***Testimonies of Trauma: Surviving Auschwitz-Birkenau***

Lisa Pine (London South Bank University)

**Introduction**

The emerging field of trauma studies from the 1990s onwards has engendered a variety of important new research in this area of scholarship. The Second World War and the Holocaust provide the context for a crucial moment in the social and cultural history of trauma. This chapter considers the historical implications of the traumatised body, mind and emotions at a particular time and place within this context, analysing the psychological trauma of the impact of the Holocaust upon its victims at Auschwitz-Birkenau. The research for this chapter is based on the testimonies of male and female survivors of Auschwitz-Birkenau. This type of witness testimony to trauma forms a significant part of our understanding of the Holocaust as a whole. This chapter analyses how male and female survivors have remembered their experiences and how they have written their narratives about Auschwitz-Birkenau. These testimonies of trauma detail events in the death camp most associated with the horrors of the Holocaust and the atrocities carried out by the Nazi regime during the Second World War.

This chapter examines some of the distinctions faced by victims of the Nazi regime in regard to their gender, as men’s and women’s testimonies have many aspects in common, but also some significant differences. The distinctions in their memories are of much interest because they illustrate subjectivities of trauma. Furthermore, the experiences faced by survivors of Auschwitz had a great impact on their own subsequent lives and on how they chose to relate their narratives and histories. This is very noteworthy in terms of the development of the historiography - whose traumatic experiences gain attention and why, and whose have been ignored? Women's Holocaust histories and narratives have not been examined until comparatively recently. No longer are women’s voices unheard and there is now a substantial literature on women’s writing and the Holocaust.[[1]](#footnote-1) This is an area of research that is constantly growing. The diversity of experiences faced by Holocaust victims requires greater scrutiny. Furthermore, particular aspects of Holocaust experience that have been difficult or taboo subjects have also been neglected in the historical writing on the Holocaust. However, such angles are important to our knowledge of the Holocaust as a whole because they give us a breadth of comprehension of and a greater insight into the diversity of victims’ experiences.

This chapter begins with a discussion of survivor testimonies as historical sources. It then analyses the writings of both male and female Auschwitz survivors, illustrating the specific experiences they faced as men and women and examining the coping and survival strategies they adopted. It explores both men’s and women’s experiences and behaviour that challenged gendered expectations. A gendered approach has now become a mainstream part of the history of the Holocaust.[[2]](#footnote-2) Yehuda Bauer has suggested that ‘the problems facing women as women and men as men have a special poignancy in an extreme situation such as the Holocaust’.[[3]](#footnote-3) Dalia Ofer and Lenore Weitzman emphasize that rather than distracting us from the Nazi brutality against all Jews, a gendered approach enhances our understanding of it ‘by locating it in the specificity of individual experiences’.[[4]](#footnote-4) It expands our knowledge base and provides a greater and more differentiated understanding of the experiences of victims. Pascale Bos has examined the place of gender in the study of Holocaust victims and survivors.[[5]](#footnote-5) She calls for a more critical approach to the evidence of gender distinctions in Holocaust narratives, emphasizing the discursive construction of the experience, memory and representation of the past. Indeed, Bos argues that ‘precisely in acknowledging (and highlighting) the elements of choice and subversive power in the creation of (gendered) personal narratives we can conceive of survivors’ agency in compelling new ways’.[[6]](#footnote-6) Hence, she underlines the need for and movement towards a significant change in our understanding of what narrative truth means and how it is used in historical analysis. The lens of gender enables readers to consider what is distinctive between the ways in which women and men have selected and constructed their narratives. As Bos rightly argues: ‘Men and women experience, remember, and recount events differently’, because of their socialization.[[7]](#footnote-7) The particularity and diversity of individual experiences makes it impossible to universalize Holocaust experiences, whether these are female or male ones.

**Survivor testimonies as historical sources**

Holocaust survivor testimonies - both written and oral - are essential historical sources, which provide a unique insight into the unfolding of events precisely because they are reflections of personal and individual experiences.[[8]](#footnote-8) Langer’s work on the oral testimony of survivors illuminates the forms and functions of memory in the reliving of traumatic events and experiences by Holocaust survivors. He argues that oral narratives allow an unshielded truth to appear.[[9]](#footnote-9) Representations of memories and experiences in written and published memoirs and testimonies are also powerful and significant as historical sourcesqw. As Benzion Dinur has stated: ‘from every point of view, memoirs and reminiscences of persons who witnessed and experienced the European catastrophe, watched it develop… are of major importance’.[[10]](#footnote-10) They offer fruitful opportunities for analysis of the diversity of traumatic experiences during the Holocaust with wide-reaching implications for our understanding of this historical event. Paul Bartrop underlines the crucial role of testimonial accounts in forming our understanding of what life was like in the Nazi camps.[[11]](#footnote-11) The richness of the narratives in written testimonies allows readers to gain a greater understanding of the Holocaust. Each writer has a different story to narrate, even in the description of intrinsically similar events, because it is the way in which the writers have comprehended and related their experiences that comprises the true core of their work. However, it is important to take into account that such written accounts yield ‘a represented rather than an unmediated reality’ and to comprehend the constructed nature of evidence itself in written testimony.[[12]](#footnote-12) Holocaust survivor narratives have been written in a variety of circumstances – some soon after the event, some after the passing of several decades, some with the help of a ghostwriter. Whilst this does not make them less legitimate or valuable as historical sources, there may be problems such as the accuracy and reliability of recall, of which historians must be aware. Moreover, on the whole, the people writing down their narratives were not practiced authors and survivor testimonies are not always elegant and polished. Furthermore, as they were written for publication, a sifting process took place in the mind of the writer and/or the editor. This means that some memories were omitted and others retained or even enhanced. The writing, as Waxman notes ‘comes from the careful representation of experience, or the perceived “appropriateness” of experiences for publication’.[[13]](#footnote-13) This means that traumatic events have been rendered invisible because they were too hard or distasteful to write down. Difficult aspects of traumatic experiences can be erased from the historical narrative, as survivors’ reconstructions of their experiences may ‘smooth corners’ in their stories, particularly of events or episodes that they find painful or hard to confront. As Waxman notes: ‘published accounts not only relate witnesses’ experiences, but also tell us something about collective understandings of the Holocaust’.[[14]](#footnote-14)

Nevertheless, published survivor accounts are certainly ‘subjectively true’.[[15]](#footnote-15) Their authors chronicle events they witnessed themselves. As Bartrop states, they ‘do no attempt to make magic, nor do they attempt to imagine the unimaginable. They simply try to tell the stories from their own individual perspectives’.[[16]](#footnote-16) It is their intention to tell the ‘truth’ as they comprehend it, as clearly as possible in order to convey the essence of their experience to their readers. This chapter uses published testimonies as its main source base. Whilst there may be some qualitative distinctions between published and unpublished accounts, these are not of a nature to make a difference to understanding the gendering of narratives. For example, archival testimonies of the responses of German Jews to Nazi persecution during the 1930s yield very similar gendered perspectives to those sources used here, in terms of men’s and women’s experiences and how they were remembered and described.[[17]](#footnote-17) Do these narratives tell or intend to tell the full or the only story? The answer is no. Holocaust survivors may have different reasons for writing down their narratives, but none of them claim to tell the full or the only story of the Holocaust. The historian must keep this in mind and not have unrealistic expectations about the nature of these sources. In Holocaust testimony, ‘the writer’s personal experience is representative and used to provide a perspective on the common plight’, not to give full histories of camps or even necessarily to relate major incidents that occurred.[[18]](#footnote-18) Not one of them can tell the whole story on its own and nor do they intend to do so. Survivor testimonies are intimate accounts of personal experiences, which the writers wish to convey to their readers. The process of testifying then is ‘not merely to narrate, but to commit oneself, and to commit narrative, to others’.[[19]](#footnote-19) In so doing, for many survivors, the process of writing their narratives was also a means of resurrecting their identities, which had been so starkly removed from them by the Nazi camp system.

Furthermore, historians may overlook difficult subjects or types of behaviour that are not expressed in written memoirs or testimonies, thus excluding them from the historical narrative. Testimonies that homogenize women’s experiences and identities can be misleading.[[20]](#footnote-20) The tendency in historical writing has been to define Jewish women as mothers, sisters and nurturers, ‘with a very particular notion of what constitutes female behaviour’.[[21]](#footnote-21) Sara Horowitz challenges the type of interpretation that ‘erases the actual experiences of women and, to an extent, domesticates the events of the Holocaust’.[[22]](#footnote-22) Anna Hardmann cites examples of women fighting for their own existence at the expense of others.[[23]](#footnote-23) Zoe Waxman has also argued that assumptions that women only had motherly and care-giving roles ‘obscure the diversity of women’s Holocaust experiences’.[[24]](#footnote-24) She further argues that the valorizing of sacrifice also means that the struggles surrounding temptation are ‘glossed over’. Waxman states that ‘the collectivization of Holocaust memory has led to a homogenization of Holocaust comprehension that eschews difficult testimony or stories that fall outside accepted narratives’.[[25]](#footnote-25) As many people find it difficult to confront the full horrors of the Holocaust, the literature has tended to overlook the desperate actions undertaken by victims in order to survive under the appalling conditions in which they found themselves. But this does not mean that they did not occur. As so much of the existing literature has represented women as nurturers, the intention here is to form a more nuanced picture by looking at different types of action or conduct among women and men than traditionally accepted normative behaviour. An analysis of survivor narratives allows for a greater awareness of these distinctions.

**Men’s Experiences and Behaviour at Auschwitz**

The terrible privations and circumstances of internment at Auschwitz included thirst and hunger, extremes of temperature, arduous physical labour, overcrowding, inadequate food and foul water, lengthy roll calls, exhaustion, illness, injury and the constant fear of ‘selection’ for the gas chambers. In terms of men's behaviour, gendered expectations were centred on strength and hardness, toughness and determination.[[26]](#footnote-26) Signs of weakness fell short of normative behaviour for men. Victor Frankl states that ‘it was necessary… to keep moments of weakness and furtive tears to a minimum’.[[27]](#footnote-27) Men did not wish to appear cowardly or weak. As a result of different social constructions of gender, men were less likely to discuss emotions, admit to weakness or the need for another person with whom to share their burden. Lagerway notes that ‘male survivors framed their narratives in order and coherence, and often de-emphasized emotions’ and that they told of ‘personal isolation, personal survival at any cost, ruthless competition’.[[28]](#footnote-28) It appears that because men had been socialized into being independent and autonomous, that these characteristics were the ones most often portrayed in their narratives. Male and female survivor accounts also represent work as a means of survival very differently. Pride in work and its impact on their identities is much more common in male writings. By contrast, female accounts have tended to be much less specific on work and how it was conducted. This suggests that work was more central to men’s experiences in line with contemporaneous gendered norms. Whilst ‘food talk’ amongst women at Auschwitz has been much analysed, Victor Frankl also recounts men engaging in food talk. He states that the majority of prisoners, when they were working near each other and not closely watched by guards ‘would immediately start discussing food’ asking each other about their favourite dishes. Frankl writes: ‘Then they would exchange recipes and plan the menu for the day when they would have a reunion – the day in a distant future when they would be liberated and return home’.[[29]](#footnote-29)

Male memoirs have tended to underplay bonds and relationships and to emphasize instead examples of individual valour, strength or autonomy. Bruno Bettelheim has explained his view on the subject of survival in the camps as follows: ‘Survival in the camps – this cannot be stressed enough – depended foremost on luck…. While nothing one could do could assure survival, and while chances for it at best were extremely slim, one could increase them through correctly assessing one’s situation and taking advantage of opportunities; in short, through acting independently and with courage, decision, and conviction, all of which depended on the measure of autonomy one had managed to retain’.[[30]](#footnote-30) Dutch survivor, Loius de Wijze, underlined the need for care of the self in his memoirs as well: ‘Everyone lives for himself. Our one and all-encompassing credo is: Survive! Between the outer limits of life and death, previous values and norms lose their meaning, and our spiritual baggage gradually erodes. The only norm that counts is “I”’.[[31]](#footnote-31)

It is important to note and add, however, that references to close relationships do appear in male narratives and there are instances of male writing that show men behaving in ways that differed from expected male gender norms. Primo Levi tells of an Italian civilian worker, Lorenzo, who brought Levi ‘a piece of his bread and the remainder of his ration every day for six months’.[[32]](#footnote-32) Without Lorenzo, Levi believes that he would not have survived Auschwitz. He states that this was: ‘not so much for his material aid, as for his having constantly reminded me by his presence, by his natural and plain manner of being good, that there still existed a just world outside our own, something and someone still pure and whole, not corrupt, not savage…. Lorenzo was a man; his humanity was pure and uncontaminated, he was outside this world of negation. Thanks to Lorenzo, I managed not to forget that I myself was a man’.[[33]](#footnote-33) He later describes a ‘tight bond of alliance’ with Alberto, another prisoner.[[34]](#footnote-34) Hence, social bonding was significant to male experiences, not only to female ones.

Furthermore, the testimonies of other male survivors underline the importance of the father-son relationship to survival, when fathers and sons had managed to avoid separation and stay together. Henry Wermuth recalls: ‘The presence of my father was, without a doubt, a major factor in my survival; but it also meant that I did not have, nor was I in need of, any other social contacts’.[[35]](#footnote-35) This suggests that the father-son relationship was so powerful, that it completely replaced the necessity for other bonds. On the death march from Auschwitz, Elie Wiesel recalls his momentary desire to fall out of line, to the edge of the road and die: ‘My father’s presence was the only thing that stopped me…. He was running at my side, out of breath, at the end of his strength, at his wit’s end. I had no right to let myself die. What would he do without me? I was his only support’.[[36]](#footnote-36) Wiesel shows here the significance of his relationship with his father and their mutual support.

The death marches have been described in many memoirs and testimonies as driving Holocaust victims to increasingly desperate behaviour. Hans Winterfeld recalls the death march from Auschwitz: ‘Normally, one could talk to the other prisoners, but when food was distributed, they began to look and act like lunatics: their eyes stared rigidly at the ladle or at the arm that distributed the bread. When they received their ration, they constantly watched other prisoners to check that nobody had been given more. It was completely irrelevant what kind of person it was: uneducated and primitive, or educated and intellectually superior. I often wondered how cultivated human beings could behave like animals’.[[37]](#footnote-37)

Indeed, Levi comments too on the aim of the Nazi camps to ‘reduce us to beasts’. But, he writes, ‘we must not become beasts; that even in this place one can survive, and therefore one must want to survive, to tell the story, to bear witness; and that to survive we must force ourselves to save at least the skeleton, the scaffolding, the form of civilization’.[[38]](#footnote-38) His desire to survive was thus underpinned by his desire to bear witness. He was determined to defend his strength and dignity for this purpose. As Eva Kolinsky has noted, many other survivors defined their own personal code of behaviour in a bid to maintain a sense of their own self-value.[[39]](#footnote-39) In Levi's *Survival in Auschwitz*, for example, Steinlauf insisted on washing, even though washing did not get him clean, because it enabled him to keep his dignity and demonstrated his refusal to become a beast, thus undermining German goals. This type of behaviour is also evident in the writings of female survivors. Men’s experiences bore both similarities and differences to those of women. Their responses to them were equally complex, nuanced and influenced by normative gendered expectations. The determination to survive and their capacity for survival was based on whatever resources they could use – including supportive relationships, ingrained cultural norms, the attempt to maintain dignity, stealing or procuring food, or sheer luck.

**Women’s Experiences and Behaviour at Auschwitz**

Female prisoners at Auschwitz had to deal with a number of problems that affected them specifically as women. Their testimonies highlight the traumas of losing their sense of their physical selves. One significant aspect of this was the SS camp ritual of shaving the inmates on their arrival. Having their heads shaved was a much more traumatic and degrading experience for women than for men. Whilst all prisoners were deeply shamed by this measure, for women this was a blow to their feelings of femininity and to their sexual identity. Livia Bitton-Jackson writes of newly arrived female prisoners having their hair shaved from their heads, under their arms and in the pubic area: ‘The shaving of hair has a startling effect. The absence of hair transforms individual women into like bodies. Indistinguishable…. We become a monolithic mass’.[[40]](#footnote-40) Rena Gelissen describes the humiliation of being ‘naked in front of strangers’ and of being shaved by male prisoners: ‘They shear our heads, arms; even our pubic hair is discarded just as quickly and cruelly as the rest of the hair on our bodies’.[[41]](#footnote-41) Another survivor, Isabelle Choko, in her memoir, also relates that, at Auschwitz, ‘at the precise moment my head was shaved, I ceased to exist as a human being’.[[42]](#footnote-42) Rose Meth, born in 1925 into a Hasidic family in Zator, Poland, who was deported to Auschwitz in August 1943, gives a similar account of her arrival: ‘I can’t begin to describe the shock and the humiliation. We were sheltered children. They made us undress completely in front of the Nazi soldiers. We wanted to die. They shaved our heads. They shaved all our hair, everywhere. We were given numbers’.[[43]](#footnote-43)

The tattooing of their camp numbers was described by survivor Eva Schloss as ‘part of the process intended to strip me of my pride and identity. When I was marched away from Auschwitz railway station, I left the girlish Eva Geiringer and her dreams, behind’.[[44]](#footnote-44) Olga Lengyel describes the degrading and humiliating treatment of female inmates on their arrival, having to undress and undergo physical examinations, before being allowed to dress in camp clothes. Gelissen mentions the gynaecological examination for new female prisoners as well. These gynaecological examinations were invasive and humiliating for female prisoners. They were painful and traumatic experiences recounted with much horror by female survivors.

The distribution of random and unfitting clothes had a significant impact on women as new camp inmates. Their individuality and their sense of identity were entirely removed by all of these actions. Gelissen recounts her feelings of despair when she noticed her ‘lovely white boots with their red trim’ being worn by an SS woman.[[45]](#footnote-45) Lengyel describes the ‘bizarre rags that were handed out for underwear’ that were ‘not white or any other colour, but worn out pieces of coarse dusting cloth’.[[46]](#footnote-46) In addition, tattered dresses were randomly distributed with no regard to size. In terms of the emotions these circumstances generated, Lengyel states: ‘In spite of the tragedy of our situation, we could not help but laugh as we saw others so ridiculously outfitted. After a while, it was a struggle to overcome the disgust we felt for our companions, and for ourselves’.[[47]](#footnote-47) A similar reaction to their ‘grey, sack-like dresses’ is described by Bitton-Jackson, as she compares herself after her arrival at Auschwitz with inmates who had been there longer: ‘The strange creatures we saw as we entered the camp, the shaven, grey-cloaked bunch who ran to the barbed wire to stare at us, we are them! We look exactly like them. Same bodies, same dresses, same blank stares. They, too, must have arrived from home recently. They, too, were ripe women and young girls, bewildered and bruised. They too longed for dignity and compassion. And they, too, were transformed into figures of contempt instead’.[[48]](#footnote-48)

After the initial shock and horror engendered by their new appearance, some women attempted to ameliorate their outfits. In the space of twenty-four hours, they adjusted their ill-fitting garments to their bodies and sewed up the holes, ‘using needles made out of wooden splinters and threads pulled out of the one blanket allocated to them’.[[49]](#footnote-49) Isabelle Choko describes feeling a need to hide her shaved head and tie up her dress which was much too large: ‘I ripped a piece from the bottom of my pale pink shirt to tie around my head like a turban and another piece to roll into a belt. My mother helped me since I had no mirror…. Other women, too, were trying to “look human” again’.[[50]](#footnote-50)

Menstruation became a significant biological problem that women had to face in Auschwitz-Birkenau. Bitton-Jackson describes a girl in front of her at roll call: ‘the blood simply flows down her legs’.[[51]](#footnote-51) When they menstruated, women and girls had no way of stopping the flow of blood, which was extremely difficult and humiliating. Gelissen recalls her first period at Auschwitz: ‘I scour the ground for anything that might help me hinder the flow. There is nothing’.[[52]](#footnote-52) Over time, in the abnormal circumstances in which they were living, women stopped menstruating. Whilst this removed the problem of humiliation, the cessation of menstruation created other concerns for many women. Some felt a loss of their identity as women, whilst others feared they would never be able to have children. Lengyel attributes the ceasing of menstruation partly to ‘the constant anguish under which we lived’, but she also suggests a ‘mysterious powder’ or ‘substance’ mixed into all the food given to the inmates’.[[53]](#footnote-53) Gelissen writes similarly that ‘most of the girls and women in camp’ lost their periods.[[54]](#footnote-54) Female inmates specifically faced these biological and psychological issues relating to menstruation and its cessation.[[55]](#footnote-55)

In addition, some girls and women were subjected to appalling violence, as well as sexual abuse and violations. In her desperation for some string to use as shoelaces, Gisella Perl hoped to exchange her bread ration for a piece of string from a Polish male prisoner: ‘I stopped beside him, held out my bread and asked him, begged him to give me a piece of string in exchange for it. He looked me over from head to foot, carefully, then grabbed me by the shoulder and hissed in my ear: “I don’t want your bread… You can keep your bread… I will give you a piece of string but first I want you… you…” For a second I didn’t understand what he meant…. His hand, filthy with the human excrement he was working in, reached out for my womanhood, rudely, insistently. The next moment I was running, running away from that man, away from the indignity that had been inflicted on me, forgetting about the string, about the shoes, about everything but the sudden realization of how deeply I had sunk’.[[56]](#footnote-56) After this shameful experience, she was determined to maintain her dignity in the face of every humiliation, every torture. Women's vulnerability, their fear of rape and their reactions to humiliation is amply evident in the narratives of female survivors. For example, the fear of rape and the theme of humiliation run through the account of Judith Magyar Isaacson, a Hungarian Jew, deported to Auschwitz in 1944.[[57]](#footnote-57) Schloss too writes: ‘it seems hard to believe that the German SS guards would take a sexual interest in the starving, dirty, ragged women they were ruling over - but some of them did’.[[58]](#footnote-58) Hence, whilst rape was not official policy because Nazi racial laws prohibited German sexual relations with Jewish women, there is evidence that at least some German guards and others, including Kapos and other prisoners, raped Jewish women. Women and young girls were subjected to traumatic sexual abuse and violations, often from their very earliest moments at Auschwitz, and whilst this was difficult to narrate, for many it was an unforgettable humiliation.[[59]](#footnote-59)

In Millu’s first narrative in *Smoke over Birkenau*, a young inmate, Lili, was the victim of the cruelty of her Kapo, Mia, whose ‘frustration and impatience’ turned to anger if her boyfriend was late or failed to turn up: ‘A violent shove sent my head slamming against the iron bar’.[[60]](#footnote-60) This was commonplace behaviour on the part of the Kapo. Lili’s position was invidious and fraught with tension. She was a pretty, young and gracious girl and because of this, she was favoured by the Kapo who gave her good work - sewing. However, Lili was in a very dangerous situation, as Mia’s boyfriend liked her. On one occasion, Mia’s boyfriend, who had drunk too much, began overtly flirting with Lili and kissing her, ‘his lips brushing her neck’. This proved catastrophic for Lili, as Mia was furious and savagely attacked her, resulting in terrible injuries.[[61]](#footnote-61) She called Lili ‘a whore’ and subsequently ensured that she was selected for the gas chambers.[[62]](#footnote-62)

In another of Millu’s narratives, Zina, accused of being ‘a whore’ was violently attacked by an old camp guard: ‘… raising his club, he began beating Zina furiously on the chest and shoulders. The blows were so fierce that in her frail state she collapsed instantly. He kept on beating her as she lay there on the ground’.[[63]](#footnote-63) Bitton-Jackson describes violence from the moment of her arrival at Auschwitz and numerous episodes of random punishments and beatings.[[64]](#footnote-64) Lengyel similarly details the threat of violence from the outset and refers to many occasions on which she and other female inmates were subjected to violence and physical abuse.[[65]](#footnote-65) Gelissen’s writing too mentions many incidences of extreme violence and brutality directed against female prisoners.[[66]](#footnote-66) Apart from such examples of random punishment and brutality, Lengyel further describes ‘medical’ experimentation on female inmates, including experiments in relation to menstruation, subjection to artificial insemination, injection with sex hormones, sterilization and gynaecological experiments.[[67]](#footnote-67) Gelissen’s narrative makes reference to such experiments as well.[[68]](#footnote-68) Sterilization experiments on women at Auschwitz took place in Block 10, a place described by Robert Lifton as ‘quintessential Auschwitz’.[[69]](#footnote-69) The notorious Block 10 induced fear and terror in female victims.

At Auschwitz, women tried to adjust and adapt to their changing circumstances. They used resourcefulness, homemaking skills and cleaning in order to establish some modicum of control over themselves and their space. For instance, they tried to clean themselves and to rid themselves of lice. Lengyel recounts how they ‘passed the single scrubbing brush to one another with a firm determination to resist the dirt and the lice. That was our only way of waging war against the parasites, against our jailers, and against every force that made us victims’.[[70]](#footnote-70) Gelissen too writes of how the women engaged in a ‘ritual cleansing’ of lice.[[71]](#footnote-71) Furthermore, there was a need for cooperation in extreme circumstances and self-preservation through mutual help, which has been highlighted, in particular, in many female survivor testimonies. At Auschwitz, women used different strategies to cope with their situation, such as the formation of ersatz families and ‘camp sister’ relationships, the sharing of recipes, cooking methods and memories of Sabbath and Festival meals.

Millu writes of Gustine, a prisoner at Auschwitz from Holland, who talked about her home, ‘for hours on end’, as a coping strategy: ‘the fire sparkling in the big blue tiled stove and her mother preparing the snacks for tea, the smell of fresh bread, the most comforting smell in the world, and the butter, the ruby-hued currant marmalade, the gaily coloured curtains on the windows. Oh, beloved home, the most cherished place on earth!’.[[72]](#footnote-72) Gelissen recalls the Sunday morning picnics with cheese Danish pastries that she used to have with her sister Danka: ‘Around noon we open Mama’s Danishes, still warm from the oven, or maybe the sun kept them warm, and eat them while languishing in the sun…. How I miss… eating Mama’s homemade sweets’.[[73]](#footnote-73) Lengyel talks of reminiscing and reciting poetry as coping strategies, ‘to escape the frightful present’.[[74]](#footnote-74) Furthermore, Gisella Perl recalls: ‘Later, as we came to know one another better, we invented games and recited poetry to keep our minds off the sordid present’. Other evenings, they played ‘another game, which spread from block to block until every woman in Auschwitz played it enthusiastically. We called the game “I am a lady”… I am a lady – I said one night – a lady doctor in Hungary. It is morning, a beautiful sunny morning and I feel too lazy to work. I ring for my assistant and tell her to send the patients away, for I am not going to my office today… What should I do with myself? Go shopping? Go to the hairdresser? Meet my friends at the café? Maybe I’ll do some shopping. I haven’t had a new dress, a new hat in weeks…’.[[75]](#footnote-75) The references in this game are clearly gender specific to the women’s previous experiences and social construction.

Moreover, kitchen memories reminded women of their former position in their families and communities and reaffirmed their own sense of essential value. Women used conversation as a distraction from their circumstances and talked about their ‘old’ lives. This reminded them of their strengths as nurturers, homemakers and cooks. It allowed them to maintain a sense of identity. Food preparation was part of the ritual of living in family, social and community life, as well as Jewish festivals, and it defined the former status of many women. The sharing of recipes and cooking tips was significant for women psychologically because it indicated a commitment to the future.[[76]](#footnote-76) In addition, they fantasized about the future, a time when the war would be over, as a coping strategy.[[77]](#footnote-77) These types of themes are common in female survivor testimonies and narratives. Furthermore, by describing the food they once cooked to another inmate, ‘they shared a familiar experience and connected to another person’.[[78]](#footnote-78)

Female narratives often describe how inmates shared food with each other. For example, Lili shared a ‘precious gift’ of ‘some cabbage leaves’ with two of her fellow prisoners.[[79]](#footnote-79) Bitton-Jackson recalls smuggling potatoes and how her mother saved hers in order to use them in place of candles on Friday night: ‘one evening while shoveling snow in the yard, we discover mounds in which potatoes are stored for the winter. We quickly dig them up and, hiding them under our dresses, smuggle enough potatoes into the camp to allow each inmate at least one potato. We wash them in the toilet and eagerly await our bedtime…. Noiselessly, with utmost care, so as not to attract the attention of the guard on patrol we bite into the hard, delightful skin of the raw potato. But Mummy saves her potato. “For Sabbath lights’” she says. Friday at sunset Mummy kindles her Sabbath lights in the carved-out potato halves using oil smuggled from the factory and threads from our blankets for wicks’.[[80]](#footnote-80) This example illustrates not only the resourcefulness of these women, but also the determination of Bitton-Jackson’s mother to try to continue her tradition of lighting candles for the Sabbath. She was caught but not punished on this occasion. Bitton-Jackson goes on to relate how they subsequently saved ‘potatoes for a Hanukkah celebration with lights’. With care and secrecy, they lit ‘Hannukah oil lamps in carved-out potato halves’ and succeeded in kindling the lights for eight nights without being caught.[[81]](#footnote-81) Millu writes of maintaining rituals and the celebration of Hannukah as well.[[82]](#footnote-82) These attempts by women to uphold religious traditions were valuable coping strategies.

Family relationships were of great significance where mothers and daughters, or sisters, could stay together, as illustrated by Gelissen’s account. She was fiercely protective of her sister Danka and tried to shield her as much as possible. Rena’s promise after all was to protect and look after her sister – indeed, her determination to bring her sister back alive was her *raison d’être* and motivation for survival: ‘My one great feat in life, my fate, is to survive this thing and return triumphant with my sister to our parents’ house…. I will succeed because I have no other choice. Failure does not even occur to me. We may die in the interim – death cannot be avoided here – but even that will not dissuade me from my sole purpose in life. Nothing else matters but these four things: be with Danka, be invisible, be alert, be numb’.[[83]](#footnote-83) She looked after Danka when she had scabies and procured lotion to treat it for her and cared for her when she became ill with malaria.[[84]](#footnote-84) In Danka, Rena found her ‘reason and will to live’.[[85]](#footnote-85) Gelissen kept up her sister’s spirits when she lost the will to go on and swore to her that if Danka was ever selected for the gas chambers that she would accompany her.[[86]](#footnote-86) Ultimately, they both survived. Millu’s writing also notes the strength of feeling between sisters in the camp and that most of them loved each other ‘with an almost morbid attachment’.[[87]](#footnote-87)

Moreover, even in ersatz family relationships, such as those of ‘camp sisters’, social bonding, in groups of two or more, helped women to keep up their struggle to survive. Rose Meth describes her ersatz camp sister: ‘Estusia and I were like sisters. People never knew that we were not really sisters. As soon as all my real sisters were taken away from me and Estusia saw my condition, she helped me a lot morally. She told me I must be strong and survive’.[[88]](#footnote-88) Such surrogate families cared for each other and improved women’s chances of survival. Lucie Adelsberger describes her camp family in which her ‘daughters’ provided her with clothing and food whenever they could. She states that members of such families often put their own lives at risk and that even for those who did not survive ‘the friendship and love of a camp family eased the horror of their miserable end’.[[89]](#footnote-89) This kind of bonding was not exclusive to women, but it appears to have been both much more prevalent among women and to have been expressed and reported more in testimonies written by women, including those of Isabella Leitner and Charlotte Delbo.[[90]](#footnote-90) Female prisoners offered each other support, comfort and solidarity. Women were able to ‘transform their habits of raising children or their experience of nurturing into the care of the nonbiological family’.[[91]](#footnote-91) As isolation and the separation of families was deliberately imposed by the camp system, the creation of new ‘families’ helped inmates by giving them a system of mutual support and a source of material and psychological strength in place of their real families.[[92]](#footnote-92)

There has been a taboo in treating women who behaved differently from perceived gender norms and expectations, largely reflecting a reluctance to deal with a painful and difficult subject.[[93]](#footnote-93) Yet, examples of such behaviour in female narratives do exist. Fanya Gottesfeld Heller states in her memoirs that: ‘The unrelenting fear of death and gnawing pain of hunger led to acts of desperation among many who survived; some stole, others lied and schemed. Still others took comfort in intimate relationships that might be considered illicit or misguided in ordinary times. It was not all pure and righteous, but it happened’.[[94]](#footnote-94) Gendered norms about expected types of female conduct such as social bonding and nurturing were contradicted by examples of spiteful and hateful behaviour. Millu describes how physical hardship and deprivation produced competitive, self-interested behaviour – women who were ‘ready to pummel and trample over the others in order to get in first and grab a good place’.[[95]](#footnote-95) Bitton-Jackson describes an episode when a bed collapsed onto her very weak mother. The other inmates did not care or help as they were awaiting the distribution of food– ‘they laugh at my alarm…. Not one of them pays attention to my frantic pleas’.[[96]](#footnote-96) Millu describes the ‘morbid curiosity’ of the women at Birkenau at the selections for the gas chambers. They craned their necks to see ‘like spectators at a sports match’.[[97]](#footnote-97) Such behaviour was at variance with gendered norms about women’s conduct.

Millu describes the transformative and destructive effect of Birkenau on the identity and behaviour of its prisoners over time. The inmates taunted and abused each other. She writes: ‘I recoiled in shame from their weary eyes gleaming with malice and their pinched mouths spewing out vulgarities, sick at the sight of what our misery had made of us…. Soon I would be a true daughter of the *Lager* [camp] ... I would be no different from the old-timers’.[[98]](#footnote-98) Lengyel too states that ‘it seemed as though the Germans constantly sought to pit us against each other, to make us competitive, spiteful and hateful’ and notes how even ‘the most peaceful souls were occasionally seized with a desire to strangle their neighbours’ in the overcrowded conditions in the bunks, through exasperation at their circumstances.[[99]](#footnote-99)

Sexuality and sexual conduct could become significant at times in the camp. It is hard to piece together these aspects of camp life for two main reasons. Firstly, they were taboo subjects, which have only recently been discussed in the historical literature.[[100]](#footnote-100) Secondly, it is difficult for survivors to narrate sexual trauma.[[101]](#footnote-101) However, the subjects of lesbianism, the granting of sexual favours and life in the camp brothel all deserve attention. Lesbianism was a taboo form of behaviour and references to it are uncommon in survivor narratives. Vera Laska has noted the lack of available documentation on lesbians: ‘Women’s memoirs say little on the subject, either because they considered the subject indelicate or because they chose to remain in the closet. The women who were lesbians when they entered the camps or became so afterward are hidden behind a double veil of hypocrisy and silence’.[[102]](#footnote-102) However, there is some mention of lesbianism. Lengyel distinguishes between ‘three categories’ of lesbians: the first group, who were ‘lesbians by instinct’; the second group, who ‘because of the abnormal conditions, suffered changes in their sexual viewpoint’ and often ‘yielded under the pressure of necessity’; and the third group, who ‘discovered their lesbian predilections through an association with corruption’. She goes on to describe lesbian ‘orgies’.[[103]](#footnote-103) In Millu’s book, there is a reference to a ‘most evil Kapo’ with a ‘black triangle’ on her shirt, portrayed as ‘fat and sturdy’.[[104]](#footnote-104) There is an implicit connection drawn between her appearance, lesbianism and ‘evil’ character. There is reference to another lesbian Kapo, the ‘Kapo of the dressmakers renowned for her lesbian predilections’.[[105]](#footnote-105) The ‘heavy, resounding footsteps’ of the ‘formidable’ Frau Gotti could be heard every morning as ‘she came to wake her lover with a long kiss as well as a little snack’. The suggestion here is not only of lesbian stereotyping, but also of the exchange of sexual favours for food. Furthermore, our understanding of lesbianism is made more difficult because lesbian relationships were hard to identify and distinguish from the numerous close friendships that women formed at Auschwitz and other camps.[[106]](#footnote-106)

Survivor narratives refer to the granting of sexual favours by some girls and women in exchange for food, other items or ‘camp luxuries’. This was commonplace and formed a significant aspect of what women found to be so humiliating and degrading about the camp experience. Lengyel describes an episode when Tadek, a carpenter who came to mend the bunks, was friendly and attentive to her. She describes him as handsome, tall and smiling. He gave her food, but then made it clear that he expected sexual favours in return.[[107]](#footnote-107) Some women adopted the survival strategy of flirting, bantering or acting coy with men and performing sexual favours, as a way of gaining extra food or luxuries. The impact of the *Puffkommando* (brothel) on different women was significant. There was a marked distinction of attitude between those women inside the brothel and those outside. On one level, there was the moral stance of rejection of a woman for prostituting herself, yet at the same time, there was some jealousy and resentment about the ‘luxuries’ that life in the brothel afforded. References to these are fewer and harder to hard, but they do exist and demonstrate behaviour that deviated from perceived attitudes and conceptions about the appropriate conduct of women. Indeed, in the historiography of both women's experiences of the Third Reich and the concentration camps in general, brothels have been mentioned only comparatively recently as these fields have developed to encompass them.[[108]](#footnote-108) Annette Timm has noted that whilst some women were forced into service as prostitutes in the concentration camps, others ‘chose this option as a way to prolong their lives’.[[109]](#footnote-109) Some women welcomed the chance to work in the camp brothel as conditions were better and they had a temporary reprieve from the possibility of being selected for the gas chambers.[[110]](#footnote-110)

Pregnancies had to be concealed at Auschwitz, because all pregnant women were sent immediately to the gas chamber. Pregnant women hid their condition for as long as possible, for ‘the camp was no maternity ward’.[[111]](#footnote-111) Despite the attempts of German officers to trick women into revealing their pregnancies, Lengyel writes: ‘Incredible as it may seem, some succeeded in concealing their conditions to the last moment, and the deliveries took place secretly in the barracks’.[[112]](#footnote-112) At the infirmary at Auschwitz, as soon as a baby was born, both mother and infant were sent to the gas chambers. In order to save the lives of the mothers, Lengyel describes how newborn infants were killed: ‘And so, the Germans succeeded in making murderers of us…. The only meager consolation is that by these murders we saved the mothers’.[[113]](#footnote-113)

Gisella Perl, a Jewish doctor from Hungary, who was interned in Auschwitz, also recounts killing newborn children in order ‘to save the life of the mother’.[[114]](#footnote-114) ‘It was up to me to save the life of the mothers, if there was no other way, than by destroying the life of their unborn children’. She recalls that the procedure took place: ‘In the dark, always hurried, in the midst of filth and dirt. After the child had been delivered, I quickly bandaged the mother’s abdomen and sent her back to work’. She states that: ‘I delivered women pregnant in the eighth, seventh, sixth, fifth month, always in a hurry, always with my five fingers, in the dark, under terrible conditions’. She concludes: ‘No one will ever know what it meant to me to destroy these babies. After years and years of medical practice, childbirth was still to me the most beautiful, the greatest miracle of nature. I loved those newborn babies not as a doctor but as a mother and it was again and again my own child whom I killed to save the life of a woman… and if I had not done it, both mother and child would have been cruelly murdered’.[[115]](#footnote-115)

**Conclusion**

The lens of gender provides a useful tool for interpreting the experiences and behaviour of Holocaust victims. Gender is a characteristic of all human experience. Both masculinity and femininity have been socially constructed and shaped by historical circumstances and expectations. Moving away from universal interpretations, both women's experiences as specifically female and men's experiences as specifically male are significant to our understanding of the Holocaust. In doing so, we can examine a variety of personal experiences and discover their implications. The field of Holocaust studies that was gender neutral until the 1980s now includes a substantial literature on gender. Furthermore, a comparatively recent, yet substantial output of memoirs and testimonies by female Holocaust survivors, has ensured that women's voices are no longer unheard. This allows us to consider the impact of trauma on women as well as on men. As Kremer notes, female writings have shown that ‘representation of history through the lens of male hegemony is incomplete’.[[116]](#footnote-116) These developments in the historiography have meant that scholars are now in a much better position to comprehend the diversity and complexity of the experiences of Holocaust victims. In the end, both male and female survivors state that luck played a large part in their survival. For example, Eva Schloss, with a similar view on this to Bruno Bettelheim, writes ‘a large part of my survival was down to pure luck’.[[117]](#footnote-117)

Men’s and women’s traumatic experiences of the Holocaust were not identical, but as Myrna Goldenberg has suggested, they were ‘different horrors’ within the ‘same hell’.[[118]](#footnote-118) Their testimonies illustrate the complexities of their emotional responses to trauma and how they have remembered and written about it. The experiences and memories of their trauma were subjective and distinctive, in certain respects, along gendered lines. During their imprisonment at Auschwitz women had to opt for agency and make choices in a variety of ways that were distinctive from those made by men. Yet, Frankl notes that for men too, the ‘choice of action’ existed, even in the face of the terrible privations they faced at Auschwitz.[[119]](#footnote-119) In the end, all Jews were equally destined for death, but there were differences on the road to that destination for men and women. The use of survivor memoirs and testimonies enables us to understand the subjectivities of the traumatic experiences faced by prisoners at Auschwitz. The lens of gender was significant both in the experiencing of these events and in the reporting or narrating of them. An analysis of male and female testimonies of trauma adds an important angle to our knowledge and understanding of this dark chapter in human history. It also suggests a way forward in the scholarship of trauma more generally - the development of a history of trauma along gendered lines – especially in circumstances of other wars and genocides, as well as how and why memories and representations of trauma change over time.

1. This literature includes: M. Heinemann, *Gender and Destiny: Women Writers and the Holocaust* (London: Greenwood Press, 1986); R. Linden, *Making Stories, Making Selves: Feminist Reflections on the Holocaust* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1993); J. Baskin (ed.), *Women of the Word: Jewish Women and Jewish Writing* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1994); E. Fuchs (ed.), *Women and the Holocaust: Narrative and Representation* (Oxford: University of America Press, 1999); S. Lillian Kremer, *Women’s Holocaust Writing: Memory and Imagination* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1999); S. Horowitz, ‘Gender, Genocide and Jewish Memory’, *Prooftexts: A Journal of Jewish Literary History*, Vol. 20, No. 1 (2000), 158-90; A. Reading, *The Social Inheritance of the Holocaust: Gender, Culture and Memory* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002); Z. Waxman, *Writing the Holocaust: Identity, Testimony, Representation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006). [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See A. Allen, ‘The Holocaust and the Modernization of Gender: A Historiographical Essay’, *Central European History*, Vol. 30, No. 3 (1997), 349-64. However, Allen’s essay mainly addresses women’s roles as perpetrators or bystanders. It does not deal with the subject of Jewish victims. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Y. Bauer, *Rethinking the Holocaust* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001), 167. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. L. Weitzman and D. Ofer, ‘The Role of Gender in the Holocaust’, in D. Ofer and L. Weitzman (eds), *Women in the Holocaust* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998), 13. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. P. Bos, ‘Women and the Holocaust: Analysing Gender Difference’, in E. Baer and M. Goldenberg (eds), *Experience and Expression: Women, the Nazis, and the Holocaust* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2003),23-50. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Ibid., 25. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Ibid., 33. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. L. Langer, ‘Interpreting Survivor Testimony’, in B. Lang (ed.), *Writing and the Holocaust* (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1988), 39-40. See also, L. Langer, *Versions of Survival: The Holocaust and the Human Spirit* (Albany: Suny Press, 1982). On oral testimony, see also L. Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruin of Memory* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991); A. Rubin and H. Greenspan, *Reflections: Auschwitz, Memory, and a Life Recreated* (St. Paul: Paragon House, 2006); J. Matthias (ed.), *Approaching an Auschwitz Survivor: Holocaust Testimony and its Transformation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009); H. Greenspan, *On Listening to Holocaust Survivors: Beyond Testimony* (Westport: Praeger, 1998), especially 209-11; on survivors and their listeners, see 41-73. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Langer, *Holocaust Testimonies.* [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Cited in J. Young, *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust: Narrative and the Consequences of Interpretation* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990), 29. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. P. Bartrop, *Surviving the Camps: Unity in Adversity During the Holocaust* (New York and Oxford: University Press of America, 2000). [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Langer, ‘Interpreting Survivor Testimony’, 33. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Waxman, *Writing the Holocaust*, 128. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Ibid., 3. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. Bartrop, *Surviving the Camps*, 47. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Ibid. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. L. Pine, *Nazi Family Policy, 1933-1945* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 1997), 149-75. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. T. Des Pres, *The Survivor: An Anatomy of Life in the Death Camps* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976), 38. [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. S. Felman and D. Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York: Routledge, 1992), 204. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. B. Gurewitsch (ed.), *Mothers, Sisters, Resisters: Oral Histories of Women Who Survived the Holocaust* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1998). [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. A. Hardmann, ‘Women and the Holocaust’, *Holocaust Educational Trust, Research Papers*, vol. 1, no. 3 (London, 2000), 12. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. S. Horowitz, ‘Memory and Testimony of Women Survivors of Nazi Germany’, in J. Baskin (ed.), *Women of the Word: Jewish Women and Jewish Writing* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1994), 265. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. Hardmann, ‘Women and the Holocaust’, 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Z. Waxman, ‘Unheard Stories: Reading Women’s Holocaust Testimonies’, *The Jewish Quarterly*, Vol. 47, No. 177 (2000), 53. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Waxman, *Writing the Holocaust*, 186. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. M. Berger, B. Wallis and S. Watson (eds), *Constructing Masculinity* (New York: Routledge, 1995). On the social construction of masculinity, see also R. Connell, *Masculinities* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995) [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. V. Frankl, *Man’s Search for Meaning* (London: Simon and Schuster, 2004), 86. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. M. Lagerway, *Reading Auschwitz* (London: Sage, 1998), 75. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. Frankl, *Man’s Search for Meaning*, 41. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. B. Bettelheim, *Surviving the Holocaust* (London: Fontana, 1986), 100-101. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. L. de Wijze, *Only My Life: A Survivor’s Story*, (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1997), 67. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. P. Levi, *If this is a Man* (London: Abacus Books, 2000), 148. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Ibid., 150. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Ibid., 168. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. H. Wermuth, *Breathe Deeply My Son*, (London: Vallentine Mitchell, 1993), 139. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. E. Wiesel, *Night: with Connections* (London: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1988), 92-3. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Cited in E. Kolinsky, *After the Holocaust: Jewish Survivors in Germany after 1945* (London: Pimlico, 2004), 27. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Levi, *If This is a Man*, 58. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Kolinsky, *After the Holocaust*, 14. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. L. Bitton-Jackson, *I Have Lived a Thousand Years* (London: Simon and Schuster, 1999), 75. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. R. Gelissen, *Rena’s Promise: A Story of Sisters in Auschwitz* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1996), 139. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. I. Choko, in I. Choko, F. Irwin, L. Kahana-Aufleger, M. Kalina and J. Lipski, *Stolen Youth: Five Women’s Survival in the Holocaust* (New York and Jerusalem: Yad Vashem, 2005), 42. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. Cited in C. Rittner and J. Roth (eds), *Different Voices: Women and the Holocaust* (New York: Paragon House, 1993) 136. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. E. Schloss, *After Auschwitz* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 2013), 114. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Gelissen, *Rena’s Promise*, 67. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. # O. Lengyel, *Five Chimneys: The Story of Auschwitz* (Chicago: Academy Chicago Publishers, 1995), 29.

    [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Ibid., 30. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Bitton-Jackson, *I Have Lived a Thousand Years*, 77. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. R. Bondy, ‘Women in Theresienstadt and the Family Camp in Birkenau’, in Ofer and Weitzman (eds), *Women in the Holocaust*, 323. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. Choko, *Stolen Youth*, 48-9. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Bitton-Jackson, *I Have Lived a Thousand Years*, 92. [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Gelissen, *Rena’s Promise*, 81. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Lengyel, *Five Chimneys*, 98-9. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Gelissen, *Rena’s Promise*, 139. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. N. Tec, *Resilience and Courage: Women, Men and the Holocaust* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2003), 168-9. [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Cited in Rittner and Roth (eds), *Different Voices*, 109. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. J. Isaacson, *Seed of Sarah* (Chicago: Univerity of Illinois Press, 1991). [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Schloss, *After Auschwitz*, 127-8. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. V. Laska, cited in Rittner and Roth (eds), *Different Voices*, 266-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. L. Millu, *Smoke over Birkenau* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1997), 22-3. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. Ibid, 39-41. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. Ibid., 47. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Ibid., 138. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Bitton-Jackson, *I Have Lived a Thousand Years*, 73, 99, 127 and 140. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. Lengyel, *Five Chimneys*, 26, 108, 131 and 156. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. Gelissen, *Rena’s Promise*, 75, 83, 90-1, 115, 144-5, 166-7 and 172. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. Lengyel, *Five Chimneys*, 199 and 186-93. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. Gelissen, *Rena’s Promise*, 148 and 183. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. [R. Lifton](http://www.goodreads.com/author/show/67376.Robert_Jay_Lifton), *The Nazi Doctors: Medical Killing and the Psychology of Genocide* (London: Macmillan, 1986), 270. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. Lengyel, *Five Chimneys*, 135. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. Gelissen, *Rena’s Promise*, 80. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. Millu, *Smoke over Birkenau*, 155. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)
73. Gelissen, *Rena’s Promise*, 225. [↑](#footnote-ref-73)
74. Lengyel, *Five Chimneys*, 72. [↑](#footnote-ref-74)
75. Cited in Rittner and Roth (eds), *Different Voices*, 109. [↑](#footnote-ref-75)
76. M. Goldenberg, ‘Memoirs of Auschwitz Survivors: The Burden of Gender’, in Ofer and Weitzman (eds), *Women in the Holocaust*, 335. See also, C. de Silva (ed.), *In Memory's Kitchen: Recipes from Terezin*, Introduction by Michael Berenbaum (Northvale and London: Rowman and Littlefield, 1996). [↑](#footnote-ref-76)
77. Goldenberg, ‘Memoirs of Auschwitz Survivors: The Burden of Gender’, 62-3, 122 and 148. [↑](#footnote-ref-77)
78. M. Goldenberg, ‘Food Talk: Gendered Responses to Hunger in the Concentration Camps’, in Baer and Goldenberg (eds), *Experience and Expression*, 171. [↑](#footnote-ref-78)
79. Millu, *Smoke over Birkenau*, 29. On sharing food, see also 57. [↑](#footnote-ref-79)
80. Bitton-Jackson, *I Have Lived a Thousand Years*, 153. [↑](#footnote-ref-80)
81. Ibid., 154. [↑](#footnote-ref-81)
82. Millu, *Smoke over Birkenau*, 68-9. [↑](#footnote-ref-82)
83. Gelissen, *Rena’s Promise*, 101. [↑](#footnote-ref-83)
84. Ibid., 127-8 and 154-62. [↑](#footnote-ref-84)
85. Ibid., 71. On this, see also 52, 72, 73, 75, 99, and 101. [↑](#footnote-ref-85)
86. Ibid., 124-5. [↑](#footnote-ref-86)
87. Millu, *Smoke over Birkenau*, 151. [↑](#footnote-ref-87)
88. Cited in Rittner and Roth (eds), *Different Voices*, 140. [↑](#footnote-ref-88)
89. L. Adelsberger, *Auschwitz: A Doctor’s Story* (London: Northeastern, 1996), 98-100. [↑](#footnote-ref-89)
90. I. Leitner, *Fragments of Isabella: A Memoir of Auschwitz* (New York: Dell Publishing Company, 1978), 44 and C. Delbo, *Auschwitz and After* (New York: Yale University Press, 1995), 63, 66 and 103. [↑](#footnote-ref-90)
91. J. Ringelheim, ‘Women and the Holocaust: A Reconsideration of Research’, *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, 10 (1985), 747. [↑](#footnote-ref-91)
92. Pine, *Nazi Family Policy*, 178. [↑](#footnote-ref-92)
93. On this, see L. Pine, ‘Gender and the Family’, in D. Stone (ed.), *The Historiography of the Holocaust* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 371-2. See also, Hardmann, ‘Women and the Holocaust’, 12; Waxman, ‘Unheard Stories’, 53; Waxman, *Writing the Holocaust*, 186. [↑](#footnote-ref-93)
94. F. Gottesfeld Heller, *Love in a World of Sorrow: A Teenage Girl’s Holocaust Memoirs* (New York: Devora Publishing Company, 2005), 10. [↑](#footnote-ref-94)
95. Millu, *Smoke over Birkenau*, 52. [↑](#footnote-ref-95)
96. Bitton-Jackson, *I Have Lived a Thousand Years*, 121. [↑](#footnote-ref-96)
97. Millu, *Smoke over Birkenau*, 46-7. [↑](#footnote-ref-97)
98. Ibid., 58. See also 65, where Millu uses the metaphor of smoke to describe how the camp transformed prisoners over time. [↑](#footnote-ref-98)
99. Lengyel, *Five Chimneys*, 36 and 40. [↑](#footnote-ref-99)
100. See D. Herzog (ed.), *Sexuality and German Fascism* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn, 2005) and D. Herzog, *Sex after Fascism: Memory and Morality in Twentieth Century Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005). [↑](#footnote-ref-100)
101. N. Shik, ‘Sexual Abuse of Jewish Women in Auschwitz-Birkenau’, in D. Herzog (ed.), *Brutality and Desire: War and Sexuality in Europe’s Twentieth Century* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 221-246. [↑](#footnote-ref-101)
102. Laska, cited in Rittner and Roth (eds), *Different Voices*, 264. [↑](#footnote-ref-102)
103. Ibid., 197-9. [↑](#footnote-ref-103)
104. Millu, *Smoke over Birkenau*, 173. [↑](#footnote-ref-104)
105. Ibid., 192. [↑](#footnote-ref-105)
106. Laska, cited in Rittner and Roth (eds), *Different Voices*, 263. [↑](#footnote-ref-106)
107. Lengyel, *Five Chimneys*, 60-2. [↑](#footnote-ref-107)
108. On this, see C. Paul, *Zwangsprostitution: Staatlich errichtete Bordelle im Nationalsozialismus* (Berlin: Hentrich, 1995), especially 13-18, 23 and 131; A. Timm, ‘Sex with a Purpose: Prostitution, Venereal Disease, and Militarised Masculinity in the Third Reich’, in D. Herzog (ed.), *Sexuality and German Fascism* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn, 2005), 223-55; R. Sommer, ‘Camp Brothels: Forced Sex Labour in Nazi Concentration Camps’, in Herzog (ed.), *Brutality and Desire*, 221-246. [↑](#footnote-ref-108)
109. Timm, ‘Sex with a Purpose’, 247. [↑](#footnote-ref-109)
110. Paul, *Zwangsprostitution*, 134. [↑](#footnote-ref-110)
111. Lengyel, *Five Chimneys*, 116. [↑](#footnote-ref-111)
112. Ibid., 115. [↑](#footnote-ref-112)
113. Ibid., 114. [↑](#footnote-ref-113)
114. Cited in Rittner and Roth (eds), *Different Voices*, 114. [↑](#footnote-ref-114)
115. Ibid, 113-4. [↑](#footnote-ref-115)
116. Kremer, *Women’s Holocaust Writing*, 238. [↑](#footnote-ref-116)
117. Schloss, *After Auschwitz*, 116. [↑](#footnote-ref-117)
118. M. Goldenberg, ‘Different Horrors, Same Hell: Women Remembering the Holocaust’, in R. Gottlieb (ed.), *Thinking the Unthinkable: Meanings of the Holocaust* (New York: Paulist Press, 1990), 150-66. [↑](#footnote-ref-118)
119. Frankl, *Man’s Search for Meaning*, 74. [↑](#footnote-ref-119)