

Working girls, mothers, and a hamster

Femininity as shown on propaganda posters in Nazi-Germany

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Abstract

This thesis researches the ideal notions on femininity according to the Nazi's by analyzing both the existing literature as a dataset of 50 propaganda posters. All posters are published in Germany between 1933 and 1945 and are gathered from the online archive of *Bundesarchiv*. Femininity and gender are two main themes in this thesis, as well as how the Nazi-German politics based their claim on controlling their population –or even more, civil life– on biopower. This meant a clear division between what was seen as female and feminine, and what as male and masculine. Furthermore, the usability of propaganda posters is researched, as well as how posters have been used in the existing literature. The created dataset does not point out any sharp differences with the literature. What is however most striking and noteworthy is the incorrect usage of propaganda posters in previous academic works. This thesis points out that posters are a problematic primary source when researching the 'true' ideal femininity according to the Nazi's, but are useable for researching how Nazi policymakers portrayed their ideals in the forms of propaganda –among which posters– to their population. Lastly, this thesis brings forth the least problematic way in using and analyzing posters in and for (historical) research.

Keywords

Femininity, gender, Nazi-Germany, propaganda(posters), ideology, representation, biopolitics, cherry-picking

Table of content

1	Introduction	4
2.	Research questions	6
3.	Key concepts	7
3.1.	Gender and sex	7
3.2.	Representation, ideology and propaganda	8
4.	Historiography.....	11
4.1.	Ideal femininity and female behavior.....	11
4.2.	Women in a regime ruled by biopolitics	14
4.3.	Effectiveness of propaganda	16
4.4.	Usage of propaganda posters in existing literature	22
5.	Methodology	27
5.1	Making a selection or database	27
5.2.	Analysing the sources.....	29
6.	Primary source analysis.....	30
6.1.	External source criticism	30
6.2.	Internal source criticism	38
6.2.1.	Posters before 1939	38
6.2.2.	Posters after 1939	46
7.	Summary of the results.....	54
7.1.	Turning points, ideal femininity and the female body	55
7.2.	Tropes and themes in propaganda	59
7.3.	General remarks	62
8.	Conclusion.....	64
9.	Bibliography.....	67
List of primary sources.....		70
Additional primary sources		73
10.	Appendix	74
Source criticism.....		74

1. Introduction

“Posters –defined as a mass-produced graphic presentation, usually in combination of text and illustration on paper, intended for public display, and designed to announce and persuade– have been a significant advertising medium throughout much of history [...].”¹

This is written by international business and marketing professor Terrence Witkowski, he conducted research on the American consumption pattern during the Second World War. He argues that posters are a very useful tool in researching history, especially state needs and how they are portrayed to the general public: aiming to change the behavior, preferences or even wants of the population, so it becomes (more) in line with the state interests.² Yet, (propaganda) posters have been rather absent in the research on the ideal notion of femininity in the Third Reich, or Nazi-Germany. Moreover, as this thesis will point out, the existing literature that *does* use the same primary source as this thesis, are problematic, even Witkowski. Further and follow-up research would not only contribute to the dated historiography, it would –if this thesis is considered– conduct less problematic primary source analyses. This thesis has both social relevance by looking at gender in a totalitarian regime, as academic relevance by looking at the usability of propaganda posters in historical research, along with pointing out the demerits of the existing literature.

It was decided to look at posters published in Germany between 1933 and 1945. In 1933, the fascist party NSDAP (*Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Arbeiterpartei*), led by Adolf Hitler, claimed a unipolar power position in Germany, allowing it to establish strict censorship laws on art, media, literature, and print, so therefore: on posters. This meant book burnings, banning anti-NSDAP outings, and strongly regulating school curriculums, all to strengthen the Nazi-ideals amongst the Germans. Artists and publishers were tied to follow these laws and create only what was fitting and according to these ideals.³ Posters can easily be spread and convey a message to a large public in a short period of time. Using striking images, slogans, colors, and text, posters were brought *en masse* to the German public, grabbing their attention quickly with simple and clear messages that were easily remembered and understood. Of course, posters were not the only formers of the public opinion, it is even unclear if they were effective; and if

¹ Terrence H. Witkowski, “World War II Poster Campaigns: Preaching Frugality to American Consumers,” *Journal of Advertising* 32, no. 1 (2003): 70.

² Witkowski, “World War II Poster Campaigns,” 70-71.

³ Christa Kamenetsky, “Folktale and Ideology in the Third Reich,” *The Journal of American Folklore* 90, no. 356 (1977): 168-169.

they were, to what extent. The usability of posters as a primary source will therefore also be worked out in this thesis.

Since this thesis focusses on Nazi-propaganda, 1933 is the most fitting starting point. Posters published before then were not bound to these censorship laws and ideals. This thesis looks at how the idea of femininity changed from before the war to during the war –but also in the wartime itself, seeing if the state needs were of influence. It was deemed, prior to the start of research, most logical to divide the primary source analysis in two timeframes: the period building up to the war (1933 to September 1939), and the wartime itself (September 1939 to 1945). This thesis will point out if this division is indeed the most logical, if the frames mentioned in the literature are more relevant, or if the primary source themselves point out something different entirely.

This thesis first gives the research questions. Then, definitions to the concepts that are central in this thesis follow. Thirdly, a historiographical overview is given. Apart from the book by Brommer which is in German, English written literature is used.⁴ Fourthly, the methodology follows, which introduces the primary sources and how they are analyzed. Then, the source analysis itself, followed by a summary which discusses the discrepancies and alignments between both the sources themselves, as the literature. Lastly, the conclusion gives clear answers to the research questions and what new insights this thesis has brought forth.

⁴ Peter Brommer is a German literary researcher; his book is covered in chapter 4.4.

2. Research questions

The questions this thesis asks are shaped to not simply answer how femininity is made visible in the selected posters, they are as well critical on the existing literature. Additionally, the questions are shaped to point out differences or alignments between the secondary and the primary sources. The first three sub questions are covered in the historiography, the other three in the primary source analysis.

Main research question

How can propaganda posters be used in historical research and what knowledge can be gained from analyzing propaganda posters when researching femininity as Nazi policymakers envisioned it in specific?

Sub questions:

- How did the Nazi-party look at the role of women within society between 1933 and 1945?
- How was propaganda used by the Nazi-party and how effective was it?
- How have posters been used in the existing literature?
- How was femininity represented in the 25 selected posters from before the wartime in Nazi-Germany?
- How was femininity represented in the 25 selected posters from during the wartime in Nazi-Germany?
- Did the representation of femininity in the selected posters change over time, and if so, how?

3. Key concepts

The following section will give the theoretical framework and terms. It is of importance to explain the main concepts and give their definitions and contexts, since they will be used throughout this thesis.

3.1. Gender and sex

A good definition and distinction of what is seen as “female” and “femininity”, or more general, “sex” and “gender”, is in order. Sociologist Jena Zarza argues how sex and gender need to have a clear definition when discussing feminism and gender issues. Zarza states that the concepts of what is seen as sex and gender has changed over time. The most recent, useful, and relevant definitions are as follows. Sex is based on a binary system that encompasses the categories of male and female, which can be traced back to genitalia, hormones, or brain chemistry. This does not reflect the actual diversity in bodies, the agency to change the body, or the interaction between biological and social facts that play out on the body.⁵ Gender is used to describe performances of femininity, masculinity, or androgyny.⁶ Gender is therefore linked to appearance, certain attitudes, and behaviors, whilst sex is linked to the physical body. Sex and gender are strongly connected, with the outward gender display allowing the social world to categorize sex based on gender (performances).⁷ This thesis does not per se lay focus on the female body itself, but on what is seen as feminine. The Nazi-ideology on how females should act and what is seen as the duty of women within society –or: the ideal type according to the Nazis of female behavior and appearance– is central in this thesis. It must be noted that, since these terms were only introduced in the 1970s, the Nazi-Germans did and could not have used these terms or used this paradigm.⁸ The Nazi-Germans would have described femininity as ‘ideal female behavior’, whilst femininity nowadays is defined by ‘gender’. In essence they are the same, although the term connected to this ideal female behavior was then unknown.

⁵ Jena Amber Zarza, “Representations of Feminist Theory and Gender Issues in Introductory-Level Sociology Textbooks,” (Dissertation, Portland State University, 2018), 7.

⁶ Zarza, “Representations of Feminist Theory and Gender Issues,” 8.

⁷ Ibid., 8.

⁸ Ibid., 8-9.; Zarza argues that the earliest this term is used, is by Sandra Bem in 1974.

3.2. Representation, ideology and propaganda

Historian Christopher Prendergast names two kinds of representation. One where a presence cites or quotes to something not there but assumed to be authentic and (physically) real, and therefore potentially present. Here, a particular representation can make something visible or audible in the present, accommodating both time and space –think per example of a radiobroadcast. The other kind of representation is a substitution for something or someone, mostly seen in language and politics. This sense of representation allows a term, image, or agent to substitute. Think per example of politicians: they represent (the political agenda of) their party, not just themselves.⁹ In this thesis the second kind of representation of Prendergast is used: a (visual) representation of a notion, or even more than ‘just’ an idea: the vision of the ideal gender performances, an ideology. Posters are the vessels that visualize the Nazi-ideals to the public but are not a direct representation of the Nazi-ideals itself. As will be pointed out in chapter 4.3, posters could and did not directly show these ideals, other factors needed to be taken into account for propaganda to be most effective. Therefore, posters are a representation of the Nazi-ideals as set out by the policymakers, being shown just so that they would be accepted and ultimately adopted by the German public, easing them into their ideals rather than forcing them.

Distinguished professor of Creative Practice Jen Webb looks at how to better understand representation and how representation plays a part in the conducting or the altering of public opinion. She delves into how representation plays a part in the cultural (or: consciousness) industries; “the industry sector that produces and disseminates commodities that sell ways of thinking, ways of seeing, ways of talking about the world”.¹⁰ Webb argues media products are influential for two main reasons: they consciously make meanings and ways of seeing the world, and because their images, stories and messages are repeated time and time again by individuals, shows, products, and of course the media.¹¹ To quote Webb:

“Tim O’Sullivan and colleagues define ideology as ‘the practice of reproducing social relations of inequality within the sphere of signification and discourse’; but it is more than just reproducing these social relations of inequality. It is also a matter of coding reality so that the ideas-becoming-ideology seem both natural and inevitable. [...] It not a matter of convincing

⁹ Christopher Prendergast, *The Triangle of Representation* (Columbia University Press, 2000), 4-5.

¹⁰ Jen Webb, *Understanding Representation: Understanding Contemporary Culture* (Los Angeles: SAGE, 2009), 107.

¹¹ Webb, *Understanding Representation*, 116.

people or forcing people, but of offering only one reality, and offering it so often, and in so many ways and places, that it seems almost impossible to think in any other way.”¹²

This creation of “one way of thinking”, can be connected to discourse. Cultural historian and sociologist Stuart Hall defines discourse as a representation of a certain kind of knowledge about a topic. Discourse can be conducted in lots of ways, think per example of language, films, portraits, and books. These representations conduct a discourse, which defines how this certain topic is seen.¹³ So, discourse is not (necessarily) based on objectivity or the truth, but on that what is *believed*, what is collectively accepted and ultimately *seen* as the truth –the “one way of thinking” as discussed by O’Sullivan. Discourse is therefore connected to power. When discourse is used to shape public opinion and to justify certain actions and ways of thinking from a top-down structure, it functions as a ‘regime of truth’.¹⁴

As can be seen in the section above, representation is strongly aligned and can be an active part of conducting a discourse. It is now pointed out how a ‘regime of truth’ is connected to propaganda. The dictionary gives the easiest definition of propaganda:

“Information, ideas, opinions, or images, often only giving one part of an argument, that are broadcast, published, or in some other way spread with the intention of influencing people’s opinions.”¹⁵

This is however too broad and simplified for academic research. According to historian Aristotle Kallis propaganda did not simply provide information; it had a wide variety of functions – many of which were on behalf of its recipients. It is intended to respond to fundamental societal needs, such as guidance, integration, correlation, motivation and mobilization, continuity, adaptation, and even diversion and relaxation. Propaganda can therefore, especially when issued from a top-down structure, be used in the mobilization of the population and moreover, control their ways of thinking and doing.¹⁶ Propaganda is covered more excessively in the historiography; this however is the basic definition used in this thesis and already points out how propaganda and ideology are possibly linked. The power of repetition in media representations is fuel for propaganda, which ultimately would lead to –

¹² Ibid., 117.

¹³ Stuart Hall, “The West and the Rest: Discourse and Power,” in *Essential Essays, Volume 2: Identity and Diaspora*, ed. David Morley (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019), 201.

¹⁴ Hall, “The West and the Rest,” 205, 208.

¹⁵ “Meaning of PROPAGANDA in English,” Cambridge Dictionary, accessed on January 2, 2023, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/propaganda>.

¹⁶ Aristotle A. Kallis, *Nazi Propaganda and the Second World War* (New York: Palgrave MacMillan, 2005), 1-2.

especially when steered from a top-down structure, which is the case in the Nazi-German context— a ‘regime of truth’.

4. Historiography

4.1. Ideal femininity and female behavior

According to feminist historian Leila J. Rupp the complex image of women in Nazi ideology has largely been overlooked by historians.¹⁷ Rupp looks at how women and men were clearly seen as two separated and immiscible spheres. As Nazi-leader and Minister of Propaganda Joseph Goebbels stated: woman should be at the heart of family life, bearing children and bringing forth the Aryan population, whilst men should be strong fighters and workers.¹⁸ In the family as depicted in Nazi ideology, a woman's first and foremost duty was to be a mother; of both the family as the Aryan, German race.¹⁹ To encourage this, the government set out marriage loans which enabled women to stay at home where they could focus on being a mother and housewife, taking care of the domestic chores.²⁰

The employment of married women was generally considered harmful to the family and national population policy; only unmarried women were therefore encouraged to work, but just “womanly work” where they could employ their “spiritual maternity”. Female employment became of great importance after the outbreak of the war. It was wrapped up nicely by the Nazis, claiming “everything must be subordinated to the profit of the people”.²¹ Rupp claims that unquestionably women played a minor role in both the Nazi party and the state, but historians failed to see why the Nazi-ideology was attractive to women: it gave them a key role in societal and homely life.²² Rupp states that even though it all seemed gloomy for women, they were not frail and helpless; women were also meant to be strong, athletic, able to do hard, physical work, and at all times meeting the needs of the state. So ultimately, how women were viewed within Nazi-ideology was flexible; appealing to both the conservatives with women as mothers, but also offered younger women an active role within society and rejected the

¹⁷ Leila J. Rupp, “Mother of the ‘Volk’: The Image of Women in Nazi Ideology,” *Signs* 3, no. 2 (1977): 362.

¹⁸ Rupp, “Mother of the ‘Volk’”, 365,367.

¹⁹ Therefore, the government outlawed abortion and strongly advertised against the contraceptives for healthy Aryans, controlling the female body.

²⁰ Rupp, “Mother of the ‘Volk’”, 371.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 375.

²² *Ibid.*, 375.; The book by historian Vandana Joshi is interesting and makes a similar argument, but in a different context. It talks about the political power that women *did* enjoy; how little it may have been. Joshi looks at how, by the status of women in their neighborhoods and local communities, they were the most visible and active denouncers. Women used their designated role to assert power over their realm of influence, using said power to their own agenda, securing their role in their homes and neighborhoods.; Vandana Joshi, *Gender and Power in the Third Reich: Female Denouncers and the Gestapo (1933-45)*, (New York: Palgrave, Macmillan, 2003), 197.

“bourgeois” life whilst offering security in –from a conservative and nationalist point of view– a world gone mad.²³

Historian Charu Gupta contrasts this notion of female freedom and power, by stating that oppression of women in Nazi Germany was the most extreme case of anti-feminism in the 20th century.²⁴ In the 1920s and 1930s women were removed by the Nazis from the political and economic life, reversing the gains women had made since the 1860s feminist movement.²⁵ During the war the need rose to employ women; this was directly clashing with the firm Nazi view on women according to Gupta. Therefore, public opinion needed to change. According to Gupta this was done by using propaganda. When using popular media for public consumption, sudden and temporary changes without challenging traditional assumptions could take place. The Nazi image of women thus remained relatively stable, but the ‘ideal’ was altered: common before the individual good was now key.²⁶

Germany however failed to mobilize a female labor force during the war, especially compared to Britain and the USA. In Germany it only rose with 1% between 1939 and 1945. Concrete numbers are however not included by Gupta. One of the main explanations Gupta gives for this rise is that Nazi propaganda expressed great concern with protecting women from psychological or mental strain that might endanger them as mothers –and therefore the future German race. All this resulted in a confused government policy towards the mobilizing of women and an absence of concrete and coherent propaganda campaigns. Moreover, Germany lacked something the USA and Britain did have: an equal pay policy for men and women during the war.²⁷ Gupta concludes that –with the use of propaganda– public images could be altered in moments of crisis but did not bring any major change. The dominating imagery remained of women’s place at home.²⁸

Historian Jill Stephenson argues that women were not initially seen as essential for the war-effort: up until November 1941 the Germans were convinced nothing could go wrong and the war would be won. Women could stay comfortably at home, bearing children and running the household.²⁹ This idea only changed after the Wehrmacht failed to capture Moscow, proving the war was not easily won at all. Defeat became a real possibility. It was according to

²³ Rupp, “Mother of the ‘Volk’”, 378-379.; Rupp does not use primary sources when discussing the war propaganda but does look at statements and quotes from German leaders, books and female oppositionist.

²⁴ Charu Gupta, “Politics of Gender: Women in Nazi Germany,” *Economic and Political Weekly* 26, no. 17 (1991): 40.

²⁵ Gupta, “Politics of Gender,” 42.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 43.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 44.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 46.

²⁹ Jill Stephenson, *The Nazi Organisation of Women* (London: Croom Helm, 1981), 130, 178.

Stephenson only after then that it was asked of women to contribute and help war efforts more actively.³⁰

Historian Sharon Ringel studies collective memory, looking at the representation of the female body in the official Nazi women's magazine, the *NS FrauenWarte*. Ringel studies 77 magazines, published between 1934 and 1944. Ringel concludes how the Nazi ideology is both dynamic and complex. A very interesting argument Ringel makes is how, in the magazines she studied, the family institutions were *not* sacred to the Nazi ideology; rather, the Nazi women experienced some freedom of choice, as long as their body was the Nazi ideal; producing children remained their main objective and purpose. Women should be strong; power was emphasized to show that teamwork and group effort was needed to achieve the collective state goals.³¹ Women in *NS FrauenWarte* were shown as workers in a wartime industry since 1936; this did not align with their ideals about femininity, but the Nazis needed to come to terms with necessity.³² This necessity is also already pointed out by both Gupta and Rupp.

Historian Claudia Koonz talks about the economic necessity of women's employment. Koonz makes the argument that 'strong' families and motherhood made a revival during the Nazi-regime, showing "more feminine women" in their propaganda. Mothers could stay at home only as long as the economy and state could allow them. Women's employment was eventually deemed necessary after the outbreak of the war according to Koonz, only after then women were implored to take on jobs. It became obvious that the ideal woman cultivated flexibility, rather than any specific skills so that she could leave the workplace and return to homemaking.³³ Hitler replaced family consideration with national needs according to Koonz, with the National Socialists introducing the slogan "tradition does not mean stagnation, but duty", stretching the argument how duty was putting the collective before the individual good. Koonz however discusses a contradiction; since 1933, the number of working women had actually grown, but were ushered in certain 'feminine' jobs and were paid considerably less than men. For example: in 1935 600.000 more women were working than in 1932. This was due to the rising availability of 'feminine' jobs like nursing and teaching.³⁴

³⁰ Jill Stephenson, *Women in Nazi Society* (London: Croom Helm, 1975), 181-183.

³¹ Sharon Ringel, "Representations of the German Woman's Body in the Official Nazi Women's Magazine," *Feminist Media Studies* 20 nr. 2 (17 februari 2020): 252.

³² Ringel, "Representations of the German Woman's Body," 253.

³³ Claudia Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland: Women, the Family and Nazi Politics* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1987), 179.

³⁴ Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland*, 198.

The term most fitting describing the Nazi ideology concerning the role of women in society and the definition of gender, is the term used by historian Annemarie Tröger; elastic ideology.³⁵ The ideal ideology according to Nazi-policy was not 'set', but constantly meeting the nation needs. Gupta however argues that there was no elastic ideology amongst the German public, but a set vision of women as mother and housewives. Hence, women were not successfully mobilized, with propaganda being unable to alter this set vision.

4.2. Women in a regime ruled by biopolitics

The elastic ideology of Nazi Germany is based on the needs of the state; thus, the state needs their population to act accordingly, providing for the state interests. The Nazi control over gender roles, appearance and behavior is a form of biopolitics, although this term is barely used by the authors in this historiography. The National Socialist power rested –at least for a big part– on race superiority, along with a power division between the two sexes. Renowned philosopher Michael Foucault coined the term biopower. He considers this the relation between power and violence; ultimately determining who are worthy of life, and who are not. Foucault named Nazi-Germany as one of the clearest examples, with the Aryans most worthy of live, and races like the Jews least worthy. This resulted in institutionalized racism, meaning antisemitism, and the need for a biological pure, worthy and healthy race –the Aryan race. The Nazi-regime had the power of life and death, the right to take life and to let live. Moreover, exercising biopower meant taking control over life by managing and enhancing it.³⁶ This did not only mean nationalized racism, but also the control over the lives of the “good” Germans.³⁷ Women were therefore of dire importance to the Nazi-regime; they were the creators of the “good” race and life. Women therefore needed to be mothers, bringing forth lots of offspring. This accordingly meant the sustaining of the worthy race.

Although not mentioned by Foucault, Tröger describes that the Nazi use of biopower also meant the establishing of gender roles and behaviors. Control over women was needed to make the Nazi agenda successful, constantly reminding that women were 'below' men, with

³⁵ Renate Bridenthal, Atina Grossman, *When Biology Became Destiny : Women in Weimar and Nazi Germany*. New Feminist Library (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1984), 237.

³⁶ Michael Foucault, “Society Must Be Defended : Lectures at the College de France, 1975-1976,” translated by David Macey (New York: Picador, 1997).

³⁷ Deepa Bhandaru, “Is White Normativity Racist? Michel Foucault and Post-Civil Rights Racism,” *Polity* 45, no. 2 (2013): 228.

femininity and women, and masculine and men in two separate, non-miscible spheres.³⁸ Women were discouraged to get a higher education and climbing the career ladder like men could and should. Women's sole focus should be motherhood. This justified that women were paid less, were kept unskilled and were only considered temporary workers, making them ineligible for social insurance. Tröger calls this the –already mentioned– elastic ideology, constantly meeting the demands of (the capitalist economy and) the Nazi state.³⁹

Historian George Lachman Mosse wrote about the Nazi ideals on womanhood. Even though his work is prior to the introduction of the terms 'gender', 'sex', and Foucaults 'biopower', it proved to be strongly aligned with them. Mosse states that the man was always the master; it was he who determined the course of politics, law, and indeed of *all* public affairs.⁴⁰ The ideal type of the 'new fascist man' or the German Aryan is defined by Mosse as a stereotype where the human body is central, emphasizing its virtues. The strong male body was modelled on the harmonious form of Greek sculptures.⁴¹ The female stereotype on the other hand was ideally clean and beautiful, and as close to nature as possible; women were to be natural and hygienic; meaning that beauty was determined on the naturalness of women –so without cosmetics or beauty products–, and gymnastics and exercise. Women should be innocent, move gracefully and have fit, fertile bodies.⁴² The woman's sphere was the family, it was her duty to safeguard this cell from which the race has its being.⁴³ The Nazi ideal of womanhood was based on traditionalism: to "pursue the ideal of the Germanic race" (which in reality meant the embracing of bourgeois ideals already founded in the nineteenth century), the German women simply needed to be devoted housewives and mothers who lives solely for her family and behaves dutifully toward her husband.⁴⁴ Sex became state property in Nazi-Germany, all in their pursuit of racial purity. It was than of no surprise that the elastic Nazi ideology always placed women central in family life, women were after all key in the (re)production of the 'good' German race.

Historian Gisela Bock looks at the increasingly rigid ideology of racism and how (race) hygiene and sexism denied German women the control over their own body.⁴⁵ This meant that

³⁸ Bridenthal, *When Biology Became Destiny*, 237-238.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 237.

⁴⁰ George Lachman Mosse, *Nazi Culture : Intellectual, Cultural, and Social Life in the Third Reich* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1966), 20.

⁴¹ George Lachman Mosse, "Fascist Aesthetics and Society: Some Considerations," *Journal of Contemporary History* Vol. 31, No. 2, Special Issue: The Aesthetics of Fascism (April 1996): 247.

⁴² Mosse, "Fascist Aesthetics and Society," 250.

⁴³ Mosse, *Nazi Culture*, 20.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁴⁵ Bridenthal, *When Biology Became Destiny*, 271.

inferior races should be sterilized and prevented from having children, whilst abortions and birth control became illegal for Aryan women.⁴⁶ It was not the Nazi-ideals of women being mothers that resulted in the rise of childbirth after 1933, but the control over the female body and contraceptives.⁴⁷ Gupta wrote that the Nazi control over the female body, racism, and sexism are closely connected in the Nazi-regime. There was an extreme separation between the female and the male sphere, with men as (physically) strong and women as weaker and subordinate.⁴⁸

Historian Robert G. Moeller discusses how Nazi policies constantly reminded women that ‘biology was destiny’, reinforcing patriarchal families benefiting men. The Nazis preferred women to choose for a married, domestic life instead of a career. There was a clear division of labor, assigning homemaking and child-care to women. Contrary to Koonz, Moeller argues opportunities and access to new jobs did not expand much for women between 1933 and 1939; the Nazi-regime prohibited employment in some occupations and greatly restricting access to others by limiting entry into higher education –except for professions in teaching and nursing. National Socialist rhetoric criticizes married women whose employment allegedly gave families an extra wage and took away jobs from men.⁴⁹ This led to women responding unenthusiastically to the Nazi appeals to enter the wage-labor force, rather relying on the allowances granted to military dependents. The National Socialist therefore imported unfree foreign workers to take on the jobs that the women rather stayed clear of, despite the Nazi attempts to civil mobilization.⁵⁰ Moellers statement is in line with Gaptas argument on the confused government policy and absence of concerted propaganda campaigns, leading to the failure of female mobilization, strengthening, and complementing each other.⁵¹

4.3. Effectiveness of propaganda

German studies professor Dagmar C.G. Lorenz claimed that “Nazi posters, novels, newspapers, and pamphlets [...] inundated the public sphere with inflammatory messages.”⁵² Yet, Lorenz

⁴⁶ Abortions were only granted under very specific circumstances, like when the fetus was likely to be mentally or physically disabled, or when the woman was raped. Abortions were however barely granted to Aryan women.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 273, 277.

⁴⁸ Gupta, “Politics of Gender,” 41-42.

⁴⁹ Robert G. Moeller, *Protecting Motherhood: Women and the Family in the Politics of Postwar West Germany* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1993), 17.

⁵⁰ Moeller, *Protecting Motherhood*, 20.

⁵¹ Gupta, “Politics of Gender,” 44.

⁵² Dagmar C. G. Lorenz, *Nazi Characters in German Propaganda and Literature*. *Studia Imagologica*, 24 (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2018), 11.

does not include a primary source analysis in her research about posters and focusses on literature. Therefore, this statement is striking for some negative reasons. No examples are shown or talked about, nor is a good substation or reference included that backs up her statement. This raises the question how propaganda was used by the Nazi-party, what was shown and ultimately, with what effect.

Sociologist Julius Yourman writes about how the Nazis used propoganda in attempts to coordinate all avenues of communication: wanting to create one voice, will and opinion within the public mind. Authority flowed from the top down, where the German population became and was kept blind, instantly, and unquestioningly obedient to the Nazi-regime.⁵³ Yourman states that love of the home and motherhood were exploited in the German media and encouraged women to accept the form of living the National Socialist program required of them. German boys and men were taught an attitude of superiority over women, where militarism is glorified with war as heroic and thrilling.⁵⁴ Yourmans aim was to show the power but also danger of propoganda: it helped a leader not just obtaining ultimate power, but also maintaining and even extending it.⁵⁵

The book by historian Robert Edwin Herzstein *The War That Hitler Won: Nazi Propaganda* makes the argument that Hitler was successful in the mobilization of the German civil community (and military) by the usage of propoganda. Remarkably is that Herzstein talks about the usage and effectiveness of posters in campaigns. Posters contained striking colors, brilliant drawings, and outrageous satire; Hitler's enemies were evil, with Hitler himself as Germany's savior and avenging angel. Posters were also easily accessible, freely seen by anyone and everyone at any given time, making them useful and relatively cheap. Posters appeared everywhere: on kiosks, windows of party offices and civilians, and advertising columns. These posters and placards had simple themes, but their appeal was always to two powerful emotions: hatred and idealism.⁵⁶ The aim of placards had to be to make the enemy look brutal, for you gained nothing in a life-or-death struggle by making him small and ridiculous. The posters also made use of slogans, which were used time and time again in music,

⁵³ Julius Yourman, "Propaganda Techniques Within Nazi Germany," *The Journal of Educational Sociology* 13, no. 3 (1939): 148

⁵⁴ Yourman, "Propaganda Techniques Within Nazi German," 153.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 148-149.

⁵⁶ Robert Edwin Herzstein, *The War that Hitler Won: Nazi Propaganda* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1978), 198.

leaflets, posters, in speeches and other forms of media. This helped in creating a coherent and uniform public opinion.⁵⁷

A totally different voice can be heard from historian David Welch, who raises the question if it is possible to talk of a uniform public opinion in the Third Reich, and how the Nazi-regime attempted to influence such opinion with propaganda. Welch argues that the 'national' or 'people's' community (*Volksgemeinschaft*) proved to be key in the revolutionary aims of the Nazi-regime, illustrating the remarkably ambitious nature of propaganda.⁵⁸ Propaganda presented the 'true' German values, but just how effective was the Nazi attempt in establishing their ideals through the use of propaganda?

Welch claims that propaganda can only be successful when already accosting attitudes and opinions are exploited; propaganda gives force and direction to the successive movements of popular desire and feeling; it does *not* create a totally new movement. To think of the German population as a tabula rasa is too simple.⁵⁹ The Nazi-party knew this, therefore basing their ideology and ideals on national history. Welch states that the *völkisch* doctrine essentially was a product of late eighteenth-century romanticism. Welch names four major themes that recur in Nazi-propaganda: 1) the appeal to national unity based upon the principle 'the community before the individual' (*Volksgemeinschaft*); 2) the need for racial purity; 3) a hatred of enemies which increasingly centered on Jews and Bolsheviks; and 4) a charismatic leadership (*Führerprinzip*). Establishing these four aims was useful in the wartime in order to maintain the morale of both the military and the civil population.⁶⁰ Especially in point 1 instructions could be seen; what was the government doing and why, what the Germans should do, but foremost *why* it was needed to require total support of the civil population. Propaganda wanted to forge a bond that cemented the German individuals to the new, all-embracing ethnic community of the Third Reich. Social welfare services like the *National-socialistische Volkswohlfahrt* (NSV), *Kraft durch Freude* (KdF) and the Winter Aid were of importance in creating the *Volksgemeinschaft*.⁶¹

There were existing grievances dating from *before* 1933 like low wages, long working days and the unavailability of consumer good. By eliminating opposition by censorship and through the Nazis unipolar political power, it became impossible for discontent to mobilize.

⁵⁷ Herzstein, *The War that Hitler Won*, 199.

⁵⁸ David Welch, "Nazi Propaganda and the Volksgemeinschaft: Constructing a People's Community," *Journal of Contemporary History* 39, no. 2 (2004): 213.

⁵⁹ Welch, "Nazi Propaganda and the Volksgemeinschaft," 215-216.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 217.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 218-219.

The Nazis monopolized media –controlling and shaping it. The grievances and hatred were cleverly diverted into turning the public frustrations and grievances into attacks on the Jews. Propaganda was according to Welch not used for creating new paradigms but functioned more as a lightning rod. Moreover, the German civil population was not successfully convinced to choose state interest rather than personal, and utilized the Nazi-utilities to their own gain and advancements. The (social welfare) organizations were successful in creating a sense of belonging, giving the individual the feeling of inclusion and togetherness, with ultimately the effect of sacrificing the suspension of critical judgement and passively going along with the organizations.⁶² The feeling of ‘belonging’ to a community was a driving force according to Welch in the creation of the *Volksgemeinschaft*, propaganda was however unsuccessful in the creation of total mobilization. The individual good proved too important to totally and fully act in state interest. Welch concludes that Hitler’s propaganda campaigns were therefore, in fact, *not* as successful as claimed by Herzstein.⁶³

Historian Ian Kershaw makes a similar argument as Welch, countering the notion that Hitler “won” the propaganda war. Kershaw names Herzstein’s book and uses it as his basis to argue the question how effective Nazi propaganda was. Kershaw says this question is hard to answer. Firstly, he argues it is impossible to measure public opinion, and secondly that the propaganda proved to be quite unsuccessful in the boosting of the morale during the war. The war-efforts were going on longer than first anticipated, resulting in a state of despair after 1941. Propaganda failed to boost moral back up again, unable to rekindle the fighting spirit.⁶⁴

Kershaw categorized the aims of propaganda into specific themes and leitmotifs and considers them within the framework of four distinct spheres of propaganda influence. These spheres are: 1) areas where propaganda could readily build upon already generally accepted valued, ideological predisposing and dominant opinion; 2) areas where propaganda encountered no pre-existent consensus and had to try to manufacture one; 3) areas of heavy prejudice premised on widespread ignorance, where propaganda largely functioned in a vacuum; and 4) areas where propaganda ran up against strong counter-opinion and disbelief.⁶⁵ Kershaw uses these aims and their spheres to analyze how effective the Nazi propaganda was in the (re)forming of the public opinion. According to him, the central aim of German propaganda before 1939 had been to prepare the German people psychologically for war. It was effective

⁶² Ibid., 236-238.

⁶³ Ibid., 238.

⁶⁴ Ian Kershaw, “How effective was Nazi propaganda?” in *Nazi Propaganda: the Power and the Limitations*, ed. David Welch (Totowa: Barnes & Noble Books, 1983), 180-181.

⁶⁵ Kershaw, “How effective was Nazi propaganda?”, 183.

in persuading people –that did not need much convincing anyway– that Germany’s revisionist claims were justified. Germany was threatened from all sides. Should it come to war, the fault would not be Germany’s. It was believed by the Nazis that a sense of grim determination of being ready to fight was widespread amongst the population. This proved untrue: people were not as enthusiastic to the territorial expansion of the Sudetenland and the Saar territory as the Nazis hoped, and peace negotiations like the Munich conference of September 1938 were received with elation.⁶⁶ From September 1939 the chief aim of propaganda became the preservation of morale during the war. In this aim propaganda encountered growing failure. Distrust of German propaganda, coupled with boredom at its dull monotony, paved the way even in the period of German military triumph of the later drastic collapse of confidence. The reason why Germany fought till the bitter end is complex according to Kershaw: it had however little to do with the possible success of propaganda.⁶⁷

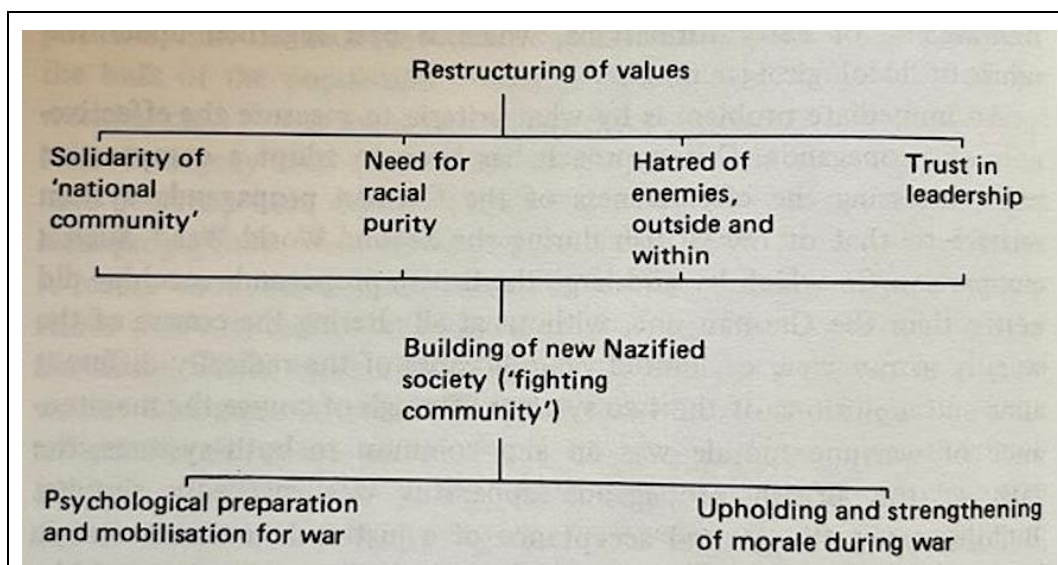


Figure 1. Nazi propaganda aims.

Source: Ian Kershaw, “How effective was Nazi propaganda?” in *Nazi Propaganda: the Power and the Limitations*, ed. David Welch (Totowa: Barnes & Noble Books, 1983), 182.

In figure 1, the framework set out by Kershaw and Welch is given. This will also be used for looking at themes in the selected primary sources for this thesis. Historian Alice Weinreb gives another theme, pointing out the Nazi-propaganda argued the Allied forces wanted to starve out the German population in order to win the war. The blame for the hunger was shifted to the

⁶⁶ Ibid., 200.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 201.

Jews, after unsuccessfully blaming it on the Allied.⁶⁸ Hunger on a national scale occurred mostly after 1942, but not –directly– by consequence of Allied actions. The true crux lay at the dramatic drop of agricultural activity, the reduction of international trade and the late introduction of a tight rationing system for both the civil population as the army.⁶⁹ The introduction of food stamps prevented hoarding and the piling up of goods and supplies in the wealthy layer of the population. Drastic measures and rationing only occurred after 1942, after the Third Reich lost ground in eastern Europe; Germanys biggest grain provider.⁷⁰

Historian Jay W. Baird talks about propaganda, without specifying on posters. Baird mainly talks about battles and military events and how these were shown and advertised, and how the “status” of the war was brought to the public. According to Baird there were two mayor themes in propaganda: anti-Bolshevism (also anti-Marxism), and antisemitism. The international Jew and Russian bolshevist both had the same drive and goal according to the Nazi propaganda; to control the world. These were two main enemies that Hitler was fighting; the inferior races that needed to be exterminated, and the enemies attacking Germany from the West (mostly Britain) and the East (the Bolshevist Russians).⁷¹ This aligns with the idea that Germany was threatened and later attacked from all sides as argued by Kershaw.

What all authors however fail to cover, is the effectiveness of propaganda in terms of altering opinions on femininity. Only Stephenson argues how propaganda is used in the forming of the opinion, actions and behavior of women in specific. She names that radio, press and posters were the most useful ways of reaching women in the propaganda culture. She argues that this kind of propaganda was easily accessible; it was not needed to go to a cinema or buy a book, it could be displayed in public places where women would come anyways to socialize or for their domestic tasks. The primary task that propaganda had set out for itself, was to remind women to think of the collective good.⁷² Stephenson argues that women (or, households) wealthy enough to buy new clothes or “rich” food like meat and fish, were not successfully inclined or tempted in economizing after the war broke out. She argues that propaganda failed to make the German housewife identify with a cause which was not in her interests. Stephenson names the unsuccessful mobilization of women in recycling and donating old fabrics and iron

⁶⁸ Alice Weinreb, “‘For the Hungry Have No Past nor Do They Belong to a Political Party’: Debates over German Hunger after World War II,” *Central European History* 45, no. 1 (2012): 57.

⁶⁹ Weinreb, “‘For the Hungry Have No Past,” 57-58.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 77.

⁷¹ Jay W. Baird, *The Mythical World of Nazi War Propaganda, 1939-1945* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1974), 9.

⁷² Jill Stephenson, “Propaganda, Autarky and the German Housewife” in *Nazi Propaganda: the Power and the Limitations*, ed. David Welch (Totowa: Barnes & Noble Books, 1983), 135.

to the state, but rather tossing them out and buying new ones if they could afford it. This proved the wickedness of the cause and the natural limits which are inevitable to the power of propaganda.⁷³

As can be seen in the statements of the discussed scholars, it is unclear just how effective posters –or in more general, propaganda– were, if this can even be measured. One thing is however certain: the Nazi-regime and party used propaganda as a tool to shape and alter the public opinion for their gain. Furthermore, both public opinion and a regime of truth are influenced in lots of ways, not just by posters or propaganda in general. In short: there is no empirical framework that might prove the effectiveness of propaganda. The most striking however is that none of the authors discuss the representation of females in the propaganda itself, nor the possible change in femininity in this.

4.4. Usage of propaganda posters in existing literature

The statement by Lorenz about the inflammatory messages of propaganda without including a primary source or sources, raises another question.⁷⁴ In the existing literature, it is striking that structured primary source analyses remain absent –apart from the research by Ringel, who uses magazines. When posters are included in the other literature, it is to strengthen and back-up the statements made in the text, not the other way around. This is problematic. Using primary sources that are favorable for one’s argumentation, conducting biased research for the most favorable results, or even choosing primary sources afterwards to back-up one’s argumentation, is called cherry-picking. This is unfavorable in *any* research. The best way to avoid it, is to use a big(ger) sample –preferable data mining a large data set– prior to drawing a conclusion, and to be skeptical to existing literature which use similar or the same sources. Employment scholar Kevin R. Murphy and professor of management Herman Aguinis say that if it seems too good to be true, it probably is.⁷⁵ On that account, the existing literature needs to be evaluated with skepticism, asking the critical question how posters are used in one’s work and argumentation.

⁷³ Stephon, “Propaganda, Autarky and the German Housewife,” 138.

⁷⁴ Lorenz, *Nazi Characters in German Propaganda and Literature*, 11.; see also the introduction of chapter 4.3.

⁷⁵ Kevin R. Murphy, Herman Aguinis, “HARKing: How Badly Can Cherry-Picking and Question Trolling Produce Bias in Published Results?” *Journal of Business and Psychology* 34, no. 1 (2019): 9, 12.; In their article, the authors look at economical –and therefore, quantitative– datasets, but argue that harking and cherry-picking is to be avoided in *any* primary source analysis.

Literary researchers Peter Brommer et al. compiled a book which covers 86 posters from 1914 to 2000, with 21 posters published between 1934 and 1945.⁷⁶ The posters are placed chronically and are given historical context, with the main aim to give a chronological overview, pointing out the (at least in the eyes of Brommer) most noteworthy events and developments of the Rhein territory. The posters used are either published, about or hung in the Rhein territory. Only the inventory of the Koblenz State Main Archive was used: this guaranteed the authors that the posters had a connection to the Middle-Rhine territory.⁷⁷ Brommer choose to use posters for conducting the timeline, due to the importance of posters in the last hundred years.

“The state probably had always seen importance in the control over and of billboards and posters, as tools in the forming of public opinion. Advertising columns in public places were an effective way of displaying propaganda. Take for example the Rheinprovinz, which had 1481 columns in 1914, and 7838 in 1937.”⁷⁸

Only two of Brommers selected posters show women. One depicting a stern and skinny looking woman, who after constantly complaining about the state turned bitter and sour.⁷⁹ The other poster is the one about the destruction of towns and cities due to the bombardments at the end of the war. This poster is issued by the NSV, showing a crying woman in agony, having one hand on her face and in her other arm holding a girl with her eyes closed, gravely injured and bleeding from her face, possibly dead. The poster is from 1944 and indicates the need of evacuation of children to safer places; if this is not done, children get hurt or even die.⁸⁰

When selecting the 86 pieces, the authors attempted to document distinctive individual themes and important developments, considering the range of different forms of public announcements.⁸¹ In this book, cherry-picking is visible; the posters needed to align with the selected historical developments, using just one poster per event. It is not discussed which posters are not included and why, which other historical developments are not covered and why, and what other themes and patterns are visible in the (other) posters of the Koblenz State Main Archive.

⁷⁶ The book is written in German but was still very accessible, also for people with mediocre German language skills. This is thanks to that most of its content is posters.

⁷⁷ Peter Brommer, Achim Krümmel, Wolfram Werner, *Geschichte Plakat: Das 20 Jahrhundert am Mittelrhein in Plakaten und Flufglättern* (Neuwied: Görres Verlag, 2002), 8.

⁷⁸ Brommer, *Geschichte Plakat*, 8-9.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 88-89.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 108-109.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 8.

Welch uses nine posters which are of relevance for his text; an excessive primary source analysis remains absent. Posters are not central, but propaganda in general is covered. The poster ‘Strenght through Joy’ is included, showing a happy man and wife on a cheap package-holiday.⁸² Welch also includes a poster of a couple who saved up for a Volkswagen, showing a woman happily waving her arm out of the ‘roof’ from the cabrio from the passenger seat, whilst the man is driving.⁸³ These two posters are used in Welch argument about how it was crucial for Hitler to disband trade unions and form his own, NSDAP-oriented labor groups; showing happy couples who enjoyed the services the Nazis provided.⁸⁴ Welch also includes two posters that are selected for this research–1.1 and 1.7–, making the argument that stereotypes emerged in propaganda. The Nazi writers and designers wanted to make the argument that the Aryan race was the purest, with inward qualities that intrinsically linked to the external appearance. This is shown by the idealization of the blonde Nordic stereotype (later also named ‘Aryan stereotype’), described by race theorist as “blond, tall, long-skulled, with narrow faces, pronounced chins, narrow noses with high bridges, soft fair hair, widely spaced pale-colored eyes, and a pink-white skin”. Not surprisingly, this limited the range of subjects that could be depicted: the virtues of the peasantry symbolized the importance of the doctrine of ‘blood and soil’, usually in the form of some idyllic pastoral setting since urban and industrial life did not correspond to such a utopian vision. This was accompanied either by lantern-jawed troopers in helmets and with clenched hands and swastika banners, or by showing the animate beauty of the Nordic racial type.⁸⁵ Welch does not look at how femininity is shown, nor does he talk about how and from where his primary sources were selected.

A book that used posters as its main body, is the one by historian Susan Bachrach. Her book is published in conjunction with the exhibition *State of Deception: the Power of Nazi Propaganda* at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, Washington D.C., running from January 2009 to October 2011, showing the items on display in this exhibition.⁸⁶ This book does not go into depth about the German society or public opinion, but more about the military campaigns and the different timeframes within the war. Very few posters have women on them, just one of them would be of relevance in the context of this research; Sieg oder Boslchewismus –poster 2.20 in my dataset. This is however not used to look at femininity, but

⁸² David Welch, *The Third Reich: Politics and Propaganda* (London: Routlegde, 2002), 62.

⁸³ Welch, *The Third Reich*, 64.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, 66.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 84.

⁸⁶ Susan Bachrach, *State of Deception: The Power of Nazi Propaganda* (Washington D.C.: United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 2011), 1-5.

to argue how at the end of the war and after the struggling warfare (especially the east front) the main theme in German propaganda became focused on what would happen to Germany in the event of defeat, trying to rekindle and uphold the fighting spirit.⁸⁷ Bachrach's book does not conduct research, it rather shows the most striking and interesting items on display in the exhibition; this makes this book very much subjected to cherry-picking.

Witkowski looks at American Second World War propaganda posters. He bases his argumentation on secondary *and* primary source material. Witkowski examines the consumption context, implementations, creative execution, and impact of government-sponsored advertising in the history of American consumer culture in the Second World War.⁸⁸ According to Witkowski, posters encourage frugal values and behaviors, showing what were considered desirable as well as undesirable practices. This is done by combining text and illustration, intended for public display, and designed specifically to announce and persuade.⁸⁹ Witkowski argues that posters were often aimed at women who were assigned the responsibility of managing and maintaining the home front. Women needed to understand rationing and how to cope with restrictions.⁹⁰ Witkowski concludes that the government influenced consumption patterns in the short run, with posters as an effective medium; the success lay in the harnessing of private and public interest. Poster campaigns tapped into sentiment in popular culture and tropes, serving and the important, governmental cause.⁹¹

Witkowski states that a great number of posters were examined via internet. Whilst he makes the argument how the abundance of posters on the internet show the “enduring aesthetic and historical appeal for present-day viewers”, he does not give the sites on which he found posters. Also, the criteria and external criticism remain absent. Witkowski states that he also gathered data from archives, who had bigger bodies of posters in one place. How much posters Witkowski used or analyzed in total is not discussed.⁹² Whilst Witkowski looks at a different context, it shows the usability of posters as a primary source in historical research. Something that *is* to be applauded, is Witkowski's inclusion of a table in which he points out the themes in all 338 posters in the Northeastern University Library archive as of 2002.⁹³ This shows that he used at least one archive in its entirety, eliminating cherry-picking at least then. Yet certain questions and doubts about possible cherry-picking in his work remain.

⁸⁷ Bachrach, *State of Deception*, 137.

⁸⁸ Witkowski, “World War II Poster Campaigns,” 69.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 70.

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 78.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 79-80.

⁹² *Ibid.*, 70.

⁹³ *Ibid.*, 72.

Ringel shows the best way –or at rather: the least problematic way– of conducting research using posters; the one without cherry-picking. This is by using one kind of visual source (or in this case, *one* magazine title) from preferably one archive, or by making a random selection or using all sources from said archive *prior* to the research. Basing the argumentation on the findings the primary source analysis has brought forth is *always* better than picking sources that fit one’s argumentation based solely on literature. This remark is not made by Witkowski, but he does state that his work is not just theoretically driven, the arguments are based on both primary as secondary sources.⁹⁴ This is very much preferable, as long as the other non-cherry-picking measures are also made. A final remark needs to be made when looking at the historiography as a whole; the literature on this subject is dated and in most of the cases, drenched with cherry-picking. This point out that this thesis is not just worthwhile, it also contributes to the historiography and will –hopefully– improve future research.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 70.

5. Methodology

5.1 Making a selection or database

Behavioral scientist Alexander L. George wrote how to analyze Nazi propaganda: what needs to be considered and what does one need to be careful of? George states that Nazi propaganda is underlined with organized, institutional features of the process by means of which they were prepared. They were an active part of the totalitarian political system, which result in important methodological implications. The first implication is that mass communication was used by the Nazi elite as an instrument of policy in order to achieve domestic and foreign policy goals. The second implication is that the selection of goals and strategies for these communication channels was closely coordinated with the policy calculations, estimates, expectations, and intentions of the Nazi leaders. The third implication is that all channels of mass communication and their contents were subject to centralized control through the Propaganda Ministry and their aligned bodies, companies, and institutions.⁹⁵ Propaganda is therefore a biased primary source, impregnated with the ideals of the issuers and creators. This needs to be considered.

Therefore, propaganda posters cannot be used as measurers of ideology or public opinion, but can be seen as tools used by the Nazi-regime to shape the public opinion: a tool in establishing and maintaining a 'regime of truth'. Whilst the work of Ringel does use an unbiased dataset established prior to research, it has a shortcoming. It is limited by her usage of the *NS FrauenWarte* as primary source, a magazine with women as target audience.⁹⁶ This makes this source less likely to be read by men and likely only reached women who intentionally bought this magazine. The flaw in Ringels work is due to the nature of the primary source, *not* by Ringels source selection or analysis method. Using a source that could be seen more freely by all, is more ideal when researching ideology and the creation of a 'regime of truth'. Whilst no claims can be made on who *saw* the selected posters, they at least could have potentially been seen by everyone and anyone, both males as females from all ages.

For this thesis, a selection is made of 50 posters, all gathered from the online archive of *Bundesarchiv*. The selection contains 25 posters published between 1933 to September 1939, and 25 posters from September 1939 to 1945. Their posters dating between the rise of the NSDAP and ultimately the end of the Second World War, came from the American Army.

⁹⁵ Alexander L. George, *Propaganda Analysis, A Study of Inferences made from Nazi propaganda in World War II* (New York: Row, Peterson and Company, 1959), 20.

⁹⁶ Ringel, "Representations of the German Woman's Body," 253.

“After the war the collection has been captured by the Americans and later given back to the Bundesarchiv. We did not separate out any posters and the whole collection has been digitized” (Martina Caspers, email contact with Charlie van Sandijk, 13/1/2023). It is not clear whether the American Army have destroyed or chosen to not return certain posters. Therefore, no claims can be made on their progeny. Besides, it would not be justifiable to talk about how many posters were published in total, how many still exist today, and ultimately how many are still accessible and digitized. We must be aware that these sources are just a small or at least a reduced part of the true amount. The posters were selected prior to research; before completing the historiography and without a working hypothesis. To further eliminate speculations on cherry-picking, this thesis states the concrete number of sources directly in the sub questions. The fourth and fifth sub question mean to give clarity on the quantity of posters used in forming the argumentation of this thesis –which is, like Ringel and Witkowski, based on both primary as secondary sources. It is preferable to clarify as much as possible, justify your choices and prove all possible steps were taken to conduct research on an as least problematic way possible. Whilst this research is still not enough to make well-founded statements and conclusions about Nazi-propaganda posters as a whole, it is the best –or rather: the least problematic way– to conduct a primary source analysis: without cherry-picking.

Bundesarchiv was selected as the archive to conduct a dataset from, because it met the following criteria. First, the posters are freely accessible online. Second, all known additional information on the poster is included: the publisher, issuing body, date and preferably also the place of publication are all of relevance, *Bundesarchiv* is very complete on this matter. Most posters have some information, for almost all the posters (44) the issuing body is known, for all posters a concrete year –sometimes even month– or a window of a couple of years in which they were published is given. There were also posters with a too broad window; only the posters that could be placed in either the 1933-1939 or the 1939-1945 selection were chosen. Also, the posters needed to be published in Germany. Two posters are selected that came from annexed territories: the Sudetenland and the Saar territory. They have been included since the posters are in German, and these territories and populations were considered German. Thirdly, the posters needed to have a visual representation of a woman or women on it, not just text mentioning or concerning women. The posters are selected after looking at all the posters in the archive which were published between 1933 and 1945. Initially, the search terms “Mutter” (mother), “Mädel” (girl) and “Frauen” (women) were used. Making a selection based on posters categorized with these terms, would however mean the research is already biased and steered. What is more, these terms would not give a complete overview of all the posters with women.

5.2. Analysing the sources

George also discussed *how* to analyze propaganda, naming three types of contexts that need to be taken into consideration. First, the communication context where the syntactic, linguistic, and structural features of the communication is considered. Second, the situational or historical context is considered, by looking at who says it, to whom, and under what circumstances. And lastly, the behavioral context, where the instrumental aspect of the communication (or: the speaker's purpose) and the relationship of the communication to other behavior of the speaker and of those with whom he is associated.⁹⁷ Whilst George does provide a good methodological framework, especially in the Nazi-German context, his work is problematic. It is very dated, being published in 1959. The most problematic is that selecting and choosing primary sources is *not* covered by George. Since cherry-picking proved to be the major issue in the existing literature, it is most crucial that attention is put to this aspect. The contexts mentioned by George are however considered in the primary source analysis of this thesis. The applied source criticism can be found in the Appendix. In the analysis of the posters the focus lays on the visual elements and how femininity and female behavior is shown. The texts are also taken into account, analyzing if they counter or strengthen the visuals, or give additional context.

⁹⁷ George, *Propaganda Analysis*, 111.

6. Primary source analysis

In this chapter the most relevant findings for this research are pointed out. The posters are organized based on their publication year; 1.1 being the earliest entry and 1.25 the latest for the posters between 1933 and 1939, and 2.1 being the earliest and 2.25 being the latest entry for the posters between 1939 and 1945. Before going deeper into the visual analysis of the sources, the external source criticism by looking at the designers, printing houses and issuing bodies is given. Here, both timeframes are covered.

6.1. External source criticism

The tables below give overviews of the known data about the prints, as included in Bundesarchiv.

Poster	Issued by	Published by	Designed by
1.1	Reichspropagandaleitung der Nationalsozialistischen Deutschen Arbeiterpartei	Carl v. der Linnepe	René Ahrlé
1.2	Winterhilfswerk des Deutschen Volkes	Kunst im Druck	
1.3	Reichsministerium für Volksaufklärung und Propaganda; NS-Volkswohlfahrt		
1.4	Deutsche Reichspost		Willi Kraska
1.5	NS-Volkswohlfahrt		
1.6	Deutsche Front	F. Maas und Sohn	Hans Scheitzer (Mjölnir)
1.7	Reichsjugendführung		Ludwig Hohlwein
1.8	NS-Volkswohlfahrt	NS. Volksblatt	
1.9	NS-Geheimschaft Kraft durch Freude		Richard Klein
1.10		Wilhelm Limpert	
1.11	Bund Deutscher Mädel	Eisfeller	Ludwig Hohlwein
1.12			
1.13	Bund Deutscher Mädel		Ludwig Hohlwein
1.14	NS-Frauenschaft		Hefner
1.15	Oskar Robert Achenbach	NSZ-Rheinfront Verlagsgesellschaft	
1.16	Oskar Robert Achenbach	Südwestdeutsche Verlagsgesellschaft	
1.17	Hugo Fischer		Werner von Axster-Heudtlaß
1.18	NS-Volkswohlfahrt		René Ahrlé
1.19	Deutsche Arbeitsfront; Otto Geiger	Verlag der Deutschen Arbeitsfront	
1.20	NS-Volkswohlfahrt		Richard Klein
1.21	Deutsche Arbeitsfront; Otto Geiger	Verlag der Deutschen Arbeitsfront	Inge Drexler

1.22	Heinrich Hoffmann; Oskar Robert Achenbach	Heinrich Hoffmann	Heinrich Hoffmann
1.23		Hempeldruck	Karl Gold; Asch LR
1.24	NS-Volkswohlfahrt		
1.25	NS-Volkswohlfahrt		

Tabel 1. External source information on posters between 1933 and 1939.

Poster	Issued by	Printed by	Designed by
2.1	Deutsche Arbeitsfront	Lehrmittelzentrale der Deutschen Arbeitsfront	Emil Dörfel
2.2	Deutsche Arbeitsfront	Lehrmittelzentrale der Deutschen Arbeitsfront	Emil Dörfel
2.3	Reichspropagandaleitung der Nationalsozialistischen Deutschen Arbeiterpartei	Kunst im Druck	Max Eschle
2.4	Gaupresseamt München-Oberbayern der Nationalsozialistischen Deutschen Arbeiterpartei; Rudolf Tipke	Müller und Sohn	Fritz Beyer
2.5	Reichspropagandaleitung der Nationalsozialistischen Deutschen Arbeiterpartei; Hannes Kremer	Franz Eher Nachfolger ⁹⁸	
2.6	Deutsches Rotes Kreuz	Erasmus	Paul Helwig-Strehl
2.7	Reichsbeauftragter für das Winterhilfswerk des Deutschen Volkes; Deutsches Rotes Kreuz	Broschek und Co.	Bernd Schuchert
2.8	Reichsbeauftragter für das Winterhilfswerk des Deutschen Volkes; Deutsches Rotes Kreuz	Buch- und Tiefdruck GmbH.	
2.9	Reichsbeauftragter für das Winterhilfswerk des deutschen Volkes; Deutsches Rotes Kreuz	Dr. Güntz	Paul Helwig-Strehl
2.10	Behringwerke		
2.11	Reichspropagandaleitung der Nationalsozialistischen Deutschen Arbeiterpartei	Dr. Güntz	Theo Matejko
2.12	Gauleitung Kärnten der Nationalsozialistischen Deutschen Arbeiterpartei	Stöhr	
2.13	Deutsche Arbeitsfront	Lehrmittelzentrale der Deutschen Arbeitsfront	Jan Derk de Haen
2.14	Gauverwaltung München-Oberbayern der Deutschen Arbeitsfront	Herm. Sonntag und Co.	
2.15	Reichsministerium für Volksaufklärung und Propaganda		
2.16	NS-Volkswohlfahrt; Gauleitung der Nationalsozialistischen Deutschen Arbeiterpartei	C. Lehle	
2.17			
2.18		Erasmus	Walter Biedermann
2.19	Gau Sudetenland der Nationalsozialistischen Deutschen Arbeiterpartei		

⁹⁸ Franz Eher Nachfolger was the central publishing house of the Nazi-party, it is also the original publisher of Mein Kampf. It disbanded directly after the defeat of the Nazi-regime.; Paul Hoser, "Franz Eher Nachf. Verlag (Zentralverlag der NSDAP)", Historisches Lexikon Bayerns, accessed on March 29 2023, [https://www.historisches-lexikon-bayerns.de/Lexikon/Franz_Eher_Nachf._Verlag_\(Zentralverlag_der_NSADAP\)](https://www.historisches-lexikon-bayerns.de/Lexikon/Franz_Eher_Nachf._Verlag_(Zentralverlag_der_NSADAP)).

2.20	Reichspropagandaleitung der Nationalsozialistischen Deutschen Arbeiterpartei	Dr. Güntz	Hans Schweitzer (Mjölñir)
2.21	Reichskommissar für Altmaterialverwertung; Reichsbeauftragter der Nationalsozialistischen Deutschen Arbeiterpartei für Altmaterialerfassung		René Ahrlé
2.22	Heinrich Hoffmann; Oskar Robert Achenbach	Heinrich Hoffmann	Heinrich Hoffmann
2.23	Deutsche Arbeitsfront; Otto Geiger	Verlag der Deutschen Arbeitsfront	Horst Naumann
2.24	Reichsarbeitsdienst	Hempeldruck	Hans Schweitzer (Mjölñir)
2.25	Deutsche Arbeitsfront; Otto Geiger	Verlag der Deutschen Arbeitsfront	Werner von Axster-Heudtlaß

Tabel 2. External source information on posters between 1939 and 1945.

As visible in the two tables above, lot is known about the selected publications; for almost all posters the issuing body is known. They are all connected to the Nazi-party, either directly or indirectly. This was anticipated, due to the censorship laws. There are two posters –1.12 and 2.17– that did not have additional information affirming the connection to the Nazi-party or -ideals, just a publication date. The message, aim and targeted audience therefore had to clearly point out Nazi alignment.

Poster 1.12, shown in image 1, has a clear aim: to stimulate buying and using German products, stimulating the national economy and creating an independent market which was not reliant on importation. This poster points out Germany was already preparing for war by creating a war economy in peacetime, aiming to establish a consumer market based on national supplies.⁹⁹



Image 1. Poster 1.12
Source: “Aufforderung zum Kauf von in Deutschland hergestellten Produkten”, *Bundesarchiv.de*, published in April 1934, publishing house unknown.

Therefore, even though issuing body and printing house are unknown, it is clear this poster is in favor of the Nazi politics and can be seen as a Nazi propaganda poster.

⁹⁹ Arthur Schweitzer, “The Role of Foreign Trade in the Nazi War Economy,” *Journal of Political Economy* 51, no. 4 (1943): 322-323.

Poster 2.17 also has a clear aim: to stimulate women to take on jobs in the wartime. It is the “Einsatz” (which translates to: mission, task, or use) of women to work. This poster wanted women to contribute to the war effort by female employment in factories. Therefore, this poster can be justifiably categorized as Nazi-propaganda.

The publishing houses were hard to trace; it was most useful to look at other entries in the *Bundesarchiv* to find out if they were Nazi-aligned or published pro-NSDAP content before 1933. Kunst im Druck (München) is the only publishing house –based on the entries in

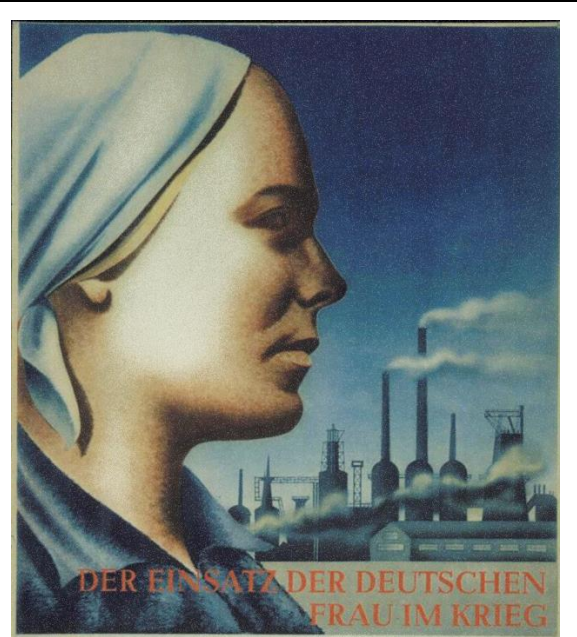


Image 2. Poster 2.17

Source: “Arbeitskräftemangel in der Rüstungsindustrie”, *Bundesarchiv.de*, published in 1943, publishing house unknown.

Bundesarchiv– that has done so. Between 1930 and 1945, it published 48 posters, all from NSDAP- or Nazi-aligned organizations. After 1945 this publishing house has eight entries, five issued by political parties for their party campaign and three to promote (local) cultural activities. No additional information could be found that could confirm that Kunst im Druck was an independent printing house that became Nazi-aligned, or if it was “just” a printing house that took on jobs from the NSDAP as a source of income.

Hempeldruck in Tetschen, very close to the German border in Sudetenland, published poster 1.23 in 1938 shortly after the annexation to the Third Reich in March that same year. Sudetenland was seen by the Nazi’s as one of the territories that have always belonged to Germany. According to Hitler’s racist ideology, the German-speaking people of Austria, Germany and the Sudetenland formed *one* nation, the Third Reich. It came to no surprise Hitler’s aim was to annex these territories.¹⁰⁰ The Sudetenland is therefore, in the Nazi-eyes, German land, inhabited by German people. Since this poster is technically speaking not *really* published in Germany, it could still be seen as such in its historical context. But moreover, the big difference between the (only) other poster included in *Bundesarchiv* of Hempeldruck made this poster worth including.

¹⁰⁰ Johannes Koll, “Sudeten Germans in Austria after the First World War,” in *From Empire to Republic: Post-World War I Austria*, ed. Günter Bischof, Fritz Plasser, Peter Berger (University of New Orleans Press, 2010), 274.

Before the annexation, a clearly anti-fascist poster was printed by Hempeldruck. The poster, issued by an unknown political party on list six during the referendum about the possible annexation, shows fascism –or more specific, Naziism– as a grim reaper holding a torch, leaning over a village –representing the “Heimat” (which translates to hometown or place of birth) in a menacing manner. In its shadow guillotine, soldiers and gallows are shown. This implies that the fascist Nazi-regime was seen as a threat to the then still ‘free’ Sudetenland. It is interesting to see that before the Nazi-occupation, voices could be heard that distanced itself from the Nazi-regime, even feeling threatened by it. After the annexation, a very pro-NSDAP poster was published, thanking Hitler for the bright future the Sudetenland once again had after the annexation. This clearly shows the power of the Nazi censorship laws, changing the nature and content of the publications of Hempeldruck fundamentally.



Image 3. Poster published by the same company as poster 1.23
 Source: “Schützt die Heimat! Wählt Liste 6,” *Bundesarchiv.de*, published between 1933/1938, printed by Hempeldruck, Tetschen.



Image 4. Poster 1.23
 Source: “Nun haben wir wieder eine glückliche Zukunft!”, *Bundesarchiv.de*, published in November 1938, printed by Hempeldruck, Tetschen.

Poster 2.10 is the only poster on which a direct connection to the Nazi-regime could not be traced from the information given on the poster itself or from the *Bundesarchiv*. The poster is issued by Behringwerke in Marburg, a medical company that wanted to promote the usage of diphtheria vaccinations. Therefore, this poster is not perse propaganda but also part of the marketing campaign of Behringwerke. The plant of this company was integrated into the Nazi economic and medical structures, with using Polish and Soviet war-prisoners as louse-feeders in their pursuit of a typhus vaccination.¹⁰¹ Whilst this poster is not directly issued by the Nazi-party, the poster still needed to be deemed worthy and according to the censorship laws. Besides, the poster is in line with the promotion of a healthy population of the Nazi-regime.¹⁰²



Image 5. Poster 2.10
 Source: “Bewahrt Eure Kinder vor Diphtherie! Diphtherie-Schutzimpfung”, *Bundesarchiv.de*, published in 1941, printed by Behringwerke.

Even though it cannot be seen directly, this poster *has* connections to Nazi-regime, and, whilst marketing medication, is in line with the ideals of a healthy Aryan population. Furthermore, the poster shows Aryan people by using the Nordic stereotype.

Striking is the absence of female designers or publicists; just one female artist could be found. Inge Drexler, designer of poster 1.21, has no known other posters in the *Bundesarchiv*, nor could additional information on her be found. Striking is that Drexlers publication is the only poster from before 1939 that shows a sole woman in a work setting; as a factory worker, promoting women to join female workgroups. The poster is issued by the Deutsche Arbeitsfront (DAF) and published in 1938.

Some other names that occur in the tables with relevant background information are Hans Scheitzer (also known as Mjölfnir), Heinrich Hoffmann, Theo Matejko, Oskar Robert Achenbach, and Otto Geiger. Scheitzer is strongly connected to the Nazi-party itself, being a close friend of Joseph Goebbels and published lots of Nazi-official propaganda; the *Bundesarchiv* includes 45 posters designed by him. Historian Peter Paret wrote about his life and publications, stating that his propaganda all held strong messages, aligned with the Nazi-

¹⁰¹ Paul Weindling, *Epidemics and Genocide in Eastern Europe, 1890-1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 401-403.

¹⁰² For more on this, see chapter 4.2 on biopolitics and -power.

ideals. This eventually led him to be SS-Oberführer in 1939, functioning as one of the Nazi-official artists up until the very end of the war.¹⁰³ Scheitzer was openly antisemitic, stating in court where he was being persecuted for his alignments with the Nazi-regime after the war that:

“I was aware that the party aimed at a legal solution of the Jewish question. I agreed with that. As a young artist I witnessed how German art was moving further and further away from the natural basis of true art. I thought it right that the excessive Jewish influence, which had risen far above the percentage of Jews in the total German population, should be reduced by legal measures to a sensible level.”¹⁰⁴

Paret looks at posters designed by Scheitzer, some of them having women in them. He does not cover the Nazi-ideals and Scheitzers opinion on femininity, he uses the posters to look at what stage the war was in and what the poster wanted to convey; in all cases, they wanted to spread hope, optimism, togetherness and –mostly at the end of the war– willingness to keep fighting.¹⁰⁵

Theo Matejko is known as one of the illustrators of the Nazi-military magazine *Die Wehrmacht* from 1935 till the end of the war.¹⁰⁶ He died in 1946, his work is now displayed in several museums like Victoria and Albert Museum (London) and Stedelijk Musuem (Amsterdam).¹⁰⁷

Oskar Robert Achenbach is known to have produced lots of Nazi-literature and propaganda, yet little is known about his personal life or beliefs.¹⁰⁸ In *Bundesarchiv* there are 93 posters issued or produced by Achenbach: all against Bolshevism, Jews, or showing England and the USSR as the “bad guys” Germany is fighting.

Publishing house Heinrich Hoffmann has 74 NSDAP posters in *Bundesarchiv*; two from before 1933, showing it was already published Nazi content before the censorship laws. Hoffmann was Hitlers official photographer since 1923 and since 1920 one of the first members of the NSDAP. Hoffman was the publisher of National Socialist Pictures, his company and photo agency grew big enough to have its own press and publishing department.¹⁰⁹ Hoffmann was imprisoned directly after the war, being labeled a “Major Offender”. His personal art

¹⁰³ Peter Paret, “God’s Hammer,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 136, no. 2 (1992): 236.

¹⁰⁴ Paret, “God’s Hammer,” 246.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 242, 245.

¹⁰⁶ “A German Artist Draws the New War,” *Life Magazine* vol. 7 no.11 (11/9/1939): 26.

¹⁰⁷ “Theo Matejko,” Stedelijk Musuem, accessed on 28/3/2023,

<https://www.stedelijk.nl/en/collectie/maker/60444-theo-matejko>; “You help as well!” Collections V&A, accessed on 28/3/2023 <https://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O101035/you-help-as-well-poster-matejko-theo/>.

¹⁰⁸ “Oscar Robert Achenbach (1882-1946?) – Schriftsteller, Journalist und Genealoge,” Blog der Archive im Kreis Siegen-Wittgenstein, accessed on 23/3/2023, <https://www.siwiaarchiv.de/oscar-robert-achenbach-1882-1946-schriftsteller-journalist-und-genealoge/>.

¹⁰⁹ Ulrich Prehn, “Working Photos: Propaganda, Participation, and the Visual Production of Memory in Nazi Germany,” *Central European History* 48, no. 3 (2015): 369.

collection, worth of 6 million Reichsmark, was confiscated. Hoffmann claimed –untruthfully– to have acquired them legally. His collection was, at least partly, based on Jewish stolen art.¹¹⁰ It is of no surprise that his works are all Nazi-aligned.

An interesting designer that has only one entry in the Bundesarchiv between 1933 and 1945, is Horst Naumann. He has 37 posters in Bundesarchiv, the latest entry being in 1952. Almost all his posters, also poster 2.23, depict strong women: glorifying or showing them as active contributors to the German society,

economy, and later restoration of the political landscape. Naumann designed a poster in 1948, celebrating the 100-year anniversary of the Communist Manifest, showing the faces of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels. Image 5 shows another poster by Naumann, directly after the war in which he has depicted women as part of the working force of Germany “Gegen Kriegstreiber”, against warmongers. This sudden change and sharp contrast can however be explained quite simple; Naumann lived in the DDR after the war, it was his ‘bad luck’ to go from one totalitarian regime to another, forced to first create fascistic, then communistic work. However, his inclusion of strong women in most of his posters is unique and worth mentioning.

Otto Geiger has published, both posters and other print, for Nazi-propaganda purposes. Geiger was the head of the Propaganda department of the DAF. One of his short pamphlets makes clear how much his ideals and visions aligned with those of the Nazi’s: he named the Jew the “Father of Lies”. In his pamphlet Geiger talks about how the German race is the most pure and active bearer of the Nordic elements; implying the Germans are ‘good’ and the Jews are ‘bad’. Jews were the true enemy for thousands of years, wanting a world revolution aimed directly against Germany.¹¹¹ All other posters of Geiger in the Bundesarchiv are aligned with the Nazi-organizations KdF and DAF. Geiger is, as is made clear in both his text and his posters, strongly connected, and aligned with the Nazi-ideals and -party.



Image 6. Poster designed by Horst Naumann, promoting the National Labor Day in which we can see how woman are also part of the German working force.

Source: “1 Mai 1946. Für Frieden, Fortschritt und Neuaufbau! Gegen Kriegstreiber und Reaktion!”, *Bundesarchiv.de*, published in April 1946, printed by Ratsdruckerei Dresden GmbH.

¹¹⁰ Steffen Winter, “A Nazi Legacy Hidden in German Museums,” *Spiegel International*, accessed on 27/3/2023, <https://www.spiegel.de/international/germany/germany-s-unsatisfactory-approach-to-art-looted-by-the-nazis-a-880363.html>.

¹¹¹ Otto Geiger, *Der zeitlose Kampf um die Wahrheit* (Berlin: Verlag der Deutschen Arbeitsfront, February 1944), <https://research.calvin.edu/german-propaganda-archive/otto-geiger.html>.

6.2. Internal source criticism

In this chapter the representation of women and femininity on the posters are discussed. Two timeframes are used: the period leading up to the war, and the wartime itself. In chapter 7 the contrasts, alignments, and contradictions between both the posters and the secondary literature will be pointed out.

6.2.1. Posters before 1939

Apart from having a female designer, poster 1.21 is also unique by the way the woman is shown; in a work-setting, with the leading text “In every factory, a women’s work group”. The poster shows the DAF-flag waving behind the stereotypical Aryan woman.¹¹² The poster most likely hung nearby factories, wanting women to take on jobs there. This is done by reassuring women are welcome and have a pleasant work environment surrounded by other women. The cleanliness of the woman is striking; she has no dirt on her, a pearly white smile and brightly colored clothing. This implicated women stayed clean and kept their fair complexion. This might be a tactical move, not showing the actual work that would mean getting dirty; rather, a female friendly environment is depicted. In this poster, femininity did not include being a mother or taking care of the household, this however is the more dominant gender role in the other posters.



Image 7. Poster 1.21, in which a woman is *not* shown in a nurturing or mothering role. Source: Source: “In jedem Betrieb eine Werk-Frauengruppe”, *Bundesarchiv.de*, published in 1938, printed by Verlag der Deutschen Arbeitsfront, Berlin.

¹¹² The DAF flag has a gear in which the Nazi-cross is shown.

Two other posters show women in a work-like setting; starting with poster 1.19, produced in 1938. The text says: “Working girl, participate in the domestic work groups (cooking, sewing, healthcare services) of the youth office of the DAF”, promoting working women to take on homemaking courses provided by DAF. The woman in the foreground is cooking, wearing apron and headscarf. She is shown in a typical feminine manner: doing household chores. In the background an office is shown, in which a female instructor or manager is standing amongst five desks at which women are operating typewriters. The background is not clearly visible, with the women having no visible faces and emotion. By gender performance the female sex of the



Image 8. Poster 1.19, in which in the background women are shown as secretaries.

Source: “Berufstätiges Mädel”, *Bundesarchiv.de*, published in 1938, printed by Verlag der Deutschen Arbeitsfront, Berlin.

office-workers is made clear: their hair is tied up, they all wear dresses and have pumps on their feet. It is made clear that women are meant to remain in certain spheres; namely in the household doing domestic chores. This poster has some slight shortcoming in the text and the visuals. Even though the woman in the foreground aligns with the written message, the women in the background lack context. Most likely, these are the “working girls” the title implies, wanting to make sure they also learn homemaking skills. Most likely, this poster hung in workplaces, aimed at working women. It reminds them of their domestic role and tasks, making clear that working is *not* their true task. By stimulating these courses, the pursuing of a professional career –if that was even possible– is demotivated.

Poster 1.24 reassures women their children will be taken care off in the NSV childcare centers whilst they work. This poster, produced in 1939, shows the working women in the background; as land laborers, plowing a field. Further in the back a picturesque village is shown.

Just like poster 1.19, the working women are painted in the background, whilst the foreground is a picture, showing the NSV services. In the foreground a nurse is shown, smiling down on the children surrounding her. The children stand close to and point up at her, implying they have warm feelings towards her. This poster takes away a big concern of women when they took on jobs: the care of their young. This poster reassures that their family would not suffer from them being employed. Due to the unknown month of publication, it is unclear whether this poster was produced in the wartime or before. As is made clear, the Nazi-regime was establishing a war-economy years before the actual war. Therefore, it just as likely this poster was produced before September 1939 than after.

With three posters, the representation of women as workers is relatively weak. Moreover, it is always in the background and less relevant than homemaking and childcare. The domestic mother role that is assigned to women is dominant and always shown in the foreground. Also, the working women are not pictured, but painted; giving the artists the ability to create utopian workplaces and workers.



Image 9. Poster 1.1.
 Source: “Die NSDAP sichert die Volksgemeinschaft”, *Bundesarchiv.de*, published between 1933 and 1938, printed by Carl v. der Linnepe, Lüdenscheid in Wesfalen.

Image 10. Poster 1.5.
 Source: “Gesunde Eltern - gesunde Kinder!”, *Bundesarchiv.de*, published in 1933, printing house unknown.

The family setting is a dominant theme, but in just four of these posters a man is shown –always as the father figure. Three of these posters (1.1, 1.5 and 1.20) show stereotypical Aryans, with the underlying message to promote family matters, with a big, healthy household as ideal and something to be proud of. Poster 1.1, published between 1933 and 1938, is issued by the NSDAP itself and shows a family of five, with the mother holding the newborn baby. The man has his arm around the woman and his other hand on the shoulder of the boy, the little girl is standing next to the mother and is smiling towards you, the rest is smiling at the newest family member. The eagle guarding over the family, with one of his wings protectively shielding them, is interesting: it represents the Third Reich eagle, guarding over not just the family, but the whole German population and race. The visuals speak for themselves, with the text strengthening the message: “The NSDAP protects the national population. Fellow citizens, when you are in need of advice or help, go to our local offices”.

Poster 1.5 conveys a similar message to poster 1.1, with the leading text “Healthy adults – Healthy children!” Yet again, the man as the tallest member of the party and the father figure, with the woman holding the newborn. The depiction of the children shows the division between feminine and masculine. The boy wears a uniform, looking tough with a proud and militant expression and his hand clenched, whilst the girls are holding a doll and a basket, wearing girly clothing. In both posters, the promotion (and creating) of a big, healthy Aryan family is evidently made clear in both visual as text. Poster 1.20 does not convey this message directly but shows a family, promoting NSV membership. The girl is shown in a uniform (presumably of the Bund Deutscher Mädel) and the two boys are holding a hammer and a scythe. Yet again the mother is holding the newborn, with the father as the head of the family –literally, by being shown on top of the triangle composition of the poster. Poster 1.8 is also issued by the NSV. It shows a poor family, with the father figure turned away from his family, unable to provide for them. The woman is yet again the mother holding her newborn. It is noticeable that in only four posters men are shown –all in a fatherly role–, but in none they nurse or hold their young; this is reserved exclusively for women. The father is the (proud) head and provider of the family.



Image 11. Poster 1.13
 Source: "Im Bund Deutscher Mädel: Reichssporttag des B.D.M.", *Bundesarchiv.de*, published in September 1934, printing house unknown.



Image 12. Poster 1.4
 Source: "Gesund, leistungsfähig und unfallsicher durch Sport!", *Bundesarchiv.de*, published between 1933 and 1939, printing house unknown.

The ideal physical condition of women and how to maintain and obtain it is shown directly in posters 1.4, 1.7, 1.10 and 1.13. In poster 1.10, a woman is shown walking in what appears to be a field on a windy day with three children. She is in a motherly role, holding hands with the two boys, with the boy on the right having his arm around the slightly younger girl. This implies that having a healthy body resulted in having healthy children; but also, that maintaining a healthy body is good and your role as mother does not intervene with physical exercise. Children can tag along, making it a fun family activity. In the other three posters, no children are shown. Poster 1.13 is promoting membership of the BDM and the Reichssporttag. Poster 1.4 just states "Healthy, strong and accident-proof through sport!", showing two women exercising with cones in an empty stadium. The last two posters stood out; since these are the only two that show women in sportswear. The sportswear is, compared to the clothing in the other posters, showing a lot of skin. Especially in 1.13 is clearly seen that the sporting shorts and shirt show a lot of the physically fit female body. The woman jumps athletically, showing her strong legs and slender body with female curves. Poster 1.4 does not show the female body in a very

athletic way, with no visible curves or muscles. In the text it is made clear that exercising creates a healthy body. After all, a healthy body meant being able to produce lots of children. Female fertility is shown on multiple occasions in this timeframe, making it one of the more dominant themes. Fertility is mostly shown in posters issued by the NSV, where motherhood is key. It is done by showing women as mothers who are happily holding their newborns, or surrounded by her big, happy, healthy and Aryan family.

There are three posters that convey a strong political message: posters 1.15, 1.16 and 1.22. They all have more text –which is leading– and few visual elements. The texts make clear how good German mother and child have it under the NSDAP-rule, and how bad the situation is in Russia, specifically how bad Bolshevism is. In these posters, the text is more leading. The photos need the additional text for the images to make sense.

Poster 1.15 talks about the health of mother and child, and how happy children create a happy and healthy population. Citations of Hitler are used, in which he states his admiration and love for the German youth and mothers. In another citation, connected to the situation in Russia, Hitler talks about how ashamed he would be if he had to send women to the front, asking them to take up arms: “Women have their own battle: with every child that she brings to earth, she is fighting for the nation!” The poster also shows starved out children, clinging to their mothers’ skirts, stating the Bolshevik regime does not provide for their people, letting their children and mothers starve to death. The importance of motherhood, the bearing of children and the support given by the state is shown by creating the distinction between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ regimes, connecting ‘bad’ to Germany’s enemy: Bolshevism.

Poster 1.16 states that German women need to be protected; they are the mothers of the nation, and all women have a higher purpose; motherhood. The NSV provides services helping women excel in this and makes sure they all have the proper tools and skills to have a healthy lifestyle for both themselves and their family. In Russia women do not receive government help, leading to starvation and hypothermia of their population, taking the life of their children. In one of the pictures, the communist ideals are categorized as “bad”, talking about how the state seized the lands of farmers, forcing the once proud landowners to farm their former land, whilst the state claims the harvest.

Poster 1.22 talks about the heavy physical labor Russian women are forced into and how they bear arms, whilst in Germany the NSV is praised by giving courses and schooling to women and girls in becoming good mothers, providing advice, and by stating how important the role of women is as housewife. In all three anti-Bolshevism posters, the notion of how bad

the enemy is, is strengthened by showing *and* telling how good the Nazi-regime is and how it cares for their mothers and children. This strengthens the notion of what is ‘good’ femininity and what is ‘bad’ femininity. All posters point out how the Nazi-regime makes sure women can do what women are meant to do: bearing children, the creation of a healthy and Aryan population, or in other words, how femininity can excel in Germany thanks to Nazi-rule.



Image 13. Poster 1.6
 Source: “Deutsche Mutter heim zu Dir!”, *Bundesarchiv.de*, published in 1934, printed by F. Maas und Sohn, Saarbrücken.

In two posters, allegories are found. The first in poster 1.6. This one conveys a political message about the expansion of the Third Reich. A referendum was held in January of 1935, asking the population of the Saar territory whether they wanted to be annexed and be part of Germany again –this territory was German prior to the First World War but was handed over to France in the Treaty of Versailles. The poster symbolically shows the breaking of the border. The man steps over the broken landmark, being reunited with his German mother; with the woman not just being his mother but representing Mother Germany. Behind the man is the Saar territory, an industrial setting, and behind the woman we

see a picturesque village. The man, although he is not wearing working clothes, represents the industrial Saar territory, whilst the woman is shown as an elderly lady, representing Germany and homely life. To message of this poster is clear; it promotes the annexation. It would not only mean the return of their industry, but most of all the return of the rightfully German population and territory to the Third Reich. This poster has more leading visuals than text.

In poster 1.9 another allegory is visible. Here, a woman is used in a symbolic way, with a female bust representing wisdom by depicting her as the Greek goddess of wisdom, Athens. In this poster, a woman is seen wearing a military helmet and is placed in the context of (higher) education, but only thanks to its symbolism. The poster, issued by KdF, is aimed at working Germans, offering them educational courses in an NSDAP-controlled setting. None of the offered courses are connected to domestic tasks or motherhood. They are connected to national history, economy, racial studies, and art. The poster was presumably aimed at male workers. It is not stated if certain people are excluded from participating, yet it is doubtful women were the aimed audience or could possibly partake in said courses. Whilst the poster does show a woman, it has little or even nothing to do with the actual German women and femininity. This also shows, whilst this poster *did* appear when searching the term “Frau”, it is preferable to create a dataset without using pre-given categorizations.

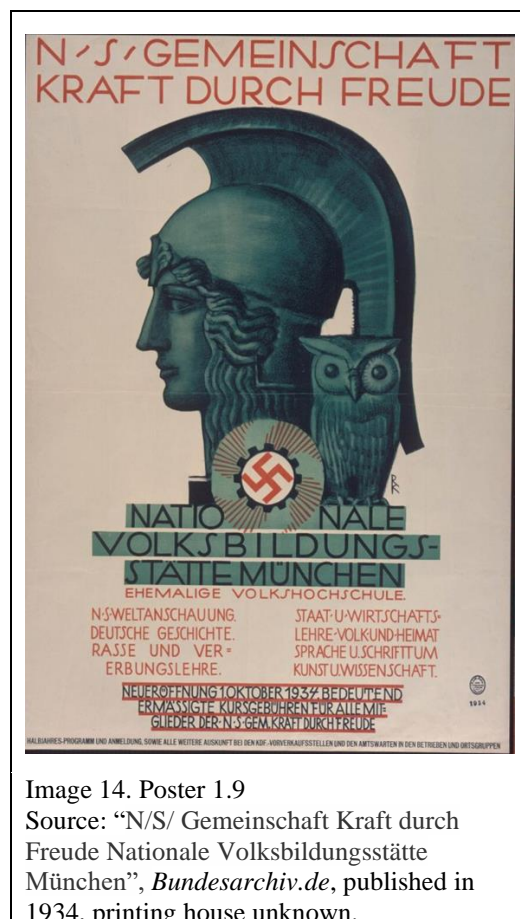


Image 14. Poster 1.9
 Source: “N/S/ Gemeinschaft Kraft durch Freude Nationale Volksbildungsstätte München”, *Bundesarchiv.de*, published in 1934, printing house unknown.

6.2.2. Posters after 1939

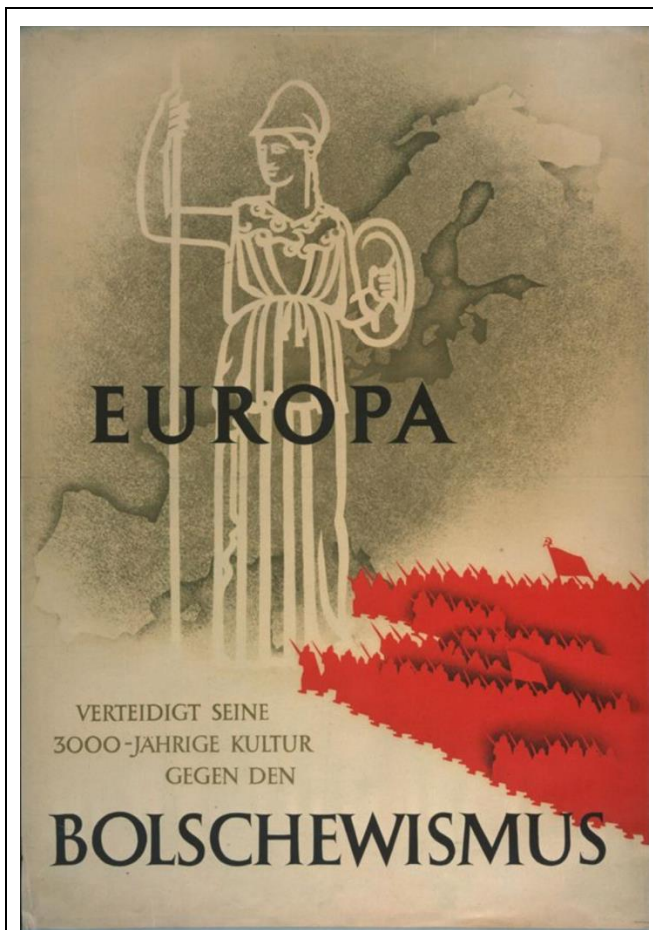


Image 15. Poster 2.15

Source: “Europa verteidigt seine 3000-jährige Kultur gegen den Bolschewismus”, *Bundesarchiv.de*, published between 1942 and 1944, publishing house unknown.

In this dataset the last allegory is found in poster 2.15. Womanhood is shown in a symbolic way, representing the 3000-year-old European culture, in need of protection against the Red Army. This is done by showing a woman as, yet again, Athens. Even though the woman wears a helmet, spear and shield, it is justified by the symbolic context; this poster does not imply that it was good that women would dress like this or bear arms. Rather than showing ideal femininity, the woman in the poster stands for the ‘good’ culture that is worth fighting for. Poster 2.15 is therefore not connected to ideal womanhood but does convey an interesting message: the enemy is a menace, advancing from the east, and the Germans need to stand ground, fight, and protect Europe. It is furthermore striking

that “Europa” is used and not Germany or the Third Reich, implying that communism or the Red Army is not just a threat to them, but to all sharing this 3000-year-old culture. Fighting the Red Army is therefore not just protecting Germany, it is protecting Europe as a whole.

Poster 2.5 is the strongest political poster in this dataset. There is a poster *in* the poster, originally dating from the First World War and made in Britain, showing their enemy: Germany. Poster 2.5 is published directly after the outbreak of the Second World War, aimed to stir up the old hate against the enemy, doing so by reminding the Germans that Britain has always seen Germany as a brutal enemy. Furthermore, according to the Britains the “rasende Bestie” (raging beast) is “nämlich: das deutsche Volk” (namely: the German people), implying that the so-called beast is more than just the German army, it was all of Germany. Britain wanted to attack and destroy not just the German army, but also its population. This was not to be

forgotten by the Germans; Britain has hated us for at least twenty years, so it is nothing more than natural we also hate them. Reusing this British propaganda poster came in useful for the Nazi's to remind their population of how was thought about them by their direct enemy. The poster is still seen as hurtful and remains a powerful and active notion, even decades later. By re-using a propaganda poster from a different nation in one's own propaganda campaign, it is made clear that war was (and is) more than just military violence; they are also fought out in ideology and by rekindling hatred and hurt from previous conflicts.

The woman is shown as the one that needs saving; the direct victim of the destruction and terror that the war has brought. If the Nazi-regime would not have agreed with this representation of women, it would have either chosen to not use this poster or had made a point by stating how ridiculous or weak the woman is shown; this is not the case. Although the representation of the woman is not made or issued by the Nazi's, the message remains clear and the same even in a different context and nation: women were the 'weaker' sex, the ones that needed saving, incapable of fending for herself. The woman is the classic "damsel in distress" who the men –or soldiers– need to fight for.



Image 16. Poster 2.5

Source: "Der alte Hass - das alte Ziel!", *Bundesarchiv.de*, published in September 1939, published by Franz Eher Nachfolger, München.



Image 17. Poster 2.20
Source: "Sieg oder Bolschewismus", *Bundesarchiv.de*, published in February 1943, published by Dr. Güntz, Dresden.

Just one poster in the dataset directly shows the enemy, poster 2.20. This poster, published in 1943, aimed to boost the fighting morale by showing two future paths. Germany could either win the war or be dominated by Bolshevism. Victory meant a bright future, using lighter colors and with a cheerful Aryan woman and child. Bolshevism would mean despair, hunger, and decay; with an ugly Bolshevik (shown as clearly *not* Aryan with unhealthy teeth and an unattractive complexion and facial features) towering over a starving population wearing worn out clothes. The right side, or Bolshevik side, is dark and gives off a grim feeling. It is striking that just a few posters show the enemy: almost always Bolshevism. The hate towards the English enemy is not visually shown in the posters but is strongly represented in poster 2.5.

In this timeframe, more women are shown working and relatively fewer in a homely family setting. In one poster, 2.1, a woman is shown in an office setting, going to presumably her boss, asking him for help or instructions. The man is doing paperwork at his desk in what seems to be a private office, with the woman coming in holding a notebook and pen. The leading text "It is better to ask twice or thrice, than to waste time making mistakes" makes clear the woman is still learning on the job or in need of reassurance that asking is better than improvising or doing what she thinks is right. This poster was not likely hung in public spaces, but on the work floor and directly aimed at the employed women. It is striking yet not surprising that the man is higher up in the company; being able to make a career for himself.¹¹³ The other posters that show working women, do not have a male presence. Yet, we can see another pattern which is also

¹¹³ Moeller, *Protecting Motherhood*, 17.; see chapter 4.2 for more on this.

present before the war; women can or even should work, but only in certain spheres and in certain jobs, always unable to make a career for themselves.



Image 18. Poster 2.11
 Source: “Hilf auch Du mit!”, *Bundesarchiv.de*, published in 1941, published by Dr. Güntz, Dresden.

One poster particularly stood out; poster 2.11 shows exactly in what jobs women could take. We see the man’s face in the sky, a soldier that is (literally) guarding over the German population, with women active in certain jobs. The text “You must also help!” makes clear that women can work in the factory (behind the woman on the left is an industrial setting), as a nurse, or as a farm and land laborer (behind the woman on the right is a field being plowed). The one sector in which women are also shown in other posters, is in a secretarial function. This is not shown on poster 2.11. It is also striking that a man is shown in this picture, as the soldier who is towering over the smaller women; the one that is protecting and fighting for the national community. The members of the

national community who are not fighting –the women in this case– are also implied to help.

In one poster –in the total of *all* the selected posters– a woman is shown in the context of a military function. Poster 2.18 shows a stereotypical Aryan woman in the role of a Wehrmachtshelferin, wearing a blue military uniform. The woman is shown from the waist up, so it is unclear whether she wears a skirt. We do however clearly see that the vest is fitted, showing ever so slightly the female curves, the hourglass body of the fit and slender woman. Women could function in the military, but also to a certain extent and only in logistics and administrative functions. The poster promotes the employment of women as Air Intelligent Assistances. Women actually fighting remains unthinkable.

Poster 2.25 is the only one in which we see a woman working hard, rolling up her sleeves and getting some work done. In other poster where women are working or shown in a work

setting, they are all smiling and have a clean and tidy appearance, in a neat and pleasant looking workplace. Here, we see the woman welching, bending over a vise with safety goggles on, her hair functionally tied back with a handkerchief, wearing a heavy working apron and gloves. This poster, being the latest of the selected poster, is aimed at the younger male population of Germany to take on arms, and the younger female population to take on jobs. The woman is shown in the front, whilst the soldiers –the men– are shown in the back, implying that women are more of the target audience. The poster shows what the “Deutsche Jugend” (German youth) are supposed to do and what work is reserved for what sex. It is still noteworthy that, whilst the woman is doing relatively hard work, she remained fair with several stereotypical complexions like the Nordic cheekbones and clean, wavy blond hair.



Image 19. Poster 2.25
 Source: “Deutsche Jugend arbeitet und kämpft”, *Bundesarchiv.de*, published in November 1944, published by Verlag der Deutschen Arbeitsfront, Berlin.

Poster 2.24 is also aimed at the German youth, but in this case solely at women and girls. This poster is visually not appealing; it has photos that do not tell anything without the context provided in the texts. The poster titled “The beautiful task”, is issued by the Reichsarbeitsdienst (RAD), making an appeal on young women of a minimal age of 17 to become teachers at RAD-schools, where (teenage) girls are taught in housekeeping, administration and organization, physical exercise, and political education. The RAD-schools give opportunities to get a higher education focused on teaching, land labor, nursing, or to learn more about homemaking and childcare. Once again, we see the spheres in which women could operate and which roles are reserved for them in society. The most striking is the information on the length of the employment: for as long as the war lasted, or a part-time contract will be offered, implying that work is always without the prospect of permanent employment. This aligns with the idea that women should not or even could not pursue a career.¹¹⁴

¹¹⁴ This again aligns with Moeller, see chapter 4.2 for more on this.; Moeller, *Protecting Motherhood*, 17.

Women were reminded almost constantly of their true task; taking care of their home and family. In 2.19 and 2.14, this is made specifically clear. In 2.19 the text is more leading, stating “It is about our children! Hundreds of thousands of German mothers stand in armor. Everything for victory!”, with a woman, shouting and holding up her hand, giving the impression she is relying up other mothers to do the same. We see again that, with this poster being made in 1943, victory is mentioned, that the fighting morale is boosted and that women are encouraged to help Germany as a whole. Striking is that an appeal is made based on the mother role, that her task is to fight for their children. Winning the war was also in interest of their children, therefore, losing the war would be in their detriment. For German mothers to help the German cause, would also mean to fight for their own cause and young.

Despite poster 2.14 shows a working woman, the focus is on domestic chores. We see a photo of a woman in a factory operating a vise, with the text: “Working women can do their groceries after 17h! Be considerate! Be a comrade: run your errands in the early morning or in the late afternoon”. A contradiction between the visuals and the text is visible; in the visuals we see a working woman, however in the text is made clear women need to do their domestic task. But another, deeper message is conveyed; even when you are not in employment, think about the women who are and make sure that they can do their domestic tasks in orderly fashion. Unemployed women need to show solidarity. This implies that working women will do their shopping in certain timeslots; so, do your shopping before or afterwards.

This message of solidarity is most strongly visible in poster 2.13. Here, it is made clear in the text that employed women are under the protection of the community; this is the responsibility and even duty of *all* Germans. The idea that female employees were to be taken into consideration and protected by all, aligns with the argument Gupta makes that the German ideal



Image 20. Poster 2.13
 Source: Jan Derk de Haen, “Frauen im Betrieb stehen unter dem besonderen Schutz der Gemeinschaft
 Das verpflichtet jeden!
 Ordnung und Sauberkeit sind unser Stolz”,
 Bundesarchiv.de, published between 1941 and 1944, published by Lehrmittelzentrale der Deutschen Arbeitsfront, Berlin.

being altered with individual good becoming subordinate to the common good.¹¹⁵



Image 21. Poster 2.3
Source: “Hamsterin, schäme dich,” *Bundesarchiv.de*, published in December 1939, published by Kunst im Druck, München.

The Nazi-control over food consumption is a theme in propaganda publications according to Weinreb.¹¹⁶ There are two poster, both from early on in the war (late 1939, early 1940), in which consumption culture is central. Starting with poster 2.3. Here, both gender and sex are used to clarify we are looking at a woman. The woman has her head turned into a hamster, with the leading text “hoarder, shame on you”. In the German language, the hamster is linked to hoarding, with the verb “hamstern” literally translating to hoarding. Hamsterin, already implies that the poster is aimed at women and shows a woman: the “in” at the end makes it a female conjugation of

‘hoarder’. By the female clothing and her full bosom, it is made *extra* clear she is a woman. The gender performance takes away any last doubts about the gender of this caricature; grocery shopping is after all a domestic chore assigned to women. The aim of this poster was to prevent women to follow in the hoarding trend that occurred in the beginning of the war, especially in relatively luxurious products as shown in her arms and basket like oil, a dried sausage, shoes, wine and wool. Hoarding is named shameful.

¹¹⁵ Gupta, “Politics of Gender,” 43.

¹¹⁶ Weinreb, “For the Hungry Have No Past,” 57-58.

Poster 2.4 creates a totally different image, going on about how good the German households have it, and how bad the situation is in England and France. Due to the leave of the working men, women are left alone with –ideally– a house full of young children. In Germany mothers received up to 111 Reichsmark (RM) along with rent and allowances, whilst in London women received the equivalent of 70,65 RM, and in Paris just 39,19 RM. The leading text is “Whilst the families there have just enough to provide for their daily and primary needs, the National Socialists make sure the families of soldiers are provided for”, accompanied with two pictures. One of a woman with a grim look on her face and two children with their heads on her shoulders, and one of a broadly smiling woman, beaming down on the baby in the stroller and a young girl holding the hand of her infant brother or sister. Once again propaganda is used to create a picture of ‘good’ and ‘bad’, with of course in this context the Allied forces as not just the enemy, but also the bad regime who is unable to care for their population like the National Socialist. Moreover, it is clear this poster is from the beginning of the war. Women were not asked to take on jobs, instead they were promoted to stay at home and take care of their household with their military allowance. This is in line with Moellers statement that women relied as long as possible on these state fundings, rather than taking on jobs.¹¹⁷

Women are still shown as mothers during the war, but relatively less than before 1939. Women are shown more and more in a work-setting, but always remain in certain spheres. Even more striking, is the text in poster 2.24, stating that when women are employed, it will be only on a temporary basis. Also notable, is the absence of male figures in the posters. If they are present, they are shown as fathers just four times –and only *before* 1939–, as soldiers or in a higher function in the company.

¹¹⁷ Moeller, *Protecting Motherhood*, 20.; for more on this, see chapter 4.2.

7. Summary of the results

This chapter points out the most striking results this research has brought forth, along with the alignments and discriptions between the historiography and the primary sources, as in the primary sources themselves.

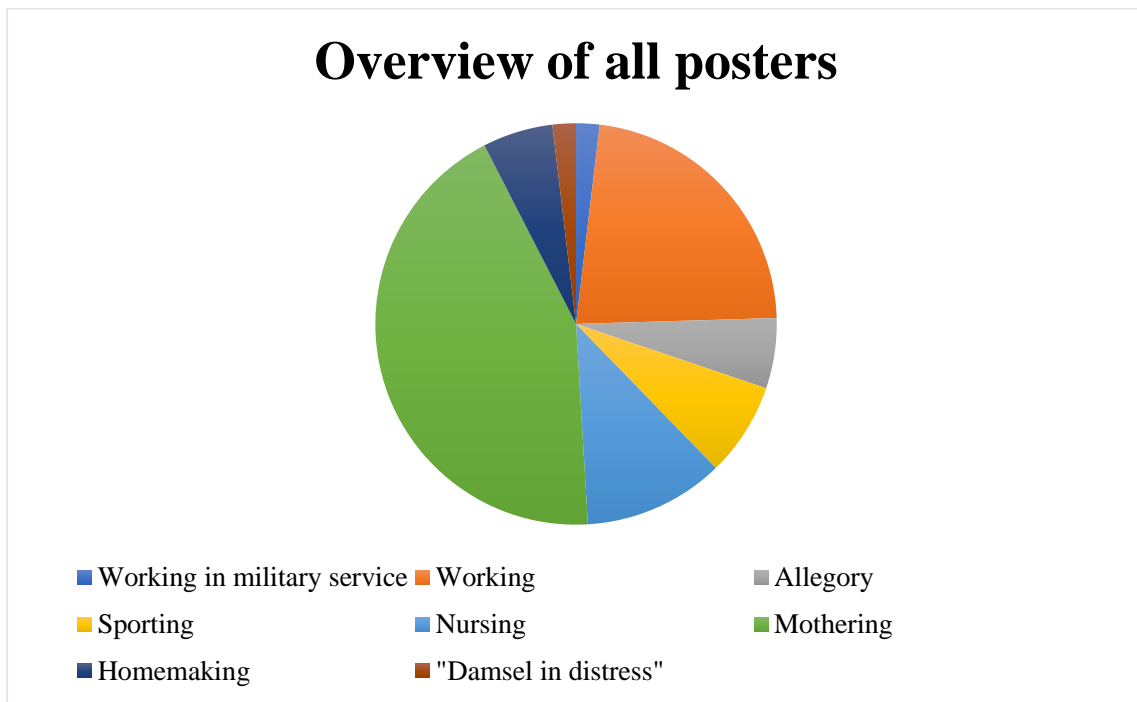


Figure 2. Pie chart showing themes in the selected posters.

In general, when looking at all 50 posters combined, the domestic role of women is most strongly represented, with ‘mothering’ and ‘homemaking’ taking up half of the chart. Nursing as taken separately since this job is connected the strongest to the mother role with nurturing caretaking as central qualities. Other employment, like factory or land labor, do not ask for these. With sporting, the wellbeing of the physical body is meant in terms of exercise. All in all, it could be said that women are mostly shown in a domestic setting, with procreation as underlying theme. Working is a relatively small part of the total, especially when nursing is not considered.

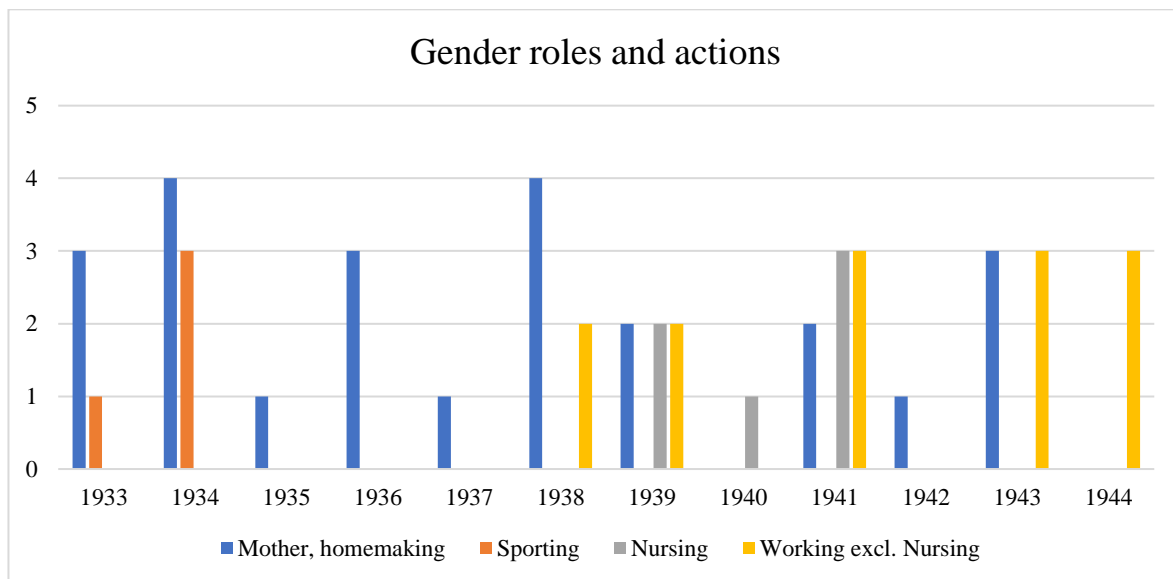


Figure 3. Chart showing gender roles and actions per year.

However, when looking at figure 3, a different conclusion is drawn. Exercising and promoting physically fitness is only directly shown in 1933 and 1934. Women before 1938 were only shown in a domestic setting, afterwards they were also shown as workers, with nursing only shown in the first three years of the war. It is visible that after 1938 the mothering and homemaking role declined but remained active. Based on Figure 3 the conclusion can be drawn that women became workers and got different roles assigned to them after 1937, without letting go of their pre-assigned tasks.

7.1. Turning points, ideal femininity and the female body

In the literature three possible turning points in the tone of propaganda and the notions of ideal femininity are distinguishable. First, there is the change in the tone of the propaganda as mentioned by Stephenson and Kershaw after the military defeats in Russia in November 1941, toppling the idea that the war would easily be won.¹¹⁸ Then there is the turning point that is also employed in this thesis: the period leading up to the war, and the wartime itself, meaning that propaganda first aimed to prepare the public for a war, and later to uphold and maintain morale. Kershaw uses September 1939 as turning point when he looks at the aims of propaganda, argues the themes remain the same, only now with different desired effects.¹¹⁹ Gupta uses the same

¹¹⁸ Kershaw, "How effective was Nazi propaganda?" 180-181.; Stephenson, *Women in Nazi*, 181-183.

¹¹⁹ Kershaw, "How effective was Nazi propaganda?", 200.

turning point as Kershaw.¹²⁰ Ringel points out an entirely different moment when change occurred, stating that women were shown as workers already in 1936, arguing that the Nazi-regime had always been preparing for (and later on, maintaining) war and a war economy.¹²¹ When comparing these three points as discussed in the literature to figure 3, none of these points seem relevant. We see that since 1938 women were also shown as workers, but the domestic tasks and role of women remained present throughout the whole timeframe. In the selected poster no fundamental changes are visible when it comes to ideal femininity, women were however given additional tasks since 1938. Furthermore, it is not justifiable to make general statements on ideal femininity in propaganda: more data and other sources needs to be analyzed to make well-founded claims on how ideal femininity was shown to the general public. This thesis and Ringel both point out that changes occurred at moments that do not align with the turning points as given in the general literature that do not include primary source analyses. It could be the general literature used no more than simple logics and *not* empirical findings when pinning change in tone and ideals on certain moments. This can be looked into further, given follow-up research that uses more and different primary sources academic relevance: namely showing whether these ‘logic’ turning points do prove relevant or not so much, or maybe even pointing out the tone always remained the same. No well-founded claims can be made on the aims of propaganda based on propaganda itself. For this, documents need to be analyzed that state the intentions of the propaganda policymakers and issuers. It would be interesting to compare these documents to the propaganda itself, analyzing how and where the aims of the policymakers reflect in the propaganda.

The female sex is only shown as a prominent theme in the posters published in 1933 and 1934. Biopower is however a relevant term and theme in *all* posters, determining the control over or at least steering of the female body and behavior. Women were in function of the wellbeing of the state. Be it as mother who upheld the national population and preserved and expanded the Aryan race, or be it as a worker who took care of the war industry and -efforts. The term most fitting for describing the Nazi ideology concerning the role of women in society and the definition of gender would be Trögers “elastic ideology”, which in its turn is based on biopolitics.¹²² The ideology as experienced by the German public however was not elastic and proved harder to change. The more set public opinion had the power to determine the themes,

¹²⁰ Gupta, “Politics of Gender,” 46.

¹²¹ Ringel, “Representations of the German Woman’s Body,” 253.

¹²² Bridenthal, *When Biology Became Destiny*, 237.

notions, and statements in the posters, with propaganda being more successful when it taps into already existing notions and opinions.¹²³ Stephenson states propaganda failed to make the German housewife identify with a cause that did not align with her own interests.¹²⁴ This could be since the set vision of femininity proved too strong, despite the propaganda efforts to get women to consider change. Propaganda was, according to both Gupta and Stephenson, hardly successful.¹²⁵ The true effect of propaganda and therefore the selected poster is however unknown.¹²⁶ The Nazi-regime having the need for propaganda posters already points out that, despite living in a totalitarian state, the population *did* have (some) freedom. The government needed them to act more in line with the interest of the state, rather than their own. Thus, posters became a political instrument, issued by the state itself. The only claim that *can* be made is that, based on these 50 posters, attempts were made to get women to *willingly* choose for, act in favor and behave according to the state needs, be it as homemaker, mother, or worker.

Looking at the posters showing working women or promoting women to take on jobs, it is clear that the posters are aimed at (unmarried) childless women. This is in line with Rupp's statement that getting a job was only encouraged for unmarried women, since employment was harmful for the wellbeing of their home and family.¹²⁷ Only poster 1.24 and 2.22 show working women with children, reassuring them that their children are taken well care off in NSV childcares. When women were shown as workers in the selected posters, it was clear that it was not per se meant for *any* women to take on jobs and that domestic chores, preparing to be a mother and developing skills in homemaking were *always* a woman's primary goal in life.

These two posters point out that being married and having children was no reason for women to *not* take on jobs; showing how they could still run their household and how their children would be taken well care off. This is in line with Ringel's statement that women always experienced *some* freedom of choice, as long as their body was in service of the Nazi-regime and according to their ideals: as long as they bared children and cared for their family, it was not a problem women had a job.¹²⁸ This is in line with Welch's statement that the very first aim and theme of Nazi-propaganda was to make appeals to the national unity based upon the principle 'the community before the individual'.¹²⁹ He states that with 'community' not just the German population but also the German state is meant; furthermore, how the German state

¹²³ Welch, "Nazi Propaganda and the Volksgemeinschaft," 215-216.

¹²⁴ Stephon, "Propaganda, Autarky and the German Housewife," 138.

¹²⁵ Ibid., 138.; Gupta, "Politics of Gender," 44.

¹²⁶ Kershaw, "How effective was Nazi propaganda?" 180-181.

¹²⁷ Rupp, "Mother of the 'Volk'", 362.

¹²⁸ Ringel, "Representations of the German Woman's Body," 252-253.

¹²⁹ Welch, "Nazi Propaganda and the Volksgemeinschaft," 215-216.

made their own interests appear as those of the German community, making favoring, supporting, choosing, and acting on these interests easier, more logical and favorable for the German population.¹³⁰ Yet, Welch –nor the other literature– cover the actual freedom that Germans experienced and hence why there was need for propaganda. The statement of Gupta on the oppression of women in Nazi Germany being the most extreme case of anti-feminism in the 20th century is therefore in need of additional context.¹³¹ Whilst it may be true that feminism experienced a set-back under the Nazi-regime, women were not deprived from their freedom of choice; it is however undeniable their choices were limited.

The argumentation by Moeller, who claimed that employment was strongly criticized when women were married, seems unlikely in case of these posters.¹³² The domestic chores and motherhood remained the primary task of women, however they were all but discouraged to take on jobs. Yet it is undeniable that most posters showing working women or imploring women to take on a job, were aimed at younger women that did not (yet) have children. And, as is made clear in 2.24, women were never meant to work permanently, only as long as the state needed them to.

Lastly, when looking at how biopower played out on the posters, something is noticeable. Biopower not only means the making of a racial division in society, but also the control over the lives of the ones deemed as racially good and worthy, determining power structure and relations between the genders.¹³³ As discussed by Rupp, Moeller and Tröger, a clear distinguishment between ‘femininity’ and ‘masculine’ and a division of power with men dominant of women is visible in Nazi society and ideals.¹³⁴ The idea that women were less powerful –not just physically, but also mentally and in terms of abilities– is seen in the posters. Men were relatively absent, but when they *were* shown they were always in a more dominant function: as the head and father of the family, or as company manager.

All in all, propaganda was according to the literature (apart from Herzstein) hardly successful. The true effect of propaganda and therefore the selected poster remains unknown.¹³⁵ The Nazi-regime having the need for propaganda posters already points out that, despite living in a totalitarian state, the population *did* have (some) freedom. The only claim that *can* be made is

¹³⁰ Ibid., 216.

¹³¹ Gupta, “Politics of Gender,” 40.

¹³² Moeller, *Protecting Motherhood*, 17.

¹³³ Bridenthal, *When Biology Became Destiny*, 237.

¹³⁴ Rupp, “Mother of the ‘Volk’”, 365.; Moeller, *Protecting Motherhood*, 17.; Bridenthal, *When Biology Became Destiny*, 237-238.

¹³⁵ Kershaw, “How effective was Nazi propaganda?” 180-181.

that, based on these 50 posters, attempts were made to get women to *willingly* choose for, act in favor and behave according to the state needs, be it as homemaker, mother, or worker. In case of women, they experienced freedom as long as their body was in disposition of the state. Being a homemaking mother was the most visible theme in the posters.

7.2. Tropes and themes in propaganda

Yourman proved most problematic. His statement that Nazi-propaganda was to create one truth, vision, voice, and opinion is true in a certain sense, but it is simplified.¹³⁶ Furthermore, Yourmans statement is so general, it would fit propaganda in any context. Not to mention, Yourman wrote this from an American perspective in 1938, making it biased. This is most evident in his glorification in the freedom of speech and what he calls the freedom to search for the truth in America, something Germans were unable to do, being kept docile by the Nazi government.¹³⁷ The more fitting framework when researching propaganda are the four themes discussed by Welch as Kershaw. The themes are: 1) the appeal to national unity based upon the principle ‘the community before the individual’, 2) the need for racial purity –strengthened by the usage of the Nordic stereotype–, 3) a hatred of enemies which increasingly centered on Jews and Bolsheviks, and 4) a charismatic leadership.¹³⁸

The first theme was shown in most of the posters, with especially in the second timeframe a rising representation of women making a more active contribution to the war industry and efforts. This theme is also connected to the second theme, tapping into the notion that women being a domestic housewife and mother helped the strengthening of the national population and therefore the Third Reich. It strengthens both the family matters, the norms within society and the community, but moreover strengthened the notion on racial purity. The stereotypical Nordic features proved a popular way of showing the Aryan people on the posters.¹³⁹ In my opinion, the first and second themes as discussed by Kershaw and Welch are closely connected. This is linked to the notion of biopower; women are seen as subordinates, the government wanted control over its population and determined the power relation between male and female within society. Women were in a clearly separate and unmergeable sphere from men in the posters, with women unable to climb the career ladder or get a higher education like men could and

¹³⁶ Yourman, “Propaganda Techniques Within Nazi German,” 148, 153.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 148.

¹³⁸ Welch, “Nazi Propaganda and the Volksgemeinschaft,” 217.

¹³⁹ This stereotype is covered by Welch, for more on this see chapter 4.4.; Welch, *The Third Reich*, 84.

were kept in a certain sphere; the homely motherly life, something men were not intended or even taught to do. This is where the female would thrive, whilst the men was the one providing for his home of which his wife would take good care off. The first two themes are most evident in the posters. In half (49%) of the posters, women are shown as mother or in a domestic, homemaking role, as is visible in figure 2.

Now to discuss the third theme of Kershaw and Welch: the hatred of enemies, increasingly centered on Jews and Bolsheviks. This can be linked to Herzstein statement that Germanies enemies are shown as the ultimate evil that Hitler is fighting.¹⁴⁰ Furthermore, Baird states that in propaganda the central theme is hatred towards the two enemies: Britain and the Bolsheviks.¹⁴¹ However, in the selected posters hatred was not a big theme and these statements proved too simple. In the posters, Jews are not mentioned or shown, the only enemy that is covered are Britain and the Bolsheviks.¹⁴² Moreover, in just three posters (1.5, 1.16 and 1.22) before the war is hatred against the Bolshevik regime covered. Hatred against Britain only made its appearance in posters *after* the outbreak of the war. After the war only two poster cover hatred towards Britain and three towards the Bolsheviks.

We see over-the-top representations of Germanies enemies in both the text as the visuals. This is mostly visible in poster 2.20, which also taps into the theme as mentioned by Bachrach: “what would happen in case of defeat?”¹⁴³ However, this theme is a negligible one, since this theme is only visible in just two posters. Poster 2.15 could be argued to have this theme, since it implies that if the Bolsheviks win, the old European culture would be destroyed. The poster Bachrach uses to visualize her argument is the only poster in the selected dataset that *really* captured this theme fully. It is unclear on which other posters or literature Bachrach based this statement, or if only this poster forms its foundation. With the lack of empirical foundation, academic references or other propaganda that point out the same theme in her book, Bachrach statement is problematic. It needs to take more than just one poster to claim this is an active theme in German propaganda at the end of the war.

Baird additionally points out that Hitlers enemies were driven to control the world.¹⁴⁴ This is a somewhat valid point, visible in posters 2.20 and 2.15 where in both cases the

¹⁴⁰ Herzstein, *The War that Hitler Won*, 199.

¹⁴¹ Baird, *The Mythical World of Nazi War Propaganda*, 9.

¹⁴² The only time the Jews are mentioned is in poster 1.22. Here, the enemy is described as “the Jewish Bolshevik”, this is however just once and in a small part of the text, which is given not a prominent place on the poster. Jewish are never mentioned as a separate enemy.

¹⁴³ Bachrach, *State of Deception*, 137.

¹⁴⁴ Baird, *The Mythical World of Nazi War Propaganda*, 9.

Bolshevist are shown as menaces aiming to conquer Germany, exploit its population, and exterminate the ‘good’ European culture. Baird also makes the statement that propaganda had two major themes; antisemitism and anti-Bolshevism.¹⁴⁵ This proves incomplete based on the selected poster, since idealism is not mentioned at all by Baird, nor did antisemitism prove an active theme. The critical note must be placed that by researching femininity it was to be expected that military themes and hatred against Germany’s enemies was less present. It would take another research that would look at *all* propaganda to determine if idealism is indeed a more prominent theme than hatred. This can only be done by researching *all* sources in one or multiple archives, since making a random selection could mean the results are not a good representation of all data.

The over-the-top representation of Hitlers enemies was to be expected; as Herzstein states, one gained nothing in a life-or-death struggle by showing your enemy as easily defeated.¹⁴⁶ This could however be added on to. The enemies shown in context of femininity are mostly used to spread hatred towards the enemy. This is mostly done by showing how bad the situation is under their, and how good it is under the Nazi-rule. Hatred is conveyed in a more sophisticated way. The enemies are less worthy and live less good. This is especially the case for the Bolsheviks, who have a government that do not provide for their population as the National Socialist one does. The over-the-top representation could be a sub-theme that is used –at least in all posters in this research when discussing or showing the enemy– for the third theme. Furthermore, a strong addition would be the showing of ‘good’ and ‘bad’ government policies, in which ‘good’ and ‘bad’ ways of life is covered. Interestingly, the first three themes can be linked together, all thanks to the umbrella term of biopolitics and -power, determining the National Socialist agenda both nationally, as internationally. Germans are the ‘good’ and ‘worthy’ race under the ‘good’ rule of the National Socialist, whilst the enemy are ‘less worthy’, living ‘bad’ –mostly due to their ‘bad’ way government.

The fourth theme is visible in just three posters. Hitler is only talked about in posters 1.15, 1.17 and 1.23, and never shown. This theme is however of relevance, since the love for Hitler or that Hitler has towards its population is connected to all other themes. Poster 1.23 thanked Hitler for the annexation of the Sudetenland. This helped in the forming of a national community, strengthening the notion of ‘blood and soil’. Poster 1.17 states that children are the future of the nation, thanks to Hitler, yet again tapping into also the first theme *and* the second theme by the

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 9.

¹⁴⁶ Herzstein, *The War that Hitler Won*, 199.

promotion of having Aryan children. Poster 1.15 directly quoted Hitler, showing his love for the German mothers and children, and comparing the ‘good’ German situation with the ‘bad’ Bolshevik one. It can therefore be said that also this theme taps into the others. When at first glance the last theme appeared negligible, it strengthened the other three themes.

A theme that is not shown at all, is the blaming of hunger on Hitler's enemies as discussed by Weinreb. Hunger is shown, but only in context of gaining donations and the showing of mothers with their infants, in dire need of help and food. The issuing bodies and charity organizations of these posters are Winterhilfswerk and NSV, Nazi-aligned organizations meant to create both more sympathy towards the Nazi-regime as a *Volksgemeinschaft*.¹⁴⁷ The source of the hunger is not mentioned in the posters. Therefore, Weinreb's theme proved absent. Hunger, cold and aid is used for creating sympathy towards these charities. The ‘hunger’ theme is thus most in line with the first theme of Welch and Kershaw, with everybody chipping in and helping the Germans who are in need.

The four themes as discussed by Welch and Kershaw proved to give a good starting point to work from. It is however quite simple and lacks certain depth. It must be noted that this framework is not perse meant for propaganda showing femininity and women but is a generalized framework for *all* propaganda. The poster selection for this thesis is not broad and big enough to make statements or claims on the lacks and shortcomings of this framework. It can only be pointed out how this framework is not completely fitting the selected posters.

7.3. General remarks

Three additional findings are in my opinion interesting. First, how working women are shown: always clean, in a neat setting, working orderly in a nice, safe environment where their femininity would not suffer and remain intact. When work is promoted or shown, women were still to remain in a certain sphere; the clean and orderly one where femininity, motherhood and their domestic side could not just be preserved, but also flourish. This argument is made in poster 2.22, where the factory is almost shown as a place where women would come to socialize rather than to work; in breaks women took nice walks together, the break area was decorated and furnished homely and cozy, and on the work floor there was always a female manager

¹⁴⁷ Welch, “Nazi Propaganda and the Volksgemeinschaft,” 218-219.

present offering help or to simply make conversation. Above all, women were offered temporary housing where, thanks to the nice women living there and its homely interior, they would instantly feel at home. Getting women to take on jobs, was however of great importance for the state and its (war) economy. Poster 2.22 shows that against all odds, the Nazi-regime wanted to reassure women they stayed in their known, feminine sphere, even whilst employed.

Also striking, is the absence of some ages. We see children under the age of 12 where they are still in the care (and control) of their parents. Then we see and read about young women from the age of seventeen onwards who qualify to become a mother and a married housewife. After the age of about 45, women disappear; they are becoming too old to have children and be an active part of the labor force. This absent group of women is in my opinion quite easily explained; they are not the intended audience, mostly because they could (no longer) provide the state needs. Teenagers are relatively absent but still relevant in the 'sporting' theme. This is in line with the idea of biopolitics in the Nazi-German case concerning women and girls: nursing, homemaking and healthcare (in order to have a strong, fertile body) were deemed essential female tasks and skills. Females were only shown when they were healthy, happy children, or when they became the one producing healthy, happy children, but also able to take on a job when the state needed them to. It is than of no surprise that in almost *all* posters, women are broadly smiling, showing happy and proud emotions.

Lastly, the target audience of the posters was not made clear by *Bundesarchiv*, so only speculations can be made based on the message the posters convey or communicate. In the selected posters three potential target audiences were distinguishable: families (or future families, newlyweds), women and all Germans. Fifteen posters were aimed at all Germans, three at families and 32 at women in specific. This however made no difference in how women were shown. The representation of womanhood or femininity remained stable, the target audience proved to make no difference in how women were shown. It is however noteworthy that posters with female representations were mostly aimed at females themselves.

8. Conclusion

This thesis asked the main question “how can propaganda posters be used in historical research and what knowledge can be gained from analyzing propaganda posters when researching femininity as Nazi policymakers envision it in specific?” Now, the final answers follow. Possible follow-up research and how and where improvements can be made in the future will be covered as well.

This thesis has proven that no totally new insights occurred from the selected posters. The most fitting term for the ideal femininity according to the Nazi policymakers, is elastic ideology. There is not one ‘set’ image that can be pinned on what ideal femininity is. The primary sources point out that women were always subject to the need of the state. Biopolitics proved to be of relevance in determining that the Aryan race is worthy of life and ‘inferior’ races are not, and furthermore determined the Nazi control over the lives of its population. The female fertility and their domestic and caretaking skills proved central in the posters. This is however not shocking; women were after all the (re)producers of the ‘good’ Aryan and German race. Not all themes as discussed in the literature are distinguishable in the selected posters, yet it is not justifiable to call for adjustment or alterations of the literature. This research only covers one archive and one kind of primary source. What is more, all sources had the same overlapping theme: women. It is not justifiable to make claims or statements on sources and archives that are outside of this research.

This thesis –as well as Ringel did– points out that the time frames in the literature are not always fitting. In future research it is unpreferable to work with a “turning points” hypothesis based on literature. The literature proved generalized and most likely ‘just’ based on simple logic. Each primary source analyses will individually point out their own “turning point” –if they have one. It is true that two timeframes are used in the primary source analysis of this thesis, this was however to point out if a change occurred in the representation of women and womanhood. As mentioned, the image of women as mothers remained relatively stable, no “turning point” is visible. Since 1938 women were also shown as workers, but again this is not shocking and in line with the state interests. The German population was after all in disposition of the state, at all times. To expect change occurs prior to research and that the given “turning points” in the literature are correct and always applicable, is a highly undesirable presumption.

When it comes to the usability of posters in historical research, some critical remarks are to be made. This thesis concludes that propaganda posters are questionable and not recommended sources when researching *actual* ideal femininity according to the National Socialists. Researching this would require sources directly made by the policymakers, *not* meant for or aimed at the German public –think for example of the Vierjahresplan. Comparing these sources to propaganda would be relevant. Propaganda exists in the grey area between the ideal (and therefore, elastic) ideology of the policymakers who issue the propaganda, and the more set public opinion of the ones who the propaganda is aimed at. It could not have been easy publishing propaganda, torn between what you, the issuer, want to achieve but needing to take the set opinion into account, the very thing you try to change or at least alter. This resulted in the set notion on what women were to do, behave and act remaining present in all years. And even when women were shown or seen as workers, they remained in their known, feminine domain, making the step and choice to act in line and according to these elastic, biopolitical Nazi-ideals easier or at least less scary. What also needs to be considered is that no claims can be made on the effectiveness of the posters and what audience it actually reached –and how big this audience was. Therefore, propaganda posters are a usable primary source in researching how the policymakers *conveyed* their ideals to the public, without making claims on how effective they were –this is not measurable.

This thesis proved there is no best way in using propaganda posters in historical research, only the least problematic one. The usage of propaganda posters as a primary source in the existing literature is troublesome, with structured analyses absent. Cherry-picking proved a recurring problem. Basing your argumentation on the findings from primary sources selected and analyzed prior to conducting the argumentation and conclusion is always better than picking the most fitting and preferable primary source afterwards, excluding argumentation based on an unbiased dataset. In the future it would be interesting to look at all posters in *Bundesarchiv*, showing how femininity is visible (both in text and image) in posters *without* visual representations of women. Or by looking at how much posters show women relative to all posters in this archive. Moreover, other archives could be analyzed and compared to *Bundesarchiv*.

In the future, ideally, one big organization or site would be constructed in which primary sources are kept under one digital roof –not just posters, think also of photographs, newspapers, or advertisements. Establishing an umbrella organization in which all sources are gathered and made accessible (via their own archive or institution) would be most preferable: working in the same way as Google Scholar and Books, per example. Then, datasets can easier be found.

However, the increased risk of picking preferable sources or the ones that pop up first needs to be taken into consideration. It is needed to be one's own watchdog and always take the non-cherry-picking measures to heart, not just in this hypothetical umbrella organization and irrespective of the kind of primary source. The umbrella organization would therefore still have problems and cherry-picking would still not be remedied. It would only mean the unification of the still available and accessible sources, making future research easier. Setting up an initial like this would require international cooperation of countless (educational) institutions, archives, organizations, and personal collectors, whilst still needing to deal with obstacles like property- and copyrights. This task would be hard and time-consuming, but nevertheless a noble and academically valuable endeavor.

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10. Appendix

Source criticism

External criticism

About the producer:

- Who is the producer?
- Is the producer either directly or indirectly connected to the Nazi-party?
- Is the opinion or standing point of the publisher made clear?
- If information is given in the poster, how is the information presented and is it clear where the information came from?

About the publication:

- Where was it printed?
- When was it printed?
- Is the aim of the poster (so, which message it wants to give) clear in either the text or the visual? And if so, how is this made clear.
- Is it clear for who the poster is meant? Or if a clear audience public or place is mentioned/shown or implicated?

Internal criticism

The visual:

What is shown?

- A short summary of what can be seen on the poster; who, what and when?

How is this shown? For this I will look at...

- Mise-en-scene: the filling of the space within the poster
- Décor/setting of the poster
- Emotions shown by the present parties or in the text
- Actions and movements
- The interaction or relationship between the parties present
- The text and if this either aligns with the points above, or differs

The meaning:

- Is a certain story or storytelling used in conveying the message of the poster?

- Does the poster use stereotypes or cliché images, and if so, how? Or in other words ‘over the top’ representation of something or someone
- Is symbolism or are metaphors used? Think per example the eagle representing the Third Reich, etc.
- Yet again, does text strengthen or contradicts the message/meaning?

What is not shown or talked about?

- Are certain characters absent whilst they are (indirectly) part of the story the poster is given? Are the women Aryan, Jewish, poor, rich, etc.? And what does this say about the underlying value patterns?

How are values and norms presented?

Is made clear how is thought about...

- Certain sexes; so, man and women
 - This raises the extra question; how is sex shown, based on gender performances?
- Ethnicities
- Social, economic, or political class
- Sexual preference

Criticisms based on: Anneke Smelik, *Effectief beeldvormen. Theorie, analyse en praktijk van beeldvormingsprocessen* (Assen: Van Gorcum & Comp, 1999), 99.