moral ambiguity of her position as biopower still wants beautiful specimens, but it nevertheless morally saves lives. In her confessional memoir, she condemns herself and the S.S. women around her for participating in biopower as disciplinary power. Through connecting biopower and disciplinary power, she breaks the stigmatizing silence that surrounds sex, abortion, and sexualized violence. Perl, similar to Ruth Kluger, another survivor, opens her "remembrance by associating death and sex, not because they intrinsically belong together but because they were both unspeakable secrets” (Young 1784). Death and sex are unspeakable events, an open secret. But Gisella Perl disrupts the unspeakable by detailing women’s wombs, abortions, sexual crimes, and sexual bartering. Through her frank discussion, we, as readers, come to understand how all women are connected during the Holocaust by bodily control and how biopower affects differently female victims, inbetweens, and perpetrators.

Subjected to degradation and discipline, female victims experienced sexual harassment from S.S. men and women, and Gisella Perl highlights how disciplinary power concentrates on women’s bodies. Perl describes how “‘One morning, at Zahlappell (roll call), we had to lift our skirts and hold them up while laughing S.S. men walked through our lines whipping our naked bodies and selecting many among us to die in the flames as a punishment for having damaging ‘camp property’” (26). Perl explains the bodily shame felt by the women having to lift their skirts for a strange male gaze. Since S.S. men would determine which women would die based on how their bodies appeared, Perl recognizes a sexual voyeurism being linked to judgments
about fitness to live, a profound sexual humiliation whose outcome leads to murder. Myrna Goldenberg agrees that “many women describe their horror at being required to undress in front of leering S.S. men and at being shaved by male prisoners” (84). Women testified that S.S. guards degraded them, shamed them, and scared them, and that they battled to keep some semblance of their dignity and humanity. Nazis attempted to rid prisoners of their humanity by taking their items, names, and culture:

I knew that I had died on that March 19, when the Germans overran Hungary and compelled us to give up everything that meant anything to us, pushing us into a ghetto first, then robbing us of possessions, freedom, and finally even of human dignity, in this seething, crawling burning inferno. Here I was only a shadow without identity, alive only by the power of suffering. (41)

Perl confronts readers with the emotional toll of losing everything. In segregated camps, such as Auschwitz, women’s fears increased, especially surrounding their bodies, since both women and men threatened their modesty. Perl, even as a privileged prisoner, details the way the Nazis eradicated the human nature of the inmates to replace it with a manufactured sense of a non-human species.

Unlike male prisoners, female prisoners had to fear pregnancy. In the camps, women were threatened with rape, not only for its violence, but for the possibility of pregnancy: "[I]n many forced-labor camps…abortion was not an option: pregnancy automatically condemned a woman to death" (Ofer and Weitzman 7). Since the eugenic laws, starting in 1933, targeted Jewish and other 'unfit' women's wombs, including ensuring their bodies ceased reproduction. These laws included compulsory abortions and sterilizations in the ghettos, but once in the camps, any woman who was visibly pregnant was automatically sent to her death. The death function signals the racism element of biopower and "in the biopower system...killing or the imperative to kill is acceptable only if it results not in a victory over political adversaries, but in
the elimination of the biological threat to and the improvement of the species or race” (Foucault 256). The biological threat starts with women's ability to reproduce, hence why women and their bodies were targeted at an exponential rate. Women's and their children's deaths ensured the improvement of the German, Aryan race, or so thought the Nazis. Once we know that the visibly pregnant were selected for killing in most camps, we can understand the importance of Perl’s service of providing women abortions in Auschwitz. Perl identified how many women “did not know that they would have to pay with [t]heir lives and the lives of their unborn children for that last, tender night spent in the arms of their husbands” (57). Readers empathize with these women, realizing how comfort and love would cause these women to die. Their reproductive capabilities became synonymous with death, and getting pregnant threatened their survival. Male prisoners did not have to face this same fear.

Gisella Perl was a complicated inmate at Auschwitz; she held more power than most prisoners and performed heinous crimes herself. Primo Levi describes the position faced by an inbetween such as Perl’s as exemplifying the coexistence of compassion and brutality “in the same individual and in the same moment, despite all logic; and for all that, compassion itself eludes logic” (56). Perl reveals here how her disciplinary power ironically preserves a mother’s life, even when working for a biopower of experimentation. As an inbetween, her decision muddles morality and consequences because although she is remorseful, her actions still bordered perpetration. She details her connection to Dr. Mengele, the twin experiment and reproductive doctor who ran Auschwitz: "When the order came that pregnancy was no longer punishable by death but had to be interrupted and the embryo delivered to Dr. Mengele for experiments, I was happy again" (Perl 52). Perl's elation over the rule change shows her role as a privileged prisoner and inmate juxtaposed. She had to harden herself to aborting both non-viable
fetuses and newborn babies in the knowledge some would become sacrifices to Dr. Mengele’s medical experiments. Perl prioritizes the mother over the child since both would die if the pregnancy would continue, and her honesty about her action places her in favor of the women in the camp. Similar to Matka in *Lilac Girls*, the memoir positions readers into “ideological identification” with Perl and asks readers to align with her “moral and ethical worldview and [her] justifications for [her] behavior” (McGlothlin 264). Not only did she abort fetuses, but she had to sacrifice newborn babies for mothers’ survival. Perl inflicts an affective response in the reader and raises ethical questions about killing newborn babies to save mothers: Is killing newborn babies for the mother’s survival, especially in the concentration camps, a moral compromise? Or is it a mercy since the children would not or could not be raised in the concentration camp environment without certain deficiencies or the constant threat of death?

Perl acknowledges the negative connotation surrounding abortions, which is that abortion is a religious sin, but she also acknowledges that without an abortion, both mother and child will be selected for death. With the stigma surrounding abortion, Sara Martal argues that “the threat of biomedical death inscribes the embodied relation of mother-unborn with desires propelled by fear, flushed with uncertainty and mobilized around faith in biomedical control” (331). Fear controlled mothers’ willingness to endure biopower’s death function to save their lives. The persistent dichotomy forces readers to place themselves in Perl’s shoes as she relives her past: “I took the warm little body in my hands, kissed the smooth face, caressed the long hair—then strangled him and buried his body under a mountain of corpses waiting to be cremated” (59). Although Perl primary aborted fetuses—non-viable babies—this baby was three days old when she strangled him. Perl’s writing gathers witnesses to the horrors of the choices made in the concentration camps and shatters the silence surrounding camp abortions and pregnancy. Perl
describes the manipulation of the camp rules about pregnancy and how the Nazis constantly toyed with women's hopes and fears. After Dr. Mengele allowed women to have their babies without threat of death, Perl describes Eva who had a baby boy, but refused to attach in fear of losing him, “And she was right. Twenty-four hours after Eva Benedek had her son, a new order came, depriving Jewish mothers of the additional food...which swelled their breasts and enabled them to feed their babies. For eight days, Eva Benedek had to look on while her son starved slowly to death” (60). In the camps, Perl's actions against the three-day-old became a mercy compared to Eva's eight-day-old son that starved to death. Perl graphically describes his death to transfer the horror onto readers, but she also signals how biopower worked on women and could change instantly depending on the Nazis' need at that time.

Perl implements both biopower and disciplinary power to save women, which tips her into both perpetrator and victim status. Although performing in favor of biopower, she provides kindness to the mothers, saving their lives, which separates her from the S.S. women, including Dr. Oberheuser, but her involvement with Dr. Mengele and his experiments in a small capacity begs a question of culpability. Dr. Mengele’s position in Auschwitz outranked many perpetrators. Perl felt his abuse if she said no to his requests, so she went along; “I had been ordered to interrupt a two-month-old pregnancy and conserve the embryo in formaline…it was a beautiful specimen and I hurried to put it into the formaline jar to show it to Dr. Mengerle later. The mother, happy to be through with it, returned to work” (79). Although fearful of Mengele, Perl’s joy over getting the embryo out in one piece and preserving a “beautiful specimen” depicts her as a perpetrator. The way that Perl’s delight with the two-month fetus in the service of biopower, captures how this particular form of disciplinary power both makes the mother “happy” (since it saves her life), and empties the moral question. Pregnancy and abortions are
where disciplinary power and regulatory power collapse in the camps to affect female perpetrators as well.

The participation in biopower as disciplinary power advanced SS women’s careers, even as they are also caught up in biopower; for example, S.S. women fearing pregnancy or the discovery of an abortion. Irma Grese and several other women, including Herta Oberheuser, had no desire to have children, and rebelled against the teachings of the regime. Perl interacted with Irma Grese constantly and spends an entire chapter going over her interaction with Grese’s malice and sadistic nature. Perl reveals that Grese received an abortion from Perl. This detail grants us a rare outlook into how female guards felt about Third Reich’s reproductive policies. In Nazi Germany, “the mission of the woman is to be beautiful and to bring children into the world” (Goebbels). Hitler deemed mothers with high status, but women, such as Grese, preferred physical power than biological esteem. In the camps, where birth control was banned, her sexual activity left her unprotected, so she required Perl to perform an abortion:

Should anyone find out about it, it would mean the end of her career as an S.S. woman. I would be sent “left”… We were both equally guilty in the eyes of her superiors, yet she held all the cards…

“And I don’t have to tell you to keep quiet about this. If you ever open your mouth, I’ll find you, wherever you are, and kill you…” (Perl 46-47)

Women in the Reich were expected to have children with so-called Aryan German men. Grese wanted nothing to do with motherhood, but her fear of being caught aborting leads her to cruelly threaten to kill Perl. For Perl, there is no choice with Grese besides to perform the abortion as she will be killed if she doesn’t or if she speaks of assisting the female perpetrators. Perl also tells of another S.S. woman afraid of pregnancy “I examined her and then straightened up. ‘I beg to report that there is no pregnancy present…For a moment her face softened. For a moment she was a woman, glad that her fears were groundless” (78). Perl’s accounts of two Nazi women
fearing pregnancy proves how even female perpetrators felt exploited by the Nazi biopolitical agenda. They feared losing income and their position of power and so they aborted their pregnancy. This example, which is a choice for these women, is very different from women who will be killed for getting pregnant.

Perl, then, points out how biopower and disciplinary power unite in female S.S. guards, and Perl plays out the blending of biopower and disciplinary power through a sadism that tries to appropriate women’s beauty. Irma Grese represents this unification. Grese’s violent nature drove the concentration camp inmates to fear and made her infamous. Both Lilac Girls and I Was a Doctor in Auschwitz analyze Grese as a ruthless, deviant, and sadistic woman. As Ilona Stein, a Holocaust survivor, testified “people chosen [for death] would sometimes sneak away from the line and hide themselves under their beds. Grese would go and find them, beat them until they collapsed and then drag them back into line again” (Jan Noks “Grese, Irma”). Several other women testified to the cruelty of Irma Grese and Perl does the same. Grese “was the highest ranking S.S. woman in Auschwitz” and her role as a high-ranking staff member proves her actions were rewarded by the Nazi regime, in the same way Herta’s were (Perl 45). Perl confirms Grese’s infatuation with female beauty, but as an afterthought of her cruel actions: “Irma Grese was enjoying the sight of human suffering…From that day on she went around in camp, her bejeweled whip poised, picked out the most beautiful young women and slashed their breasts open with the braided wire end of her whip” (45). Similar to the lifting of skirts, slashing breasts of the most “beautiful” woman is a specific humiliation of female privacy and beauty, and that the whip is “bejeweled” expresses that Perl knows that this fusion of biopower and disciplinary power takes place over a punishment of female aesthetic value, which is co-opted into the beautiful, bejeweled whip.
As a high-ranking female guard, Grese trained other guards to be cruel and enforce Nazi policies through violence. Many guards exercised violence as a “demonstration of power” and a way to further degrade the inmates of the camps (Mailander “The Violence of Female Perpetrators”). Perl introduces the link between violence and power through her experiences in the latrines. She details how “once in a while an S.S. woman came to inspect the latrine and chased us out with her whip and gun. Such an inspection had many victims, many casualties, but the next day our club life would continue, as if nothing has happened” (Perl 55). The female guards enacted violence on prisoners because they could. The sacred them to control them, a power women were not given over others anywhere else in the Nazi regime. Female guards employed fear politics to instigate pointless violence. Perl witnesses a group of pregnant women “surrounded by a group of S.S. men and women, who amused themselves by giving these helpless creatures a taste of hell, after which death was a welcome friend. They were beaten with clubs and whips, torn by dogs, dragged around by the hair and kicked in the stomach with heavy German boots. Then, when they collapsed, they were thrown into the crematory – alive” (57). Perl witnesses the brutality and allows a space for women who lost their lives while condemning the S.S. women for inflicting death. Eva Hoffman’s afterword analyzes the S.S. women’s power: “Some of her most horrifying observations have to do with the perversions of the Nazi character, from which the women working in that ghastly regime were hardly exempt” (123). Perl’s focus on female perpetrators help the readers understand why women chose violence. Similar to Lilac Girls, the memoir makes is ask why given the outrageous level of female perpetrator violence that Perl exposes was violence by women not taken as seriously as male perpetrator violence?

In an early example of the comparative analysis approach, Gisella Perl's I Was a Doctor in Auschwitz depicts both perpetrators and victims side-by-side and describes how the fusion of
biopower and disciplinary power effects all women's bodies. Both *Lilac Girls* and *I Was a Doctor in Auschwitz* reorganize memories and historical accounts to highlight women’s stories and acknowledge Nazis targeting women’s reproductive capabilities. Each of these books implement new historical accounts—*Lilac Girls* involves the Caroline Ferriday archives while *I Was a Doctor in Auschwitz* includes the Nuremberg Trials—to reorganize and understand female victims separately from male victims, and recognize that female perpetrators were treated differently by historical, legal, and cultural accounts. Kelly and Perl, through their approach to testimony and memory, redefine female stereotypes and detail women’s roles side-by-side. They push us to delve deeper into what it meant to be a women during the Holocaust and how biopolitics functions both for and against women.
CHAPTER 3 – THE PEDAGOGICAL NEED FOR HOLOCAUST LITERATURE

Holocaust education, and therefore, Holocaust knowledge has declined significantly since the events occurred during the 1940s. In a recent 2020 study done by the Claims Conference in the United States, “56 percent of U.S. Millennial and Gen Z [students] were unable to identify Auschwitz-Birkenau, and there was virtually no awareness of concentration camps and ghettos overall. Only six percent of respondents are familiar with the infamous Dachau camp, while awareness of Bergen-Belsen (three percent), Buchenwald (one percent) and Treblinka (one percent) is virtually nonexistent” (“First-Ever 50-State Survey”). These statistics document the dwindling education given to US students on the Holocaust from middle school and onward. In comparison to other nations, such as the UK, Austria, and France, the United States’s Holocaust comprehension lacks the most. In the UK, “a high percentage were able to name the notorious Auschwitz (63 percent), just 14 percent were able to name Bergen-Belsen, 10 percent named Dachau, while a mere six percent named Treblinka and four percent named Sobibor” (Claims Conference “New Study Reveals U.K. Respondents”). US students grapple with Holocaust retention because they cannot experience the emotional spaces of genocide. Spaces of genocide mean the concentration camp ruins, intact ghettos, or any place the Nazis invaded. We, as Americans, also endured the Holocaust as an outside nation and collectively, have a detached emotional connection to the event.

Historically, US Holocaust education took decades to begin, and still suffers from impersonal teachings. The Adolf Eichmann trial brought awareness in the 1960s, but “a decisive year in the development of Holocaust awareness was 1978, during which Americans witnessed a
group of neo-Nazis parading through a Jewish neighborhood in Skokie, Illinois. Ordinary consideration of the feelings of Holocaust survivors conflicted with the American right to freedom of expression” (Ben-Bassat 408). This event brought Nazi ideology onto US soil, making Americans much more aware of the Jewish persecution that happened in the Holocaust. With Skokie and similar protests, such as Marquette Park, Holocaust survivors joined the American government to secure funding for the United States Holocaust Museum. From there, Holocaust memory, since the 1980s, transformed into a central educational device. Jay Winter dubbed the period “the memory boom” and the term stuck (57). Survivor writings increased and in 1993, the museum welcomed visitors to finally bear witness to what had happened almost 50 years ago. Through expanded perspective, Americans empathized with the survivors and cultivated a new connection between the Holocaust and themselves. Yet, the museum and Holocaust education standards concentrated on the universalized experience, and arguably, still do.

Not only do I advocate for enhancing Holocaust education, but for literature’s role in that education. Literature and other art forms ensure a complex outlook on the Holocaust and aid readers experience with the complicated histories of genocide. Aharon Appelfeld’s keynote address described how art “‘has always sought out the individual, his inner [world], and from that, it tries to understand the [outside] world. Art, perhaps only art, is the last defense against the banal, the commonplace and the irrelevant, and, to take it even further, the last defense against simplicity.’” (Yad Vashem “Teaching the Holocaust”). Literature invites students in by imagining the perspectives of victims and identifying the full weight of what happened through an empathic connection. However, it also develops a more sophisticated sense of historical agency. Nevertheless, without adopting teaching strategies that move from the individual
experience into the broader Holocaust history, students will struggle to fathom how to bear witness to the impact of such works, like Night by Elie Weisel and The Diary of Anne Frank by Anne Frank. Each of these books has an adjacent lesson plan on the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) website for teachers to utilize. Although the materials allow variance depending on the teacher, they focus on the specific person within the text and the specificities of their experience. As memoir authors, Elie Weisel and Anne Frank contemplate their Holocaust experience, not a universal one. Night’s lesson plan, in particular, advises against widening students’ perspectives and warns assigning “the [timeline] card ‘D-Day, June 1944’ or ‘Auschwitz Report in U.S. Newspapers, November 26, 1944’ as they are not mentioned in Night” (United States Holocaust Memorial Museum 5). Literary analysis, however, demands these broader connections and places historical and cultural studies into literature. Through analyzing literature, we can ask about gender representation, or the lack thereof, and as grade level increases, the inner workings of the concentration camps, such as the ‘gray zone,’ biopolitics, and even, sexual crimes.

Literature is necessary to include with history as it invites us to experience the unfolding of history from the victim’s, or in some cases, the perpetrator’s perspective. It allows us to understand suffering, recognize prejudice, and understand survivor’s guilt and its complexities. Holocaust literature has an ability to not only help students with retaining historical information but to assist teachers in asking daunting questions that they may not know how to ask. Lilac Girls, for example, raises questions like: how does biopolitics effect gender differently and what choices were made according to gender? What were the medical experiments and how did they function throughout the concentration camps? What were female perpetrators and how did they justify their violent actions, both during and after the Holocaust? Through literature, students can
develop both historical and literary agency that they can apply to other studies and the outside world.

For teachers and students alike to obtain a responsibility for social change, they need to develop historical agency. Kent den Heyer defines historical agency as “a tool that helps students both to make meaning out of history, as historical thinkers, and enhances their capacities as agents in the present” (411-412). In the classroom, teachers can implement historical agency through research-based activities and Socratic seminars that asks students to look deeper into the Holocaust. Some students have voice how historical agency “enables us to position ourselves within ‘history’ and therefore to communicate effectively with others about how our past resonates today” or how it “allows you to question motives and arrive at your own conclusion. Become an active member of society as opposed to a passive viewer. It develops ideas of social justice” (Nye et al. 775). Students function with the historical knowledge in everyday life and isolate instances related to history. Historical agency in accordance with the Holocaust is paramount to preventing acts of prejudice and antisemitism while promoting acts of kindness and compassion.

Similar to historical agency, literary agency evokes the same function, but pushes further into the ethical imperatives and empathetic context. Historic narratives offer background for students to interpret their own literary agency by “putting one’s own time and place into a broader perspective and seeing oneself as making choice that are, cumulatively, historic” (Levstik and Barton 123). Literature allows students to recognize the effects of memory, perspective, and storytelling on history. Through comprehending historical narratives, students enable their skills to connect with characters on their level and create personal postmemories of history. Postmemory, as Marianne Hirsch defines it, is “the relationship that the generation after
those who witnessed cultural or collective trauma bears to the experiences of those who came before, experiences that they “remember” only by means of the stories, images, and behaviors among which they grew up” (106). Students attain literary agency through interpreting language of the past, remembering from previous generations, and incorporating their emotions into that of the narrative’s characters. Through education, students gain both historical and literary agency to bear witness and collectively experience the Holocaust, which they will pass on to the generations after them. Whether the postmemory emerges through writing, like Martha Hall Kelly’s, or through oral tradition, new generations need literary agency alongside historical agency to “understand what happened in the past (what people did at the time of the event, specific actions taken, etc.), why the event took place (what the actions, beliefs, motivations, and intentions of certain actors were), and the consequences of the event (how people were affected, how they responded, etc.)” (Damico et al. 2-3). Literature attempts to provide the framework surrounding both the individual’s place in the historic narrative and expands to the bigger concepts of the event. Students can then determine what the history means for them and how it affects their lives in the present through constructing their particular understanding of literature and history.

Literature’s approach through specific subject positions strengthens the reorganization of historical accounts, whose universalizing of the Holocaust, nonetheless, takes a male point of view. Instead of separating out the experiences, the historical accounts become embodied as one trauma. The problem with characterizing the Holocaust as a collective event creates a false narrative of sameness. Through universalizing, certain experiences, such as female perpetration, become erased, and an ethical flattening transpires. However, Holocaust literature challenges this
flattening and the patriarchal model of history by integrating historical thought into a
contemporary mode for students. Literary and artistic works:

…are the new instruments, born of trauma, that allow us, tentatively, to teach the
Holocaust. That they are not certain, that they beg more questions than they resolve, that
they eschew grand claims, that they are only feeling their way through unmapped
ground…are all characteristics that already show some form of deep sense of response to
the events. (Eaglestone and Langford 14)

Literature responds to the effects of trauma, genocide, and ultimately, death. Literature blends
memory with historical accounts to show students the humans behind the facts, but it also
provides a transformative movement of witnessing. Therefore, literature humanizes the
Holocaust: “A novel derives meaning primarily from what it tells us about the human condition:
‘Things like these happen to people we know.’ A memoir, conversely, derives meaning primarily
from what it tells us about a human being: the memoirist tells us, in effect, ‘This happened to
me.’” (Franklin 116). The two forms—novels and memoirs—foster debates surrounding
Holocaust facts and individual experience. Unlike other forms of straightforward lessons,
literature requires students to tap into their minds, bodies, and souls to process the moral and
ethical imperatives. As Rachel Baum concludes, “students must feel a commitment to memory as
a dynamic, political process that continues to shape our contemporary world. They must see
Holocaust memory as the constantly changing entity it is, rather than a static body of facts to
memorize” (56). It creates a call to action in students to identify acts of prejudice both in
themselves and outwards. Literature, thus, creates a balancing between Holocaust history and the
individual perspective, and opens the distinctions of gender, perpetrator, and compromiser.

Education that examines the women’s role is globally deficient, but by implementing
literature written by women about women, we can push women’s stories from the background
into the foreground. Since the Holocaust literary canon tends to highlight male perspectives,
female experiences obtain secondary status. Although women writers began alongside male
writers, evident by Gisella Perl’s 1948 memoir, “The core of the canon of the Holocaust was
constituted by the memoirs of Tadeusz Borowski and Primo Levi not by Charlotte Delbo or
Seweryna Szmaglewska; by Marek Edelman and Adam Czerniakow, and not by Zivia Lubetkin
or Vladki Meed” (Ubertowska 33). Through gender segregations in the camps, female victims
and even female perpetrators experienced day-to-day life away from their male counterparts.
Male writing, as Joan Ringelheim, Myrna Goldenberg, and Marion Kaplan argue, cannot
represent the female experience nor the biopolitical targeting done to women by the Nazis. Until
recently, the 1980s and onward, publishing houses attempted to keep Holocaust historiography
predominantly male. In 2009, Louise O. Vasvari’s “Introduction to and Bibliography of Central
European Women’s Holocaust Life Writing in English” culminated over 400 life writing entries
from female Holocaust survivors, and she was the first to accumulate such a collection. Her
collection “resulted from a ‘boom’ in such writings that occurred after years of mostly remaining
unpublished by women themselves or being refused by publishers” (Kaplan 43). Although Anne
Frank appears in Holocaust education, her story only represents the horror of hiding from the
S.S. Her book, unlike Lilac Girls, I Was a Doctor in Auschwitz, And the Rat Laughed, and so
many others, tells a singular, pre-concentration camp approach, creating a limited female
narrative and experience.

Through reintroducing women in the Holocaust, female victimhood diverges from male
victimhood, which literature illustrates through the individual experience. As Myrna Goldenberg
argues, female victims have “a double vulnerability as Jewish women: (1) biological differences
from men; (2) gender-specific socialization patterns; and (3)...the ethic of caring that both
reflected and was generated from their experiences as women” (80). This double vulnerability
comes from ethnicity and biology presented by biopolitics and Nazis forcing the policy upon their conquered societies. Nazis decided that “it is not simply a matter of destroying a political adversary, but of destroying the enemy race, of destroying that [sort] of biological threat that those people over there represent to our race” (Foucault 257). Nazis pinpointed women as the mothers of the ‘enemy race’ hence high rates of death. Literature can target these intricacies, which increases empathy and distinctly separates men from women through individual narratives. Both I Was a Doctor in Auschwitz and Lilac Girls depicts first-person, female narratives focused on the biopolitical, gendered experience. Students, then, empathize with, relate to the historical characters, and evoke literary agency to finetune their historical awareness.

Female victims re-establish the importance of gender separation in Holocaust education, but female perpetrators unfold a more complex moral gender terrain. Through inditing female perpetrators, students would begin to understand “the prominence of genocidal women” and how it “may have a certain predictive value, one that is profoundly relevant to the current debate over women, peace, and conflict” (Jones 88). With the help of literature, teachers can separate out female and male perpetrators by investigating how both participated in the Holocaust. By identifying female perpetrators, students can discern that genocide is created by both women and men. For example, I Was a Doctor in Auschwitz potentially leads to questions about Irma Grese, including: how and why a noncombatant women transformed into an agent of violence? What Grese’s motives were for joining the concentration camps and how she defied the common Nazi expectations of German women? Holocaust literature assists in distinguishing female from male perpetrators, but also differentiating how gender affected justice and culpability. Literature forces students to consider perpetrator’s “motivations and actions” and their “individual and
collective agency and responsibility. It also invites classroom enquiries focused on how these actions were punished in the post-war world and the extent to which this was ‘just’ and appropriate” (Pearce and Foster 377). In Lilac Girls, Herta Oberhauser’s “justice” was barely five years in prison after her 20-year sentence was commuted and she was still able to practice medicine after her release. In comparison to her male colleagues who received life or death sentences, Herta represents the gender disparities in justice. With narratives, such as Lilac Girls, students can realize the complexities of genocide and female perpetrator justice. Through literary debates, students can inquiry and research how justice and responsibility fluctuated by gender and recognize how the justice system could not try every single perpetrator, which meant many Nazi-supporting women went free.

Apart from literature educating students on perpetrator justice, literature improves student perception of moral complexity and particular subject positions. Specifically, those who are compelled to participate in atrocities in order for themselves to survive, those I’m calling ‘inbetweens’ as well as those who become perpetrators. As shown in Gisella Perl’s I Was a Doctor in Auschwitz, victimhood is not black and white. Perl subjected newborns to Dr. Mengele’s experimentation or immediate death. Individuals, like Perl, distort the lines between what it means to be innocent and what it means to be a perpetrator. Even though Perl saved countless lives, what about the lives she stopped before they even started? How do we teach students about such a grey area? This is where fear normally sets in for teachers. But with “a variety of good literature, combined with a careful teacher facilitation, [it] can help students see and understand the complexities that multiple historical perspective suggest without sacrificing their ethical sensitivities and impulses” (Levstik and Barton 113). The right literary approach can help teachers overcome the fear of discussing ethics, morals, and culpability. Holocaust memoirs
of inbetweens showcase the effects of concentration camp mentality on prisoners and perpetrators. Through Holocaust literature, justice and culpability combined with gender reveals a continued biopolitical difference in the courts. It also tackles a re-evaluation of historical understanding of the ‘gray zone,’ perpetrators, and the international court system after World War II.

How are women in genocide, both victims and perpetrators, treated differently from their male equivalents? Who decides what’s unspeakable about women’s bodies and stories in accordance with Holocaust education? What does it mean to be complicit, and could victims also be complicit in crimes during the Holocaust? These questions amass fear in teachers and general education, which causes them to stray away from selecting emotionally charged and historically challenging pieces of literature. Fear surrounding the Holocaust’s more controversial topics—sexual crimes, biopolitics, and female perpetration—labels them unspeakable in classrooms. Unspeakable, in this context, means “an inability to perceive [the horrors], couched in an emphasis on the limits of thought, language, and representation,” but also the increasing discomfort in students when addressing topics that involve pain, trauma, and death. In April 2007, a worldwide scandal broke out in the UK when schools decided to remove the Holocaust from the state curriculum. The reason for the removal relied on how “teachers feared that they would thus ‘cause offence’ to pupils who might feel alienated if the topic were presented in a way that did not correspond to the ‘versions of history in which pupils are steeped at home, in their community or in a place of worship’” (Carrier 43). Globally, educators fear offending students when teaching historical genocides, antisemitism, and prejudice. It keeps teachers from presenting all the information, as shown through skipping compulsory laws targeted at women’s
bodies. This fear causes bans, removals, and even silencing of the histories around harsh events and does a disservice to both students and teachers alike.

In recent years, Holocaust book bans have increased in the US and will continue to rise if educators continue to fear teaching the Holocaust in public education. Early in 2022, Tennessee officials banned the graphic novel, *Maus*, from schools due to offensive language, partial nudity, talks of sexuality, and graphic violence. One school board member was quoted, declaring, “‘Why does the educational system promote this kind of stuff [violence]’… ‘It is not wise or healthy’” (Kasakove “The Fight Over ‘Maus’”). Educators do not ‘promote’ violence but discuss acts of violence in hopes to prevent students’ societies from turning to violence. In Holocaust education, the consequences of violence must be examined in order to understand just how horrendous the event was. Lawmakers, such as those in Tennessee, that ban books only feed into Holocaust denial. They harm the education system by shielding the kids from ‘offensive’ topics.

Unfortunately, the recent bans show an unsettling similarity to Nazi Germany, where “one of the actions taken by the Nazis during [the Holocaust] was to ban and burn books deemed ‘un-German.’ When the goal is to control the message, art and literature always come under attack” (Salerno “5 Banned Books”). Banning books, nevertheless, demonstrates the power that the written word has and the importance of using them in Holocaust curriculum. The correlation between banning Holocaust literature and furthering Holocaust denial generates a society that is oblivious to the possibility of genocide emerging again.

To combat new denialism, I argue that we must place Holocaust education in both History and English classrooms to ensure students have the agency against future prejudice. Without education battling denial, students will believe, especially “in New York where an astounding 19 percent of respondents felt Jews caused the Holocaust; followed by 16 percent in
Louisiana, Tennessee, and Montana and 15 percent in Arizona, Connecticut, Georgia, Nevada and New Mexico” (Claims Conference “First-Ever 50-State Survey”). Almost a fifth of the current Millennial and Gen Z generations in New York thinks the Jewish population caused the Holocaust, even though New York requires Holocaust education. Hence, why Holocaust education needs to increase in K-12 education, specifically in middle and high school. Programs that add Holocaust literature alongside historical lectures will alleviate questions of denial, improve student’s historical agency, and create meaningful connections between the Holocaust and students. In English classrooms, teachers can choose books that include women’s stories, perpetrator perspectives, and biopolitical laws to pair historical background and literary individualism. Literature, even a fiction novel, produces a way for students to interpret and research the Holocaust in a non-traditional way. With a literary component, Holocaust education can contest denialism and the normalized male historiography that attempts to put women in the shadows.

Ultimately, Holocaust education benefits from blending English and History classrooms through Holocaust literature. Not only can Holocaust literature inform about the Holocaust, but about subsequent genocides through comparative genocide studies. Yehuda Bauer contends, “Events happen because they are possible. If they were possible once, they are possible again. In that sense, the Holocaust is not unique, but a warning for the future” (37). John Roth also advocates for comparative genocide studies, which he facilitates in his classroom through student debates and interests. He argues, “We seek not only to learn about the Holocaust but to learn from it. The ethics of uniqueness urges that the debates about the Holocaust’s uniqueness are worth pursing just to the extent that they enable us to learn from them, which means learning increased sensitivity” (Roth 29). Comparative genocide studies assesses two or more genocides
in hopes of seeing the patterns to prevent another. However, it is tricky to balance the uniqueness of one genocide with another. High school and college level students are more equipped for comparative genocide studies as they should have a semblance of historical knowledge on the Holocaust. Through comparative genocide studies, teachers “must ensure that students are supported in studying the specifics of each genocide as well as in identifying the commonalities that span genocides” (Reid et al. 300). From starting to universalize genocide and explaining the causes, students connect and realize the possible signs of genocidal ideologies. Cross discipline approaches to genocide, including literature, will help assist in education about the specificities of each genocide while identifying the universal patterns. These pattern could include female perpetrators, biopolitical crimes, and ethnic targeting. Comparative genocide studies done through literature lifts students’ historical agency and molds students’ abilities to identify signs of genocide based on their Holocaust knowledge.
CHAPTER 4 – CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE WORK

Throughout this thesis, I’ve advocated for literature’s abilities to deepen the understanding of the Holocaust, both morally and ethically. I’ve advocated for viewing victims and perpetrators side-by-side. I’ve advocated for an in-depth look at the Nazis’ biopolitical views and how the application of those views affected women differently from men. My advocacy comes from an outside perspective, meaning I have no ties to the Holocaust. I am not Jewish, and I am not German. I gained historical agency and wants to see Holocaust education improve and increase throughout the United States. This project has been years in the making. Since my time in community college, I’ve researched the Holocaust and have encouraged that scholars broaden their approach to include more elements: from medical experimentation to the role of female perpetrators. Throughout my college career thus far, I’ve attempted to dissect the Holocaust’s open secrets, such as biopolitical crimes, concentration camp creation, and gender politics. I say “open secrets” because these topics are not widely discussed in education nor in public conversation; many citizens around the globe are oblivious to what happened passed the 6 million Jews and other groups who were murdered. That’s why I will continue this project and why I will continue to advocate for mandatory Holocaust education in the United States, then worldwide.

I started this thesis as a way to answer questions I had about the Holocaust. When I first read Lilac Girls in 2020, I learned about a camp that I previously had no knowledge about, Ravensbrück. I had heard the name, but I never knew that it was a women-only camp. Throughout my public education, we had one class period on the Holocaust, starting in high
school. During that period, we rushed through the entire Holocaust, starting with Auschwitz creation and ending with American liberation. I had many questions: what happened in the concentration camps? Why were concentration camps deemed “necessary”? Why were gas chambers used? Were there only a few concentration camps? Where were the records from strict death camps? There were more questions than answers and I discovered certain answers myself through social media. I came across a twin experiment survivor, Eva Kor who gave an interview to Buzzfeed about her and her sister’s survival story. Her interview prompted me to investigate the twin experiments and Dr. Josef Mengele. At that moment, I did not realize the difference between women and men, only the differences between twins and the general Auschwitz population. Eva Kor inspired me to write my undergraduate thesis on medical experimentation and the Nazi doctors’ role in the creation of the concentrations camps and gas chambers.

Then my journey persisted, Eva Kor continued to inspire me through her memoir, but I wanted to expand my perspective of the Holocaust. I turned to literature to find the answers that history forgot to tell me. Through months of research, I discovered Kelly’s Lilac Girls (2016), Borowski’s This Way for the Gas, Ladies and Gentlemen (1960), and Nyiszli’s Auschwitz: A Doctor’s Eyewitness Account. Alongside Eva Kor’s memoir, I Survived the Angel of Death (2014), I argued that blending memoirs and fiction novels would help students better retain Holocaust history and help them to identify and better understand survivors’ shame, guilt, denial, trauma, and other affects. When writing this thesis, I realized how little I actually knew and how much others must not know about Holocaust. I became passionate about uncovering unspeakable, censored topics. But it was not until my current research that I learned that research focusing on the different experience of women also fell under categories of research often neglected.
Women became my sole focus after coming to the realization that female victims and perpetrators are missing from the historical and cultural record. *Lilac Girls* provided me with a good comparative example to examine female victims and female perpetrators. In my mind, I thought maybe a few female perpetrators existed here and there, but never to the extent of what Wendy Lower, Sara E. Brown, Alette Smeulers, and Susan Luhmann revealed. These gender historians exposed how female perpetrators existed in the thousands and how they were ordinary women who supported Nazi ideology as guards, secretaries, wives, doctors, nurses, and in other roles. Before reading them, I, too, tended to masculinize Nazi perpetrators, as if subconsciously resistant to linking women to such violence. Through this research, I discovered that women helped build Nazi society and commit mass genocidal practices. Literature helped me synthesize this information and individualize female perpetrators. Books, such as *Lilac Girls* and *I Was a Doctor in Auschwitz* depicted female perpetrators and their psychological motivations for violence. These piece of literature re-defined female stereotypes and held women responsible. They separated women from men in perpetration. Literature taught me what certain histories had neglected. Although I relied on history to give me the truth surrounding the literary accounts, I wouldn’t have come across my conclusions without literature.

I turned towards literature written by women to see if they wrote about the female experience differently from the bits and pieces I’ve read from male authors, such as Tadeusz Borowski. I knew I wanted to continue to analyze *Lilac Girls*, but not necessarily for affect, trauma, and denial, topics from my previous thesis, but for the actual historical content. With an intention to discover female Holocaust accounts, Aleksandra Ubertowska’s article, “‘Invisible Testimonies’: The Feminist Perspective in Holocaust Literature,” immediately caught my attention. What testimonies are invisible? How can testimonies be invisible? What is a feminist
perspective in Holocaust studies? Her article began my research into the feminist perspective on the Holocaust and inaugurated my desire to rectify women’s omittance from both historical record and the Holocaust literary canon. From her article, I began to understand the importance of my project, not only because I was bringing women’s voices to the foreground as so many others have done, such as Joan Ringelheim’s “Women and the Holocaust”, Myrna Goldenberg’s Experience and Expression: Women, the Nazis, and the Holocaust, and Karin Doerr’s “Memories of History: Women and the Holocaust in Autobiographical and Fictional Memoirs.” I also aimed to bring female perpetrators’ voices alongside female victims. As scholars, we try to separate perpetrators from victims, for notable reasons—preserving evil against good, for instance. But there is something powerful about combining those voices together. We get to see how perpetrators became perpetrators and how their victims endured their violence. With novels like Lilac Girls, we come to recognize how the Nazi system had underlying consequences that bound victims and perpetrators alike, especially for women. Nazi ideology revolved about bodies and reproduction, which meant defying that ideology either resulted in death or punishment. I realized that Lilac Girls brought an important topic into the mainstream public and through its messy romance entanglement and fictionalization, the undertones of biopolitics, female resistance, and archival testimony were there.

Due to this (re)discovery, I understood that I needed to find a memoir that matched Lilac Girls in context, which why I turned to Gisella Perl’s I Was a Doctor in Auschwitz (1948). Somehow, I had overlooked this important memoir in my studies. The memoir taught me about perpetrators' psychological motivations, compulsory abortions, and the female gray zone. Her memoir, unlike other Holocaust pieces I’ve read, hit me differently, both emotionally and mentally. As a woman, I read her memoir with empathy for women who were forced to watch
their children die or abort fetuses made out love. Perl made me feel angry about how biopolitical goals tortured women through their bodies. It made me fathom the fear behind pregnancy, the choices of female perpetrators, and the loss of humanity. It made me grapple with how I would morally handle situations Perl was placed in. Her memoir presented women in a way that I’d never experienced before when researching the Holocaust. Through this re-evaluation of women’s experiences, I, too, felt guilty for not representing women’s stories as they should be represented. Women should be represented by understanding their choices, not stereotyping them for working in the gray zone nor should sexual crimes against them be seen as a casualty of war. Although men suffered from sexual abuse, the sexual threat for women led to constant fear that they would be marked for death if they fell pregnant if without prospect of abortion. Not every camp had a Gisella Perl who would risk her life to save women through abortions. Gisella Perl explained a strange moral conundrum that I couldn’t recognize with the terms that currently existed. She didn’t fall under an ordinary privileged prisoner, such as a Kapo since she wasn’t in charge of anything. She simply gained privilege by working as a doctor in the hospital ward, but both saved and aborted lives through her position. This gap compelled me to coin the phrase “Inbetween.” She was in between an ordinary prisoner, privileged prisoner, and perpetrator, but functioned with the mission to save women in the camp from death. Although that mission sometimes erred on the side of murder or experimental subjection, she always tried to help the mothers survive. This intention identifies her as an “inbetween.”

This thesis expanded my perspective on types of women, female-driven crimes, and crimes against women. Scholarship needs comparative analysis of female perpetrators, but also an analysis of the female gray area that includes female inbetweens and privilege prisoners. In uncovering this gap, my Ph.D. dissertation will further my examination into female perpetrators,
privileged prisoners, and inbetweens. I aim to increase my reading fluency in German the better
to broaden my access to non-translated archival documentation, memoirs, and testimonies. I
intend to delve into female privilege prisoners, such as Sylvia Friedmann, to draw out the
differences between women prisoners, who embodied the perpetrator mindset to survive, and
those, like Dr. Alina Brewda and Gisella Perl, who became placed in inbetween status, trying to
save her fellow prisoners while doing questionable actions. I also plan to differentiate between
the women who worked in the death camps versus the concentration camps. I also want to open
the types of art forms I analyze to examine film, graphic novels, photography, and literature.
Doing so might provide a multi-formal approach to the function of gender in the Holocaust.
Overall, I am excited to continue researching female perpetrators and add my voice to the
feminist scholarship.

Let me take you back to the Dallas Holocaust Museum and what I imagine in the next
decade. I imagine seeing a whole exhibit wing dedicated to women, representing female victims,
and perpetrators. I imagine panels describing biopolitics at the start of the main exhibit. I
imagine an homage to the women who suffered sexual abuse at the hands of the Nazis, but also
at the hands of their liberators. I imagine panels describing sexual bartering, compulsory laws
pointed at women, and women inbetweens. Ultimately, I want to see women acknowledged for
their roles in the camps, both perpetrators and victims. In my next steps, I hope to make the
imagined, reality through working with my local Holocaust museums and universities to take my
research and those of other feminist scholars to build exhibitions, either permanent or traveling,
that represent women. In the future, I will create a curriculum that includes women instead of
losing them behind the universalized, male experience.
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