IN THE HISTORY OF THE INTERSECTIONS between war, gender, and sexuality, historians have debated the degree to which the age of total war represented a step toward "remasculinization," a process by which traditional constructions of masculinity are bolstered and strongly redefined as a reaction to a breakdown of hegemonic conceptions of masculinity.¹ In German society the First World War led to particularly intense debates over whether or not combat had been essentially healthy or destructive for the male psyche and body. On the brink of 1914 doctors and critics anticipated that the war would reinvigorate men weakened by decades of peace and the accelerated pace of modernity. The brutality and stress of modern warfare, however, seriously tested traditional gender norms and boundaries.² The postwar milieu was wrenched by cultural debates over the social effects of the war, intensified by the political divisions in the wake of defeat and revolution. Conflicts over the rise of the "new woman" and debates over the memory of the war as something either horrifying or laudable culminated with the


Nazi seizure of power. The Nazi state aimed unprecedented violence against men and women who failed to conform to the regime’s social and sexual ideals. Through remilitarization and war Nazi ideologues hoped to counter allegedly degenerative behaviors like homosexuality and restore the health of the male body and psyche.3

Total war brought an unprecedented invasion of the state and military into sexual and reproductive life.4 In Germany during the First World War the military enlisted doctors to investigate and contain a wide range of psychological problems, including the sexual disorders that were felt to have undermined military efficiency. Doctors warned of an epidemic of sexual trauma in the form of men whose behaviors were permanently altered by the psychological stress of combat, in particular, the experience of killing.5 In order to cope with the deprivation and stress of the front, homosexuality, masturbation, and other “deviant” behaviors proliferated, even in men who appeared “masculine” and “normal.” As men grew accustomed to killing, it was believed, they became addicted to it as a heightened experience that drained sexual drives and turned men impotent. Most alarming to contemporaries was that this effect of the war was largely invisible and not simply confined to so-called feminine men, the physically abnormal, working-class men, or those labeled neurotics. Further, these men allegedly transmitted the depravity and violence of the trenches to postwar domestic life, threatening social chaos.

The First World War generated in Germany a widespread fear that modern industrial combat caused sexual disorders in men. This anxiety about male sexual disorder originated with psychiatrists and by the end of the war had become part of a broad-based perception that modern war was harmful to men, challenging traditional bourgeois assumptions about war and sexuality. Before the war doctors and social critics had nurtured a myth of the war experience that envisioned men transcending their sexual drives in their will to sacrifice for the nation.6 However, the trenches created a new kind of man

3Regarding Nazi Germany’s racial construction of gender boundaries and persecution of “asocials” see Michael Burleigh and Wolfgang Wippermann, The Racial State: Germany, 1933–1945 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), chaps. 8, 9.


5Recently, there has been some interesting scholarship on modern warfare’s appeal for men; see, for example, Joanna Bourke, An Intimate History of Killing: Face to Face Killing in Twentieth Century Warfare (New York: Basic Books, 1999); Niall Ferguson, The Pity of War: Explaining World War I (New York: Basic Books, 1999), esp. chap. 12.

6Mosse, Nationalism and Sexuality, 117; see also Mosse’s classic work on the myth of the war experience, Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990). On conflicts and contradictions in Nazi images of war as the arena
brutalized by mass violence, no longer dependent on women for sexual satisfaction, and addicted to violence as a source of sexual release. Fears about the creation of this "new man" undermined attempts by doctors to portray war as an ennobling experience that reinvigorated male sexuality.

The experience of total war fueled anxieties across political lines. The war's effects on male sexual life were especially traumatic for Weimar Germany's middle class, which shared common notions of war as a problem for male sexuality even if increasingly politically fragmented. By the end of the war socially and politically conservative doctors feared that the war had obliterated the sexual instinct in men, or at least had shifted men's sexual drives away from women and toward other men and the desire for further violence. Doctors on the other side of the political spectrum, working independently, expressed similar concerns. The famous sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld, who had long been ostracized and ignored by the medical and academic establishment for his progressive views on homosexuality, also expressed fears that the war had shattered male sexuality and unleashed forms of violence and sexual dysfunction that threatened postwar society and its attempts at recovery. Though their prejudices, blame for the catastrophe, and visions for recovery varied, Weimar doctors from different points on the political spectrum began to treat war and sexuality as a new site of inquiry and an urgent social problem. To complicate this new problem further, visions of traumatized bourgeois sexual norms quickly gained wider currency, bringing political organizations and veterans themselves into intensifying debates over who was at fault for male sexual disorder and how it could be healed.

Some of the most interesting approaches to the history of male gender anxieties are found in recent scholarship on psychological trauma in the First World War. Scholars of the history of medicine have analyzed the challenge posed by "hysterical men" to psychiatric medicine's paradigms on gender and mental illness. This focus on the perspective of doctors reveals how the image of the "hysterical" or "neurotic" male as an unpatriotic, welfare-dependent, and unmanly shirker resonated among military psychiatrists who tried both to reinvigorate men with masculine virtues and to control mental breakdown in the stress of total war. Cultural historians like George Mosse have analyzed the symbolic meaning of shell shock as a "social disease" constructed by doctors. As Mosse noted, shell-shocked soldiers joined the list of those deemed social outsiders: Jews, criminals, homosexuals, and the insane. Like these other groups they too were placed

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7See, for example, Paul Lerner, Hysterical Men: War, Psychiatry, and the Politics of Trauma in Germany, 1890-1930 (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2003).
outside the idealized image of the “true man” who was in control of his sexual instincts. Maria Tatar has examined wartime brutalization and male sexuality from a cultural approach. In her analysis of sexual violence in the interwar period, Tatar links the brutalized postwar imagination reflected in Weimar art to the traumatic experience of the front, which gave rise to a fascination with sexual murder that seemed to proliferate in interwar German art and culture.

In contrast to the growing scholarship that focuses on the medical and cultural significance of psychological and sexual trauma, this article concentrates on the construction of psychosexual trauma in the broader Weimar society. By doing so it is possible to reconstruct how sexual disorder was defined not only by doctors but also by the lay public and traumatized veterans themselves. This approach sheds light on the degree to which fears about the war and its altering of sexual behaviors and roles were of central importance to wide sectors of German society reeling from the catastrophe of 1914–18. When analyzing the medical discourse as well as popular press and archival documents written by traumatized men, it becomes evident that contemporaries saw sexual brutalization as the most widespread symptom of psychological trauma experienced by men at the front. From the point of view of critics in professional and popular circles across social and political lines, the emergence of hysterical men who threatened military and labor was only a small portion of a deeper, more long-lasting psychological disaster involving a breakdown in sexual behavior, the rise of widespread psychosexual violence, and the obliteration of heterosexual norms set by prewar middle-class culture.

Before 1914 leading psychiatrists in imperial Germany’s universities and medical clinics warned that modern industrial society and culture might lead to degenerate psychological drives and behaviors, including sexual perversion. Establishment doctors targeted socialism and “racial enemies” for allegedly spreading sexually deviant behaviors that eroded the German family and national life. Most psychiatrists believed that the boundaries between “normal” and “abnormal” sex could easily be contained. Though they warned of the threats of modernity, doctors were confident that middle-class culture could keep its effects under control. In his classic 1892 work, Entartung (Degeneration), Max Nordau argued that while the machine age

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7Examples of cultural approaches to the connections between the war, sexual breakdown, and violence in interwar Germany include Maria Tatar, Lustmord: Sexual Murder in Weimar Germany (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1995); Richard W. McCormick, Gender and Sexuality in Weimar Germany: Film, Literature, and “New Objectivity” (New York: Palgrave, 2001), esp. chap. 4.

ruined the nervous system," men with strong nerves and work ethic could still preserve their manliness. The influential Berlin sexologist Iwan Bloch, in his 1906 work Das Sexualleben unserer Zeit in seinen Beziehungen zur modernen Kultur (Sexual Life in Our Times in Regard to Modern Culture), wrote that "a properly functioning soul" with "strong willpower" could resist the corrupting effects of city life, cabarets, and temptation toward promiscuity and sexuality. Masturbators, perverts, homosexuals, and other "male hysterics," he warned, were a danger to the national community but were easily recognizable and thus contained without difficulty.

Fears about the spread of homosexuality dominated medical and popular debates about an alleged crisis in male sexual behavior. Middle-class Germans felt besieged from all quarters. While some doctors warned that this homosexual "epidemic" came from below as working-class degeneration expanded with the onslaught of urban life, there were also anxieties that the spread of homosexuality came from above and was a symptom of aristocratic decadence. In the wake of the 1907 Eulenberg scandal, in which Kaiser Wilhelm II's confidant was exposed as a homosexual (and an incident in which the chief of the Prussian Military Cabinet was even alleged to have worn a ballet outfit to a private gathering), middle-class critics questioned whether or not the aristocracy had lost control of the officer corps as a pillar of masculine virtue. Further cases in which officers had allegedly seduced their recruits led to Reichstag speeches calling for public inquiries into the "pink regiments" of the Prussian army. Right-wing critics, especially in the mostly middle-class German Navy League and Pan-German League, called for the old aristocratic leadership to be replaced by "real men" whose credentials were a "hardened masculinity" and middle-class values based on work ethic, merit, and productivity rather than court connections. As a result, just before 1914 the German military underwent reforms that had eroded the power of allegedly decadent aristocrats in favor of a more technocratic and industrialized military that emphasized toughness over aesthetics.

Before the war Germany's middle class asserted a carefully defined notion of the male sexual ideal. The bourgeois male was imagined to be a pillar of rational sexual order who resisted the temptations of "irrational" instincts. The male body, it was believed, was under control of the brain and reason rather than the sexual organs and passions, which dominated in women

12Mosse, Nationalism and Sexuality, 33–34.
14Funck, "Ready for War?" 58.
and were responsible for feminine hysteria. Male sexuality was idealized as rational and orderly, characterized by a strong will that maintained sexual restraint. In a larger Victorian context the middle-class imagination cherished an image of stoic emotional self-control in which men could not only resist sexual temptation but also restrain themselves from complaining about or even reflecting on personal needs. Through restraint and self-control men could protect themselves from the irrational and "feminine" passions that threatened to erode their natural selves.

In late-nineteenth-century Germany full-fledged manliness and heterosexual stability could only be achieved within the context of the bourgeoisie's carefully defined universe of socially appropriate marriage. As Bärbel Kuhn has demonstrated in her study of single men and women in Wilhelmine Germany, greater pressure was put on men to marry in order to fit the middle-class ideal, as it was believed that married men focused their energy more intensely on social duties like work rather than on the emotional stress of sexual competition. Men were constructed as morally fragile before they married, since they might become dependent on lower-class women, in particular, prostitutes, for the sexual gratification that undermined their ability to remain rational and focused on their more utilitarian pursuits in the economic sphere. Without proper discipline, perceived antisocial behaviors like the frequenting of prostitutes could spiral out of control. Men who delayed marriage were more susceptible to developing "sexual abnormalities," including homosexual tendencies, typified by the figure of the "dandy," a ubiquitous figure in prewar culture who symbolized male arrested development, immorality, and uselessness.

Central to bourgeois male identity, then, was an emphasis on sexual restraint. In 1908 F. W. Foerster, an advocate for Germany's Purity Leagues, argued that sexual restraint bolstered manly virtues like courage and discipline, while masturbation and promiscuity eroded the strength of will and capacity for self-sacrifice. On the brink of the war, Germany's middle class emphasized a hardened masculinity in the popular press, one that increasingly idealized a vision of militarized male sexuality and one in which spiritual devotion and physical exertion for the nation could help men control their temptations toward degenerate sexual behaviors, according to Joachim Radkau. This self-control was essential to maintaining not only

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17Ibid., 187.
19Mosse, The Image of Man, 100.
bourgeois values but also the needs of the national community as defined by medical and military authorities. Visions of war as reversing decades of degeneration and irrationality galvanized Germany’s middle class, who believed they could lead the nation’s men out of their sexual collapse through war. The image of the effeminate dandy became a lightning rod for social critics who argued that German men had become completely self-absorbed, indulging in sexually “deviant” behaviors without a care for bourgeois standards of self-control and devotion to the nation. At the fin de siècle manliness was becoming increasingly medicalized, as doctors took it upon themselves to prescribe a bulwark against male degeneration. Emancipated women, neurotic men, Jews, and homosexuals were seen as the enemies of the middle-class standards of discipline and chastity. Allegedly, working-class tendencies toward promiscuity, homosexuality, and sexual violence threatened to spread like a contagion. The German middle class envisioned itself the only remaining sanctuary against this sexual plague, and they idealized the counterimage of a warrior male who transcended sexual needs, replacing these energies with complete devotion to the Fatherland.

This ideal had a lasting influence on veterans, and it resonated in postwar literature by some veterans who tried to make sense of their inner psychological experience. Shortly after the war Ernst Jünger celebrated this image of the hardened, selfless being who immersed himself in mechanized combat, impervious to “weak” desires or any instincts that sapped his role as a fighter. In his memoirs, Stahlgewittern (Storm of Steel) and Der Krieg als inneres Erlebnis (War as Inner Experience), Jünger idealized the disciplined soldier who strips away all prewar shreds of decadence in favor of a utilitarian industriousness and who also controls technology and triumphs over the machine age. Jünger became a rallying point for groups who cherished prewar notions of male identity. He celebrated the war for releasing both man’s animalistic instincts and his “power of will” to control these base urges. On the one hand, Jünger shared Friedrich Nietzsche’s rejection of bourgeois morality and celebrated the emergence of the hypermasculine storm trooper who through force of will triumphs over bourgeois and feminine sensuality and decadence. However, Jünger’s immense popularity in the mainly middle-class right-wing paramilitary organizations like the Steel Helmet (Stahlhelm) suggested his importance as a cult figure among reactionaries who denounced both the decadence of traditional aristocratic conservatives and the rising tide of working-class emancipation. As Klaus

21Weindling, Health, Race, 15–19.
23Ibid., 110–11.
24Mosse, Fallen Soldiers, 61–62; see also Mosse, The Image of Man, 110.
Theweleit has argued from a psychoanalytic perspective, these men created a kind of “psychic armor” that protected them, both physically and psychologically, from the “diseases” of female sexuality, left-wing politics, and the “flood” of the uncontrollable masses.  

Such postwar attempts to represent war as a healthy experience for the male psyche and body concealed broader middle-class fears that most men had actually succumbed to a psychological and sexual breakdown. Before 1914 many hoped that a war would heal the sexual and psychological degeneration spreading through the male population. However, prewar middle-class dreams of usurping control over masculinity and sexual behavior in the military were short-lived. Modern industrial warfare produced unanticipated consequences. Visions of heroic sacrifice and a hardened, spiritually strengthened warrior male were quickly replaced by the reality of trench warfare. Surviving for days under shell fire before an attack, being buried alive, and witnessing the horrific violence produced by machine guns and high explosives created an otherworldly atmosphere at the front. Psychological numbness and even insanity seemed the only forms of escape for many men. As one soldier recounted: “I am still feeling shaky after yesterday afternoon, when the English battered our trench with shrapnel and shells. More than one water-hole was dyed purple with the blood of those who were killed. . . . We all become more or less callous and unfelling out here in this horrible war; whoever does not goes mad in the most real and awful sense of the word.”

Symptoms of psychological breakdown erupted in the form of men suffering tics and tremors, paralysis, uncontrollable shaking, and nightmares. As Elaine Showalter argues in her analysis of the famous British cases of Siegfried Sassoon and Wilfred Owen, shell shock became the only form of escape from an intolerable reality, especially for men who because of socialization were unable to express their emotional vulnerability in the face of stress. Showalter identifies at least two major patterns of emotional responses to psychological stress: either the outpouring of powerful feelings of love for other men or, more frequently, “anxieties about masculinity” that led to breakdown: “If it was the essence of manliness not to complain, then shell shock was the body language of masculine complaint, a disguised male protest, not only against the war, but against the concept of manliness itself.”

In Germany these physical symptoms of mental anguish were labeled “war neurosis” (Kriegsneurose) or “war hysteria” (Kriegshysterie). Doctors were hard-pressed to solve what they saw as an epidemic of hysterical men,
with over six hundred thousand individuals in the regular and reserve armies diagnosed as suffering from a whole range of different nervous disorders. The military enlisted doctors to solve the outbreak of war neurosis and get men back into the trenches. In their efforts to prevent military catastrophe, psychiatrists debated the most efficient paths of treatment—from electroshock to psychotherapy—in order to cope with what many doctors believed was essentially an illness faked by working-class men, who were traditionally seen as deviant shirkers in the industrial workforce and were now suspected of trying to escape their wartime duty by any means. Psychiatrists predicted that without proper discipline and fear of punishment, men would fall into a cycle of welfare dependence, or “pension neurosis,” and abandon their traditional male roles as workers and soldiers.

While doctors struggled to find successful ways to get war neurotics back on the front, there was also concern about whether or not these men would be successfully reintegrated into family life after the war. In particular, the recovery of “normal” sexual drives was an important part of doctors’ concerns about rehabilitation. In 1918 the Labor Ministry authorized Dr. Otto Lipmann at the Institute for Applied Psychology in Potsdam to produce the definitive study of psychological problems suffered by soldiers and their potential impact on reintegration into postwar life. To evaluate soldiers recently returned from the front, Lipmann hired Paul Plaut, an officer who had experienced combat at Verdun in France during the war and who had been doing police duty at a veterans’ hospital in Berlin. Plaut was not a professional psychiatrist, but he had experience investigating the psychological effects of the war by interviewing veterans regarding their emotional responses to stress and fear. Modern industrial combat, Plaut theorized, had unique physical, psychological, and moral dimensions. Waiting to be killed under shell fire, he believed, caused nerve damage in which the electrical streams that passed through the bundle of nerves in the brain were cut off, damaging motor coordination. In addition to this deadening of the nerves, men suffered complex emotional disorders. What concerned Plaut most was that while the physiological damage to nerves would heal, the “multifaceted, myriad emotional responses to the war” would persist.

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31Fears of “pension neurosis” were especially widespread among doctors who later supported National Socialism; see, for example, Dr. H. Koetzle, “Gedanken zur Reform des Reichsversorgungsrechts,” in *Deutsche Kriegsopfersversorgung*, 2. Jahrg., Folge 1, Berlin, October 1933, 10, Bundesarchiv Koblenz.
Even those who looked "normal," he predicted, harbored an "inner crisis" that undermined their ability to return to life after the trenches.\(^3\)

Plaut collected several thousand surveys, which included a whole range of questions that focused on the sexual life of soldiers: "What are the main sources of your so-called excitement for war?" "Do your sexual desires increase in the circumstances of war, stress, moodiness, etc.?" "Are you drawn to danger—why?" The answers men gave to these questions convinced Plaut that even healthy and "strong-muscled men" suffered from "new peculiarities." In addition to the tics, tremors, nightmares, and depression that were familiar signs of war neurosis, he found evidence of men becoming jaded to violence and even emotionally or sexually dependent on the feelings produced by killing. Plaut determined that most soldiers surveyed became sexually aroused in combat, and on occasion they transferred these feelings to other men, but their long-term response to this depended on their prewar sexual experience, marital status, age, and social class. Men from working-class backgrounds, whom he believed had less complex emotional lives, were more permanently damaged by the feelings of sexual excitement they experienced in combat and would continue to seek sexual gratification through abnormal means, including homosexual behavior. In contrast, he predicted that middle-class men would more effectively reassimilate into postwar norms. Though the war tempted officers into "deviant" behaviors, they could control these feelings and quickly return to normal masculine standards of behavior, including self-control and heterosexual desires.\(^3\)

Though he believed social class shaped how men would respond to sexual excitement and violence, Plaut warned that the war had long-term moral consequences across class lines. In particular, he predicted that war produced a morbid fascination with violence. Men tried to replicate the excitement of war by seeking sexual arousal through violence, which they had first practiced at the front to cope with fear and stress. Soldiers would then become addicted to "unnatural" experiences of violence and accompanying sexual release. While men adjusted by mimicking the outward behavioral norms of bourgeois society, they also concealed a whole range of psychopathologies hidden just beneath the surface. Even more common than sexual arousal in the face of violence was an obsession with images of terror that sapped men of their emotions and empathy for their fellow human beings. One soldier wrote in the survey:

> In the trenches lie the stinking corpses one on top of another... Over our group a shrapnel bomb explodes. The first man is dead: shrapnel

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\(^3\) Paul Plaut, "Psychographie des Kriegers," in *Beiträge zur Psychologie des Krieges* (Leipzig: Johann Ambrosius Barth, 1920), 34, 46–47.

in the head, he remains there in a sitting position until the next day, when we fetch him. The second, a corporal, dead: bullet in the neck. The third, a noncommissioned officer, shot through with holes like a sieve—head, chest, and hand shots. Life was sucked out of him. The fourth, helmet shot through. The fifth was me. The sixth, shot through the heart, dead. The seventh, shot in the back. The eighth, also dead. All from one shrapnel bomb. When one sees all that suffering, the air and all sense of desire certainly drains out of you.

Most of these men withdrew into an emotional state within which all feelings of compassion and sensitivity were eroded and mostly replaced by a numb fatalism and isolation. Though men did not explicitly make the link in their narratives, Plaut deduced that the numbing effect of violence also resulted in an erosion of sexual energy and the loss of interest in forming healthy sexual relationships and families.

This idea that front-line violence distorted male sexuality and traumatized bourgeois sexual norms gained wider currency in the 1920s. Psychoanalysts, including especially Sigmund Freud, quickly pointed to postwar violence as a manifestation of psychosexual trauma, though Freud conceded that a variety of environmental factors as well as the enormous stress of modern combat could also trigger neuroses. The war played a critical role in pushing Freud to reevaluate psychoanalytic theory. After the war, Freud identified what he called the "death instinct" (Thanatos) together with the "life instinct" (Eros) as an equally central underlying drive in the human psyche.

The famous Berlin sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld agreed with Freud that the increased violence of the postwar period was linked to the disruption of psychosexual drives. Hirschfeld argued, however, that the psychoanalytic theory that the war stimulated preexisting psychosexual neuroses in the individual was not its most important contribution to understanding the effects of the war. Instead, Hirschfeld noted in his Sittengeschichte des Weltkriegs (Sexual History of the World War) that Freud’s link between the violence of the war and the unleashing of sadistic instincts, particularly the death instinct, was a more crucial insight. Further, Hirschfeld emphasized that the war had created an overall atmosphere that allowed normally repressed sexual drives to manifest themselves not only in combatants but also in civilians not directly affected by the war. This “release of sexual restraints” was fostered by the “libidinous effects of war enthusiasm” that had begun in 1914 and the normalization of violence that unfolded as the war dragged on for years.

34Plaut, “Psychographie,” 102–3.
35Ibid.
Hirschfeld had long been rejected by conservative mainstream psychiatrists. After the war he continued to confound neurologists by arguing that war neuroses were a universal experience that transcended class and gender boundaries, suggesting also that these neuroses were a natural, if tragic, outgrowth of the violence unleashed by the war. But one of Hirschfeld's most controversial fields of study was the topic of homosexuality. His contemporaries attacked Hirschfeld for arguing, based on a mass of evidence collected at his Sexual Research Institute, that homosexuality was inborn and thus should be decriminalized. Hirschfeld was denied an academic position by mainstream psychiatrists who denounced him as a "propagandist for homosexuality" and a supporter of the political Left. A Social Democrat, Jew, and homosexual, Hirschfeld was one of the Nazis' first targets, and they destroyed his research institute on 6 May 1933, within weeks of Hitler's coming to power.

Between 1914 and 1918 Hirschfeld's institute filed thousands of letters from officers and soldiers at the front detailing their homosexual experiences. Hirschfeld noted the paradox in the military's extreme antipathy toward homosexuals, while at the same time homosexuals seemed to thrive in the military environment. Under the guise of military virtues like comradeship, homosexual men were able to more openly manifest their preexisting sexual feelings. One soldier's letter detailed what he saw as an opportunity to preach to his comrades in an effort to broaden their minds about homosexuality:

I worked very faithfully for the common cause, gave many of our fellows our literature and got them to the point where they were interested in the fact of homosexuality and then answered the questions which their interest would prompt them to ask. I came across some remarkable views and many times I was dismayed at the horrible lies which had been disseminated about us. . . . I am certain that if everyone would do his share in the interests of the whole class of homosexuals and help dispel the legendary lies concerning us, great progress would be made. . . . Would that all my colleagues could be freed from their oppressive burden through open and valiant combat.

Homosocial relationships became increasingly commonplace, and they even began to accompany traditional mother-son and wife-husband paradigms of loving loyalty with stories of gentle nurturing between soldiers who fell in love under the strain of combat. Even the colloquial language of military life sanctioned this domesticated bonding, though often tongue in

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38 Weindling, Health, Race, 108.
40 Hirschfeld, The Sexual History, 131.
cheek, as evidenced in the terms “flyers’ marriage” and “wedding” that were used to denote a happy working relationship between a pilot and observer whose assignment it was to fly over the enemy lines for reconnaissance.\textsuperscript{41} Soldiers developed what historian Thomas Kühne has described as a mixture of masculine hardness and womanly softness, both of which coexisted in the complex definitions of comradeship at the front.\textsuperscript{42}

The front also enabled homosexual men to find other homosexual men in an environment more tolerant of same-sex relations than that before the war. Hirschfeld noted that while the physically erotic nature of these relationships usually remained hidden, they were tolerated, even encouraged, as a necessary bonding between men. For many men these relationships were felt to be a natural, logical extension of their military and emotional experience. As one officer wrote:

One day there came an ensign from the cadet corps, Count L., with whom I immediately fell in love. We had known each other slightly from the corps. He returned my love entirely. . . . Soon we became inseparable friends and the major and other older officers rejoiced at the splendid relationship which had grown up between superior and subordinate. . . . So Karl and I lived together, went into service together, etc. When we didn’t go out of an evening, we dismissed the servants and sat for a long time arm in arm, in close embrace, saying many tender and lovely things to each other, spinning golden for the future and building beautiful castles in the air. . . . Sometimes it was very late when we got to bed. To you, doctor, I can confess that we also engaged in sexual activity, but only rarely and in a thoroughly fine, esthetic, but never punishable form. For two whole months we enjoyed our love happiness together.\textsuperscript{43}

They were arrested when caught in bed by a superior officer, and this officer was diagnosed as having a “neuropathic constitution” and discharged. He concluded his letter to Hirschfeld: “If I were to say I was not sorry that I could no longer wear the King’s uniform, I would be telling an untruth. . . . The conviction that he has performed a great sacrifice fills a man with a sort of proud and joyous satisfaction. I will not permit myself to be robbed of the idea that the love of urnings is at least as holy and pure, good and noble as any heterosexual inclination.”\textsuperscript{44}

\textsuperscript{41}These terms appear in numerous flyers’ narratives of the war. See, for example, pilot Ernst Udet’s description of his “wedding” to his observer in his Mein Fliegerleben (Berlin: Ullstein, 1935), 10–11.


\textsuperscript{43}Hirschfeld, The Sexual History, 135–36.

\textsuperscript{44}Ibid., 136.
The tragedy of such cases, Hirschfeld's study of homosexuality suggested, was that of all the sexual effects of the war, the greater openness about homosexuality and the feeling among many men that it was a normal response to conditions, including stress and fear, were the most benign and natural sexual effects of the war. The war did not create homosexual behavior by any means but rather facilitated relations between homosexual men who were otherwise sexually and socially repressed before the war.

Unlike his colleagues in the conservative psychiatric establishment, Hirschfeld did not see homosexual relations at the front as a sign of catastrophe. Instead, his work depicts heterosexual culture in a state of crisis as a result of the war. Most dangerous to bourgeois culture, he claimed, was the explosion of postwar violence, which he traced to the psychological experience of combat. Hirschfeld focused on what he considered the most pervasive long-term destruction unleashed by the war, namely, the rise in sexual violence, which destroyed healthy sexual relations between men and women. In the disruption of these relationships, Hirschfeld argued, was laid the groundwork for sadistic behavior that unfolded in two stages, first at the front and then in the process of returning home.

Hirschfeld and his colleague, Erich Wulffen, a criminologist who wrote a widely consulted handbook for police on how to identify sexual criminals, documented cases of veterans who lost their sexual interest in women but became obsessed with inflicting violence as a means of attaining pleasure. War neurosis, Wulffen concluded, was only the tip of the iceberg for a whole range of much more common psychological problems that manifested themselves in men trying to replicate the violence of the front in postwar domestic life.

The most widespread symptoms of psychological trauma caused by the war, Wulffen and Hirschfeld argued, were sexual disorders, which affected men and women long after 1918. Wulffen's study of sexual relations after the war focused on the close relationship between brutalization in the trenches and the manifestation of sexual pathologies. His work can be seen in the context of an explosion of criminology studies on domestic violence during and after the war. Moritz Liepmann, a professor of criminology at the University of Hamburg, and Franz Exner, one of Weimar Germany's most prominent criminologists, did some of the most extensive and influential work on crime in the period between 1914 and 1924. They found that the proportion of female criminals rose from

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47 See Erich Wulffen, Der Sexualverbrecher: Ein Handbuch für Juristen, Verwaltungsbeamte und Ärzte (Berlin: Langenscheidt, 1910). During the Weimar years he updated this study with his Kriminalpsychologie des Täters (Berlin: Langenscheidt, 1926).
15 percent to 40 percent between 1914 and 1918. So-called feminine characteristics played only a minor role in explaining this phenomenon. Liepmann concluded that female homicides were sometimes linked to wife beating or caused by “erotic and affective disturbances.” Exner pointed to the fact that women had been deprived of sexual satisfaction during the war as a cause of criminal behavior. On the whole, they argued that women were committing more “masculine” crimes like homicide because wartime changes in labor and domestic responsibilities placed the same pressures on women that had been previously endured by men. In other words, women were increasingly committing criminal acts because changing social and economic conditions forced them to mimic men.

Wulffen broke away from these gender- and socioeconomic-based explanations for sexual disorder. Further, Wulffen did not see women as agents of violence but as secondary victims of the atmosphere of violence that had afflicted men in the trenches. In particular, Wulffen argued that the war had caused men to channel their sexual energies toward violence, replicating their experiences at the front in their relations with women. As a result, women became sexually unsatisfied with their husbands, setting into motion patterns of domestic strain and abuse. Wulffen pointed to the case of Annemarie Donner to illustrate the long-term impact of the war on sexual and family life. According to Donner, her husband had returned home from the war a “more serious, closed off, harsh and distant man.” He became increasingly uninterested in his marriage and work, as his thoughts remained fixated on the war. Violent outbursts, including regular beatings, punctuated his relations with his wife and his friends (480-83). She also reported that her husband paid little attention to her sexually. He had been “sexually weak” before the war and had never been a very “sexually attentive man.” But after the war, his fixation on violence replaced all attempts at sexual relations. In an attempt to escape her traumatic home life, she pursued her dream of attending film school, where she fell in love with another man, Otto Krönert. Krönert was also a veteran, but, according to Wulffen, he was less brutalized by the war. When she confronted her husband with demands for a divorce, a fight ensued, and Krönert unintentionally killed her husband during the melee with the old army pistol that her husband always carried around with him (483-85).

During the sensationalist trial both Annemarie Donner and Otto Krönert were sentenced first to death and then to life in prison for killing her husband. The Dresden court called it a “crime of passion,” deferring to a state-appointed psychiatrist who concluded that psychological disorders were not a factor in the case. Wulffen argued that the court’s psychological interpretation of the crime was wrong. Though none of the characters in

49Ibid., 112-13.
the drama suffered from war neurosis, in his opinion, they were nevertheless victims of what he described as a common set of psychological problems that affected returning veterans and their families. Central to the Donner case, Wulffen believed, was the effect of living with an emotionally distant, sexually unresponsive, and violent man who had emerged from the trenches (485). The war not only destroyed Annemarie Donner's marriage, Wulffen emphasized, but it also gave her the radical notion that she was entitled to break free from social and sexual oppression.

Magnus Hirschfeld also analyzed this case and concluded that this sense of psychological and sexual independence was a widely shared experience among women. For men, however, the war had done just the opposite. Men fell into psychological deterioration, sexual withdrawal, and emotional collapse. Though the war carried the burden of responsibility for postwar psychosexual disorders, Hirschfeld also placed blame on women for exacer-bating these tensions. Women were expected to be responsible for nurturing men through their sexual dysfunction and restoring them to their "normal" selves. Hirschfeld even expressed sympathy for the frustration and anger felt by returning veterans, arguing that they were too traumatized and psychologically exhausted to intimate their problems to their wives. Men feared how women would react if they confided in them about the emotional problems they had experienced in combat, including sexual anxieties, and thus women should be responsible for initiating a discussion about the war's psychological effects (485). In Hirschfeld's picture of postwar social life women were the agents of healing and recovery, while men were expected to remain passive, unable to move on from their traumatic pasts. Deemed unable to assert themselves and emotionally dependent on others, men haunted by their memories thus slipped into traditionally feminine roles.

Wulffen and Hirschfeld both constructed women primarily as victims of domestic violence. Interestingly, though, women had the potential to become perpetrators, especially if sexual dissatisfaction and fatigue caused by caring for helpless men set in. Wulffen pointed to the war's long-term tendency to turn women into callous and potentially violent beings who mirrored their male counterparts. The sadism mixed with jadedness found in the trenches could be found in women's lack of empathy for men shattered by the war: "At the time the husbands returned home, wives looked at their sick, weakened men, and looked around for new young lovers. Some wives poisoned their husbands in order to live with their lovers. . . . One woman admitted in front of the judge: 'My dear husband was very sick. I was tired of the long hours of nursing and thought to myself, it would be better for him and for me if he died'" (485).

Wulffen's portrayal of women reveals an inner contradiction over responsibility for recovery. On the one hand, he blamed women for their failure to nurture brutalized men. On the other hand, he also portrayed them ultimately as victims of the same uncontrollable violent urges and lack
of empathy that overtook everyone who witnessed mass violence, whether from the trenches or on the home front.

In this model of universal victimhood, everyone who survived the war years was susceptible to psychosexual trauma. The explosion of sensationalist literature in the 1920s focusing on sexual crimes, Wulffen and Hirschfeld argued, could be seen as another manifestation of Germany’s widespread social and cultural crisis. Serial killers were particular products of the war, which “mobilized these psychopaths with its violence and devaluation of human life,” Wulffen wrote (492). The trenches fostered a “primitive and animal-like atmosphere” that stimulated latent “sexual perversions” like masochism and sadism in those who had been relatively functional before the war (60-61). Fritz Haarmann, one of Weimar’s most notorious serial killers, exemplified this transition from a nondescript and functional neurotic into a murderous predator. Though not a veteran himself, Haarmann committed twenty-six murders in the 1920s, murders characterized by extreme sexual sadism and torture that were, according to Wulffen, essentially imitations of the violence produced in the trenches. Another infamous serial killer, Peter Kürten, was also believed to be a product of the war. With a history of hereditary mental illness compounded by an abusive father, Kürten first killed before the war, when he tortured an eleven-year-old girl to death. Like Haarmann, he did not actually fight in the war, but Wulffen portrayed Kürten as the result of the atmosphere of violence and neurosis emanating from the trenches to the home front. After the war Kürten became a full-fledged serial killer, murdering dozens of young women in a frenzy of sadism that terrified Düsseldorf for months in 1925 (493–96). Kürten was the real-life model for Peter Lorre’s cinematic icon in Fritz Lang’s M, which in 1931 introduced the “psycho-killer” as a new figure to the screen. References to the war are imbedded in the film’s imagery, reminding audiences of the connections between the war and postwar violence.1 Lang’s film mirrors Wulffen and Hirschfeld’s thesis that these sexual predators were victims of their environment and symptoms of larger psychoses unleashed by the war.

Hirschfeld and Wulffen were not the only doctors concerned with sexual violence, but they were exceptional in characterizing it as a universal psychological condition. As the war came to an end, most psychiatrists, particularly those with a conservative background, blamed the epidemic of sexual disorder on returning working-class soldiers and social outsiders, including Communists and Jews, and feared that it would spread to bourgeois culture. The Munich psychiatrist Dr. P. Lissmann, who served as a military doctor at the front for over three years, wrote in 1919 that sexual

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50 See also Magnus Hirschfeld, Zwischen zwei Katastrophen (originally entitled Sittengeschichte der Nachkriegszeit) (1931; Hanau am Main: Karl Schustek, 1966), 463–64.
51 Anton Kaes, M (London: British Film Institute, 2000).
abnormalities were the most widespread psychological consequence of the war and that these disorders continued to disrupt the postwar social fabric without showing signs of diminishing. Lissmann rejected psychoanalytic interpretations of neurosis as originating in psychosexual trauma. Unlike Freud, he was certain that the “steel bath of nerves” necessary during the war had caused such prolonged tension that it produced permanent neurological disturbances and hormonal changes. Most men who suffered war neurosis, Lissmann believed, did not manifest the familiar symptoms like tremors and uncontrollable shaking. Instead, more veterans experienced sexual dysfunction, including the inability to achieve erections, sudden involuntary ejaculation, and the loss of interest in sexual activity.\textsuperscript{53}

For Lissmann, the most troubling long-term consequence of these symptoms was the “sexual disorder” that was now spreading to the middle class. Combat did not fulfill bourgeois expectations of regenerating men to fulfill their roles at home. Instead, the prewar symptoms of degeneracy seemed to proliferate even more. He linked these symptoms directly to the experience of men at the front, where terrifying artillery bombardments shook men so deeply that their sexual physiology was permanently altered. He found such damage in both middle- and working-class men who had otherwise seemed normal before the war: “In the field reports I have already explained how many officers and men with otherwise completely normal nervous systems were either totally unable to achieve an erection or suffered from extreme defects.”\textsuperscript{54} Fetishism, uncontrollable masturbation, and other “deviant” behaviors also seemed to prevail at the front. Lissmann reported on one soldier he met in a field hospital who confessed that he masturbated with the uniform of a comrade who was quartered in the same room with him.\textsuperscript{55}

According to Lissmann, such “perversions,” including homosexuality, were not natural. Psychological stress in war, he argued, led men who had once conformed to Victorian social values to engage in taboo activities, in particular, homosexual behavior between “otherwise normal, heterosexual men,” in order to relieve stress.\textsuperscript{56} The prevalence of homosexuality in officers disturbed him most. The war did not create deviant sexual behaviors, he noted, as these had already been present (in the working class in particular, he maintained), but the close proximity of men at the front, widespread stress, and sexual deprivation resulted in a breakdown of norms between

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\textsuperscript{54}Lissman, \textit{Die Wirkungen}, 9–11.

\textsuperscript{55}This case is related in Hirschfeld, \textit{The Sexual History}, 135.

\textsuperscript{56}Lissmann, \textit{Die Wirkungen}, 13–22.
\end{flushright}
officers. Ultimately, Lissmann was confident that normal heterosexual men could resist the contagion of homosexuality and sexual deviance. But he warned that these changes in sexual behavior were especially dangerous because they occurred in men who appeared outwardly healthy and remained in good social standing but had inwardly become sexually dysfunctional and social deviants. Because sexual disorders could be relatively concealed, he feared, doctors could not control these psychologically disturbed men. Unfolding just beneath the surface of German society, male sexuality was undergoing its own leveling as the distinctions between middle- and working-class behavior were breaking down. The postwar sexual deviant was no longer the easily spotted “feminine” or “hysterical” male but rather an invisible force threatening society from within. Marriage, morality, and sexual boundaries among Germany’s elite were on the verge of collapse, according to Lissmann, and it would set into motion a national crisis.1

The broad-based perception that modern war shattered bourgeois conceptions of male sexuality is also revealed in the popular press of the interwar period. German soldiers, especially those diagnosed with psychological wounds, were portrayed as sadistic and sexually deviant men who transmitted immorality and brutality learned at the front to German society. Women played a central role in stabilizing heterosexual male identity and middle-class values. In his 1921 pamphlet *Geschlechtliche Grausamkeiten liebestoller Menschen* (The Sexual Cruelties of Love-Crazy Men), journalist H. A. Preiss argued that the front was an otherworldly place that destroyed normal sexual values and behavior, which he defined as monogamous relations between married men and women. The stress of modern industrial war, however, led even “normal men” as well as “intrinsically degenerate men” to turn to homosexuality, fetishism, and other “abnormal sexual practices in order to relieve their tense nerves.” Preiss concluded that these were not the symptoms of deeper neuroses but rather typical reactions to extreme conditions found at the front. The main problem, he predicted, was that veterans had become dependent on “deviant” sexual practices, making it difficult for them to readjust when they returned home.58

The only way that men could correct the sexual degeneracy of the trenches was with the help of women, who in providing a normal (meaning bourgeois domestic) existence would win their husbands back to the prewar heterosexual camp. However, the moral universe of the trenches had contaminated the home-front milieu. The idealized female caretaker of the bourgeois home had also slipped into irrationality and sexual degeneracy as a result of the war. Preiss lamented that the rise of the “new woman,” who abandoned her role as the “well-bred loyal German wife” in favor of becoming a “sex crazy girl” with everyone but her husband, had subverted

57Ibid., 28.
this goal. He complained that this “new woman” made it impossible for men to find a nurturing, traditional environment in which to recover.59

This image of women as incapable of restoring prewar sexual norms was widespread. Journalist Hans-Georg Baumgarth, who also wrote pamphlets for a lay public, argued that the war had replaced bourgeois morality with “primitive” instincts that stimulated pathological sexual desires in both men and women even of good social standing. Morally fit middle-class men had difficulty coping with the enormous violence of modern war. Violent behavior replaced their sexual drives, he complained, leading them to inflict violence on women through “bestial sexual acts.” Baumgarth recognized that men became like animals, drunk on the violence unleashed by the war. This behavior was understandable, considering the extreme environment of modern war, Baumgarth insisted. But most catastrophic was that women, whom he saw as responsible for leading men out of their brutalized state, had also slipped into animalistic behavior. Their basic irrational nature was reawakened in this atmosphere of shattered traditional life: “Of course, the war has also unleashed lusts in our women. Men are fewer and fewer, nature and the aroused blood flow forth, especially with young women who, if the sensibility is once awoken, can be much more lustful than men. Are all the divorces really so odd?” Baumgarth suggested that men understandably broke down because they had to bear the force of front-line violence. Women, however, should have been able to overcome their stresses at home, including the trauma of domestic violence, so as to provide the care and moral example needed to return the family to normal.60 In this paradigm the war was less pathological than women who did not adhere to prescribed social and sexual boundaries. Women were thus responsible for the ongoing crisis. Men could only maintain their normal, that is, heterosexual and middle-class, values and behaviors if women played their assigned roles as nurturers within the bourgeois family.

Among traumatized veterans themselves, the war rather than postwar social structures was the original culprit behind their psychosexual disorders. Reflections on the causes of sexual trauma can also be found in letters from veterans to social welfare administrators. Veterans complained that the war caused all sorts of psychological problems, including the erosion of the sexual drive and inclinations toward violence. Most of these cases deal with veterans who complained that doctors were not willing to acknowledge the war-related origins of their complex problems and thus denied them veterans’ pensions. Erich G., for example, wrote in 1921 that his anger toward his wife and his criminal behavior stemmed from the psychological stress he had experienced during the war. His psychiatrist, Dr. Max Nonne, one of Berlin’s most famous specialists in war neurosis, concluded that Erich was

59Ibid., 41-43.
not a war victim but rather a fraud and degenerate trying to swindle the welfare system. Nonne pointed out that Erich’s prewar criminal record for petty thievery, his lower-class social status, his history of venereal disease, his entanglements with the vice police (Sittenpolizei), and the problems in his marriage were all evidence of a continuing immoral disposition. Erich claimed that his prewar background had nothing to do with his postwar problems. He was sexually impotent, he claimed, because of a terrifying experience in the trenches during which he was buried alive under a shell burst. He argued that his gonorrhea stemmed from prewar encounters with his wife, who had engaged in numerous adulterous affairs. Doctors, he complained, held his prewar criminal record and family problems against him, and he sued Nonne for failing to treat his psychological problems caused by the war. Veterans like Erich G. fervently protested the postwar image of veterans as moral degenerates who threatened postwar society. Instead, Erich insisted, he was a victim shattered by the war and ignored by doctors, who blamed him as the cause of his own social and psychological ills.61

The Labor Ministry files are filled with correspondence from mentally disabled veterans who complained about alleged mistreatment at the hands of doctors. These men most often protested what they saw as the insensitivity of doctors who failed to believe their versions of how their wartime experiences caused postwar psychological problems. Some veterans saw this insensitivity as a violation that they compared to sexual abuse, and in these cases they described doctors as rapists. Diagnosed war neurotic August F., for example, drew parallels between the horror of the trenches and the experience of being evaluated by Dr. Schulz at the Hannover disabled veterans’ nerve clinic. August claimed that Schulz made him undress, paraded him through the hospital naked while mocking him, and then accused him of simulating his injuries. He recounted in a 1921 letter to the Labor Ministry:

Against this type of treatment I submit this firm protest and I will not fail to speak out against this above described rape of a disabled veteran. . . . If this gentleman [Schulz] were to have come back sick from the front, or if he had spilled his blood for the fatherland, he would certainly not treat a disabled war veteran like a repulsive dog or deny him a means to exist. . . . There can be no doubt after this critique of the state doctor’s medical evaluation that my observation will be so embarrassing to the state that it will be rejected, the doctor’s examination will be considered justified, reason will be denied, and terror will govern.62

Mentally ill veterans often characterized postwar medical treatment as a kind of secondary trauma, in which the victim is accused of being responsible for

61Letter from Erich G. to Reichsarbeitsministerium, 30 September 1932, R3901/Film 37013, Bundesarchiv Berlin-Lichterfelde (hereafter cited as BBL).
62August F. to Reichsarbeitsministerium, 26 October 1921, R3901/Film 36027, BBL.
the initial trauma or of not being able to recover from it. Thus, the psychological rape initially inflicted in the violence of the trenches was repeated by doctors who further humiliated veterans.

This image of veterans victimized first by the war and then by insensitive doctors proliferated not only among the men who felt traumatized by the war but also among those who had remained at home. Hermann Klomfoth of the Friedensbund der Kriegsteilnehmer (Association of Pacifist War Veterans) wrote that the whole concept of war neurosis did not originate with the front soldier but rather within Germany’s political and military elite. Hans Schlottau, a veteran in this pacifist organization, accused military doctors of sadism. He described them as the “murderers, robbers and beasts of the world” who force mankind into a “feverish nightmare of murder and blood” while diagnosing the victims of war as psychotics and enemies of the nation. In his play Die letzte Tage der Menschheit (The Last Days of Humanity), veteran and war neurotic Oskar Maria Graf described his gradual realization that psychiatrists and generals were the real sadists in postwar German society. Magnus Hirschfeld, who had not fought in the war, was especially critical of establishment doctors. In Sittengeschichte des Weltkrieges Hirschfeld referred to Graf’s play in arguing that military doctors exhibited sexual sadism in their treatment of war victims. In particular, Hirschfeld pointed to the electroshock treatment known as the Kaufmann method, developed as a cure for war neurosis and used to uncover alleged fakers. This shock treatment was really a form of torture, Hirschfeld asserted, that tapped into the doctors’ own sexual perversions and pleasure in causing pain (71–73). Hirschfeld was sympathetic to traumatized veterans as victims of military doctors who exerted their power to define boundaries between the sane and the insane or the normal and the abnormal. In Hirschfeld’s analysis these boundaries blurred until the sexual disorders and sadism of “perpetrators” and “victims” were equally indistinguishable.

The apparent crisis in bourgeois sexual culture was also highlighted by veterans organized in associations that drew from a primarily working-class base. The political Left was keen to use stories of medical abuse to construct doctors and the conservative interests they represented as the real degenerates. In leftist critiques notions of neurosis were inverted, with middle-class conservatives portrayed as sadists and psychotics. The social democratic–oriented war victims’ organization, the Reichsbund der Kriegbeschädigten (National Association of War Disabled), Germany’s largest veterans’ organization with over six hundred thousand members, portrayed the bourgeois public as the real neurotics who preferred to avoid reading about the physical and psychological wounds of disabled veterans. One Reichsbund journalist wrote that in its desire to avoid paying taxes for welfare, the middle class was gripped by a form of “savings

psychosis" that was far worse than the alleged "pension psychosis" that afflicted disabled veterans.\footnote{4}{Die Liquidierung der inneren Kriegslasten," Reichsbund der Kriegsbeschädigten und Kriegsteilnehmer, 25 January 1930, Staatsbibliothek Berlin. See also Crouthamel, "War Neurosis versus Savings Psychosis" (see n. 30).}

The Communist war victims’ association, the Internationaler Bund der Kriegsopfer (International Association of War Victims), took this representation of the middle class as degenerate to another level, attacking not only their socioeconomic interests but also their manliness. Through the Communist Party veterans found a channel for describing doctors as depraved and psychotic. Communists asserted that doctors were the real hysterics who were too unmanly to admit Germany had lost the war. One Communist war veteran wrote about hysterical doctors preying upon postwar society with their sadistic hatred of veterans. Doctors, he asserted, were weak men who could not take responsibility for the loss of the war and neurotically refused to pay for its human costs.\footnote{5}{EiEmil Vogeley, “Die Psychiatrie und Neurologie im Dienst der kapitalistischen Klasse,” Internationaler Bund der Kriegsopfer, no. 10 (October 1928): 1, DDR Massenorganisation-Abteilung, BBL.} It was the bourgeoisie, not the working class, who lacked the discipline and sacrificial spirit needed to recover from the war.

The sexual degeneracy of the middle class was another theme found in Communist literature. The focus of the Communist critique of doctors was that they were nothing but puppets of capitalism out to eliminate welfare for veterans. In ridiculing psychiatrists, however, Communist war veterans frequently hinted at the sexual depravity of doctors. Sarcastic puns and innuendos were part of the rhetoric, with doctors who inflicted electroshock treatment portrayed as sadists hiding behind their medical uniforms.\footnote{6}{“Geschäftsmann oder Arzt!" Internationaler Bund der Kriegsopfer, no. 2 (March 1928): 3, DDR Massenorganisation-Abteilung, BBL.} In one article a Communist veteran accused doctors of projecting their own disorders on patients: “Do not tolerate the proctologists who belittle you and your hard-earned rights. Assert that there is no judgment handed to you that is really not the sickness of your doctor himself.”\footnote{7}{Renten Neurose,” Internationaler Bund der Kriegsopfer, no. 8 (August 1928): 3, DDR Massenorganisation-Abteilung, BBL.} Using the term “proctologist,” this veteran simultaneously hinted that psychiatrists were perverts and mocked their professional status. At the same time, Communist leaders had little sympathy for war neurotics themselves. While party leaders provided a sounding board for disabled veterans to heap scorn on "perverse" doctors, they were ambivalent about the idea of hysterical men in the ranks of their own militant revolution. Proletarian war victims, the Internationaler Bund claimed, were more manly than doctors and the rest of the middle class. But psychologically disabled men could only achieve this status if they joined the Communist revolution, which Communist leaders
saw as the path to overcoming their unmanly dependence on capitalism, nationalism, and warmongering.\(^6\)

The First World War marked the beginning of a broad-based anxiety that war was deeply problematic for male sexuality. Before 1914 psychiatrists had predicted a war experience that would heal frayed nerves and revitalize sexually pathological men. These doctors were part of the state’s and the military’s project of imposing greater control over the social and sexual life of combatants. By 1918, however, many doctors suspected that they could not control the onslaught of degenerate male sexuality. In fact, the war triggered a reversion to an even more irrational, sexually chaotic universe. While most doctors and cultural critics still blamed the rise in sexually abnormal behaviors on traditional enemies—working-class men, the “new woman,” and modernity—they also found a disturbing link between the cherished experience of combat and the spread of sexually deviant behavior. In order to survive the traumatic stress of modern industrial warfare, men across social class lines had broken sexual taboos and boundaries. Worst of all, sexually deviant men had become largely invisible and could no longer be controlled by doctors or traditional authority figures. This phenomenon alarmed observers across political lines. Outside the professional and theoretical circles of mainstream psychiatrists, progressive sexologist Magnus Hirschfeld expressed anxieties that paralleled those of his conservative counterparts: the war inflicted sexual chaos on men at the front that rippled throughout postwar society. The intense conflicts over the origins and responsibility for this sexual disorder represent another layer of fragmentation in interwar Germany’s deeply traumatized middle class.

Contributing to an increasingly complicated and popularized debate, veterans attempted their own diagnosis of Germany’s sexual disorder. Through letters to the state and political organizations, traumatized men asserted authority over their own sexuality and the meaning of their war experiences. The psychological destruction caused by the war shattered even normal men, veterans argued. Sexual disorders were not a manifestation of inborn pathologies but rather a natural response to extreme stress and violence. There was no shame in acknowledging these emotional problems as symptoms of psychological trauma. Just as traumatic as the trenches, veterans complained, was postwar society’s failure to recognize these as normal symptoms of stress. The real neurosis lay in civilians’—and especially doctors’—refusal to take responsibility for the costs of the war.

 Debates over male sexual life and responses to warfare raise interesting questions about who wields authority over the mental and physical consequences of modern warfare. Which sexual and psychological behaviors are normal, and which are abnormal? Veterans’ accounts that suggest that extreme violence and

\(^6\)“Kriegs-Hysterie,” *Internationaler Bund der Kriegsopfer*, no. 12 (December 1925): 1, DDR Massenorganisation-Abteilung, BBL.
stress left men emotionally desperate and evidence of widespread "degenerate" behavior in the trenches suggest that sexual disorder was instead the normal response to surviving trench warfare. Most disturbing in the long term for the postwar milieu, extreme violence and brutality left men emotionally and sexually distant or even addicted to violence as a form of gaining sexual satisfaction. Who was to blame for this catastrophe: the war or the individual? Though conservative doctors and social critics tried to control and define male sexual life by labeling deviant behaviors and blaming traditional social outsiders, it was impossible to return to prewar constructions of social class, gender norms, sexual deviance, and myths of the war experience. After 1918 war could no longer be seen as the savior of the male psyche, even the psyches of middle-class, moral, and patriotic men. Nevertheless, more radical solutions to controlling male sexual life, with its own reconfigured traditional conceptions of the war experience and myths regarding its physical and psychological effects, would gain ground with the rise of Nazi Germany and an even more brutal war.