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When Biology Became Destiny

How Historians Interpret Gender in the Holocaust – with Marion Kaplan

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Transcribed by: Samantha Munoz

[Holocaust Living History Workshop](#)

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- Time Transcription
- 0:00 [READ WRITE THINK DREAM / UC San Diego Library Channel /
www.uc.tv/library-channel]
- 0:10 Marion Kaplan: I'm going to give a historiographical view of gender and the history of the Holocaust. Looking back on the past three decades of historical studies on Jewish women in the Holocaust is no small task. I started my own research in the 1970s with a study of the German Jewish feminist movement, the Juedischer Frauenbund, and with another book that analyzed women's roles in Jewish families in nineteenth-century Germany. By the early 1990s, the field of women in the Holocaust had just begun. My own interest stemming from my family history, my parents were refugees from Germany, and from my early engagement with the women's movement as a graduate student at Columbia, led me to this field. It took a while for me to gain the courage to address Jewish women and families in Nazi, Germany. It felt too close. Still, as with my other books, I wondered, might women have experienced this era differently than men? And if so, how?
- 1:15 Marion Kaplan: The early pioneers of the field assumed, yes, of course, women experience things differently than men. But we needed to do the research. I'll start there. But first, a historical reminder, 1980s feminists may have propagated this agenda, but questions about gender arose long before, although we did not know that at the time. Dr. Emanuel Ringelblum's collection of testimonies, reports, and surveys in the Warsaw ghetto from 1939 until 1943 later known as Oneg Shabbat - the project was called Oneg Shabbat - asked questions of and about women and many of the collectors were women. Polish, Jewish - and there's a new film coming out right now which many of you may see in the next few months -
- 2:07 Speaker 1: Film Festival, February 13th, Sunday.
- 2:11 Marion Kaplan: February 13th, it's playing at the Jewish Film Festival and it's called, *Who Will Write Our History* and the book itself by Sam Kassow is a brilliant, beautiful, beautifully written book about Ringelblum and the collection of these archival data during the Holocaust. Polish-Jewish historian Phillip Friedman, who survived in Lviv in hiding, set an agenda also for future research as early as 1945. That was later published as *Pathways to Extinctions* - some of you may know that book - including the biological impact of starvation on men and women, statistics of biological destruction, the disintegration of the family, post-war medical and psychological exams of survivors, all of which implied at the very minimum gender and generational analysis. The first large-scale research impetus came in 1983. Let's see if I can get it. Yes. In a pathbreaking conference coordinated by Joan Ringelheim and Esther Katz in New York entitled *Women Surviving the Holocaust* - and that's my copy. And it's an eight-and-a-half by eleven-inch group, pieces of paper stuck together with a stapler. It was never really published. For two days, four hundred survivors and female scholars, as well as two male scholars, try to

figure out whether, and if so how, gender mattered. At points, we broke into small groups and I had the opportunity of taking notes in one survivor's group. I recall my surprise at the time and confusion when many survivors both rejected the importance of gender and highlighted it at the same time. In other words, these older women claimed being a woman didn't matter and then described how indeed it had mattered. I thought then, and I still think today that many survivors did not want to support a feminist inquiry and yet hope to tell their stories for posterity.

4:31 Marion Kaplan: That same year Vera Laska - that's the organizer, Joan Ringelheim. That same year Vera Laska, herself a survivor - and she's the one with the glasses looking very seriously at someone else - Vera Laska published her *Women in the Resistance and the Holocaust*, that's 1983, using women's testimonies. Twelve years after that first foray, Dalia Ofer and Lenore Weitzman organized the International Workshop on Women in the Holocaust at the Hebrew University in 1995. Why did it take so long? The short answer, scholars needed to do the research that connected women's history, feminist theory, and the Holocaust. This took time. In the 1990s, for example, *Lessons and Legacies of the Holocaust*, published by the Holocaust Educational Foundation offered just two articles about women in its first three volumes, which spanned the whole 1990s. Scholars' focus on Jewish women caused some opposition in the 1990s. Part of what I see as a conservative backlash against feminism. A few critics even lumped feminist historians with Holocaust deniers, accusing feminists of using the Holocaust for their own agendas. Specifically, these critics saw a gender analysis as quote, privileging women. That is raising women's suffering above that of men and maintained that women's experiences were irrelevant or even worse irreverent. Thankfully that debate led by *Commentary Magazine* - some of you may know that - died down very quickly. [laughs]

6:15 Marion Kaplan: Indeed, women's historians had always underlined that being Jewish mattered first and foremost, but as Joan Ringelheim wrote quote, the end, namely annihilation or death does not describe the process. Mary Felstiner specified that quote, along the stations toward extinction, each gender lived its own journey. I added rather defensively, but probably appropriately for 1998, that quote, to raise the issue of gender can never place blame on other survivors for the disproportionate deaths of Jewish women. Blame rests with the murderers. To raise the issue of gender also does not place it above racism. We know that the Nazis did not want to quote, share the earth with the Jewish people. That's Hannah Arendt. However, gender helps to tell a fuller, more intimate, and more nuanced story. It gives Jewish women a voice long, denied them, and a perspective long denied us. And I believe that to this day. Research on Jewish women didn't occur in a void. American and European women's historians began publishing on a wide variety of topics linked to women's history. This is another one of the, the survivors, a survivor of Theresienstadt at that conference.

7:42 Marion Kaplan: For example, one of the first books that came out in women, in European women's history was called *Becoming Visible: Women in European History*. Then historians began to explore women in Nazi society. Tim Mason, an English historian of Germany grew interested in German non-Jewish women in the 1970s. In the 1980s, Claudia Koonz's his book *Mothers in the Fatherland* as well as Renate Bridenthal, Atina Grossman, and my own book, *When Biology Became Destiny* also included Jewish women in these histories, but separately. They had their own chapters. My own work, therefore, coincided with and was greatly influenced by the scholarship of other women's historians, as well as the entry of women's history into the academy. You know, the first courses on women's history started in the sort of 1980s, early eighties. How did we write these histories? First, we needed to discover materials in newspapers and in governments, and in organizational archives. But many of us also turned to memoirs, diaries, letters, and interviews as crucial first-person evidence. Reapplying the feminist motto, the personal is political, many historians insisted that the personal was also historical. That without women's memories, we missed half the history of the Holocaust. More specifically, without women's memories, we miss the familial and domestic aspects of the Holocaust, but also the gendered public behaviors and humiliations as well as gendered persecutions in ghettos and camps. Indeed, a recent historian concluded the diaries and memoirs dating from the war and post-war years are two majors, are the two major sources regarding pregnancy, birth, and sexuality. In addition, comparing personal testimonies of both Jewish women and men makes gender an obvious, really an inescapable lens.

9:50 Marion Kaplan: The conference I mentioned in 1995 opened a new research avenue, including the history of Jewish women and families before the war in both Western and Eastern Europe, women's struggles in ghettos and camps and resistance, and women's accounts in Holocaust literature. Most of those topics focused on women rather than on comparative gender analysis, but some did gender as well. These themes set, themes set the stage for the next twenty years of studies. Researchers, and myself included, benefited from the topics raised at this conference, the sources suggested there, and the creative energy bursting from the conference itself. Lenore Weitzman's *Women and the Holocaust* came out three years later as did Judith Tydor Baumel's *Gender and the Holocaust*. This brings me to the topic I delivered at that conference, out of which grew my book *Between Dignity and Despair: Jewish Life in Nazi Germany*. Now I turn to that research and highlight a few of my major findings from that time. Although the calamity that hit German Jews affected them as Jews first, they also suffered based on gender. At first, Jewish men were far more vulnerable to physical assault and arrest and women remained to carry the burdens of maintaining their homes and families, households, and communities. Even if ultimately Jewish women were also enemies doomed to perish in the Nazis quote, race war. Not only was early Nazi racism and persecution gendered, so too were the victim's survival strategies

in both practical and psychological terms. The victims reacted not only as Jews but as Jewish men and women. A focus on women led me to recognize, for example, that in contrast to men, most women took the early warning signals of Nazism more seriously than most men, adjusting to the abrupt changes in law and culture imposed by the Nazi party and embraced by many non-Jewish Germans.

12:03 Marion Kaplan: Women eagerly trained for jobs and crafts, useful abroad. Whereas men hoped that they would be able to maintain their careers and professions in Germany. And at home, women made do on smaller budgets, shopped in hostile stores, and tried to create cheer in cramped spaces while husbands were asked only to limit their expectations. Finally, many women became breadwinners often for the first time as husbands lost their businesses or jobs. Gender made an enormous difference in deciding between fight and flight. In the early years, Jewish women were more sensitive to discrimination, much more eager to leave Germany, were willing to face uncertainty and lower class status abroad rather than discrimination and ostracism at home. Jewish men thought they had, and did have, a great deal more to lose by fleeing. Over 80 percent of Germany's approximately 525,000 Jews lived solid middle-class lives. These men had to tear themselves away from their life work, whether a business or professional practice. Usually more educated than women, many men felt a deep attachment to German culture. Additionally, many of them had fought in World War I and these veterans believed that their service and patriotism would count for something. More importantly, since middle-class men had previously been the primary breadwinners, as long as they made a living, they were unwilling to face poverty abroad.

13:44 Marion Kaplan: So in light of men's primary identity with their occupation and breadwinner status, they often felt trapped into staying. Women whose identity was more family-oriented struggled to preserve what was central to them by fleeing with it. Ironically, those men whose businesses declined as a result of the Nazi boycott of April 1933 and sporadic increasing boycotts thereafter, and those who lost their jobs due to the antisemitic April laws of 1933 had little choice but to leave, which resulted in their family's safety. By April 1938, sixty percent of all businesses that Jews had owned before 1933 no longer existed. Still, until November [19]38, some of those men who had not lost their jobs in businesses hung on - either hoping the regime would collapse or trying to get the documents necessary to flee. In addition to different experiences in the world of work, men and women also led relatively distinct lives and often interpreted daily events differently. Women were more integrated into their neighborhoods. They noticed daily interactions with neighbors, regular exchanges with the grocer, and participated in local women's organizations. Raised to be sensitive to social situations, women's social antennae were finely tuned and also directed toward more unconventional, what men might've considered more trivial, sources of

information: what the baker said, whether the neighbor gave her usual good morning greeting.

- 15:23 Marion Kaplan: A widespread assumption that women lacked political acumen stemming from their primary role in the domestic sphere, often gave women's warnings less credibility, and the prejudice that women might be hysterical in the face of danger worked to everyone's disadvantage. Many men insisted that they were more attuned to political realities. They claimed to see the broader picture to maintain an objective stance. When Elsa Gerstel urged her husband, a former judge who had lost his job, to emigrate, he responded, the German people, the German judges would not stand for much more of this madness. Men mediated their experiences through newspapers and broadcasts. Whereas women's narrower picture, the minutia, and significance of direct everyday contacts, brought politics home. Women also seem to have been acutely aware of their children's unhappiness, another reason to flee. When children suffered from abuse at school, mothers and fathers often disagreed as to the solution. Tony Lessler, the founder and director of a Montessori school in Berlin which became a Jewish school, remembered quote, the city schools became ever more difficult for the Jewish children. If the parents had only guessed what the children had to go through. And it must probably have been a false pride that caused the fathers, in particular, to keep their children in city schools. Lesslers pointed, Lessler pointed not only to fathers' aspirations to give their children a quality education but also to their stand-tough approach. Memoirs, furthermore, attest to the fathers' unrealistic hopes that their children would not suffer and to their insistence that the children develop quote, thicker skin.
- 17:10 Marion Kaplan: Recalling debates within Berlin Jewish families, Peter Wyden summed up, quote, it was not a bit unusual in these go or no go family dilemmas for the women to display more energy and enterprise than the men. Almost no women had a business, a law office, or a practice - a medical practice - to lose. They were less status-conscious, less money-oriented than the men. They seem to be less rigid, less cautious, more confident of their ability to flourish on new turf. Finally, I noticed that women's perspectives highlighted entirely new public-private dimensions of history. For example, men wrote of the public spectacle of the November Pogrom, otherwise known as Kristallnacht or crystal night, the smashed shops, the burning synagogues, the lasting image of broken glass in the streets. A powerful image mentioned often and only in Jewish women's memoirs is that of flying feathers covering internal spaces, the home, the hallway, the courtyard. Similar to pogroms in Russia at the turn of the century, the marauders tore up goose feather blankets and pillows shaking them into the rooms, out the windows, down the stairways. Bereft of their bedding, Jews lost the kind of physical and psychological security and comfort that this represented. In addition, Jews could no longer replace those items due to their cost and also because the looming war

economy severely limited linens. Broken glass in public and strewn feathers in private spell the end of Jewish family life and security in Germany.

- 18:56 Marion Kaplan: Gender differences in perceiving danger accompany gender role reversals. In what Raul Hilberg, as early as 1992 described, as communities of men without power and women without support. We find for the most part anxious, but active women who early on greatly expanded their traditional roles. Many experimented with new behaviors, rarely before attempted by any middle-class German women. For example, interceding for their men with the authorities and seeking paid employment for the first time. Two examples will have to suffice. The first focus is on the November Pogrom of 1938 highlighting women's activities under dire circumstances. While destroying Jewish property, the marauders also beat and arrested about 30,000 men and interned them in concentration camps. There were exceptions. Some women were publicly humiliated, beaten, and murdered. But mostly women were forced to stand by and watch their homes and shops torn apart and their men abused. Later women summoned the courage to overcome gender stereotypes of passivity in order to find any means to free men from camps. Ruth Abraham, whose picture is up there, impressed her family, but also the Nazis with her determination and bravery. During the Pogrom it was she who pulled her fiance out of his store and led him through the teeming crowds to safety. She then traveled to Dachau concentration camp to ask for her father-in-laws - or future father-in-law's - release.
- 20:36 Marion Kaplan: Arriving in a bus filled with Hitler's elite troops, she entered the camp where she was ignored. She assumed that because of her quote, Aryan looks, her blonde hair, and blue eyes, those in charge took her for a member of the League of German Girls. She requested an interview with the Kommandant and begged for the release of her elderly father-in-law and she succeeded. Again, attributing her success to her looks since the men who helped her refused to believe that she was a quote, full Jew and seemed to take pity on her. Abraham's highly unconventional behavior found a more conventional reward. The couple married immediately. The rabbi who performed the ceremony did so with bandaged hands, an indication of the treatment he had received in a concentration camp. The second example focuses on women making family decisions. In the aftermath of the Pogrom, women not only arranged the release of loved ones but also sent their children abroad on what were known as Kindertransports. They also sold property and made all kinds of emigration decisions. Accompanying her husband home after his ordeal in a camp, one wife announced she had just sold their house and bought tickets to, of all places, Shanghai for the whole family. Her husband reflected in a later memoir, anything was okay with me only not to stay in the land in which everyone had declared open season on us. Similar expressions of thankfulness tinged perhaps with a bit of surprise at women's heroism can be found in many men's memoirs. They continue to be indebted to women even after

their ordeal when many men too beaten in body and spirit could not be of much use during the scramble for emigration.

- 22:22 Marion Kaplan: Traditionally men had publicly guarded the honor of the family and the community. Now suddenly women found themselves in this difficult and new position. Even though women transcended certain gender roles, gender as such caused serious consequences in emigration. Gender made a difference in matters of life and death. For example, more women than men remain trapped in Nazi Germany. There are many explanations for this, including male deaths in World War I, a higher number of widows, the intention of men to emigrate first and then bring their families over when they had settled, and so on. It is also clear that more men got out before the doors were shut through business connections, capitalist visas to mandate Palestine, or because they were in physical danger earlier than women and women sent them out first. The disproportionate number of elderly women, whom the Nazis murdered suggests that gender and age were a lethal combination. This then was my early research, looking at the grassroots, at daily life, and at the quotidian responses of German Jews. I've found that the genders often perceived and reacted to the same events differently.
- 23:42 Marion Kaplan: And gender could also be a matter of life and death. When we observe grassroots developments, we see clearly that the public and private lives of Jews often varied in accordance with gender. So what happened in the next twenty years? To this day, there seems to be a good deal of social history and women's history, including local histories of Eastern and Western Europe and histories of camps and ghettos. Often these social and women's histories include women but are not consciously about gender. That's the point you were making before, which is sometimes it focuses on women, nothing wrong with that. But often it's now trying to also look at the differences between men - male and female experiences. If we approach topics in a gendered way, we ask, might've changed the narrative. Holocaust historians, especially male historians, rarely asked how women experienced aspects of the Holocaust differently from men or how this might change our understandings. Literary scholars do that more often. They ask gendered questions of their texts, whether autobiographies or fiction. They come to the text with a particular interest in gender, but fewer historians seem to go beyond including women.
- 24:52 Marion Kaplan: Still, some promising research in Holocaust history has appeared lately. I can't go into all of it, but we'll mention two areas, new work on Eastern Europe and on the topic of sexuality. I'll start with historians of Eastern Europe. For example, there's new work now on women inside and outside of ghettos, which includes the family life of Jewish women, women's strategies of survival, as opposed to male strategies of survival. Who did what within the ghetto and on what's called the Aryan side, when they sneak out of the ghetto and try to pick up another identity, social roles in the ghetto, more testimonies and literary

perspectives, as well as cultural studies, and work on individual women like Rachel Auerbach of the Warsaw ghetto based on her diary and literary work. In addition, autobiographies have flourished. In 2009, Louise Vasvári gathered four hundred entries of women's life writings from Central and Eastern Europe. And these are only the ones in English. So those of you who are professors and want to give yourself students projects to do., there are hundreds of memoirs in English on a variety of subjects having to do with the Holocaust. This was the result of quote, a boom in such writings that occurred after years of mostly remaining unpublished by the women themselves or refused by publishers. Like Primo Levi's book, for example, was also refused for a long time. So it took a while till memoirs became, were published at all and then became easily, more easily accessible.

- 26:44 Marion Kaplan: Research on sexualities and the body have made significant progress in the last years mostly as women's history. Back in 1993, Claudia [unclear] addressed how the Nazis targeted lesbians. And we can find lesbians and the Holocaust noted in studies in the Shoah as early as 1999, but we need far more research and taboos make this difficult. Still, books about same-sex desire exists. I've used *Aimée & Jaguar* in teaching and will translate parts of a new book in the series, *Jewish Miniatures* that focuses on another couple Marta Halusa and Margot Liu. Also, queer history in and of itself, as well as how that research can answer questions about women's lives in extremes, should be addressed. Though these topics get harder to research as time passes since the numbers were much smaller, to begin with, and the survivor population is dying.
- 27:42 Marion Kaplan: Endangered as Jews, women also experienced sexual vulnerability. Sexual violation often started with sexual humiliation, nudity, and shaving in the camps. Anthropologists have pointed out we need to understand violence not solely as physical, but as an attack on the humanity - the personhood - of individuals. In camps, for example, many daughters had never seen their mothers undressed and then in front of male guards. Nor had most women ever shaved their heads. One survivor wrote of the quote, blow to her morale after such a shaving. Quote, we could have been shot, gassed, and yet the single act of German brutality constituted a sacrilegous act on our bodies, our only possessions. This may have affected religious women even more due to their strict upbringing regarding modesty and nudity. Men too were shaved, but in general, spoke far less about sexual violation or worried about nudity. The sexual economy and sexual barter during the Holocaust needs further exploration. Anna Hájková's work on Theresienstadt for example highlights the power dynamics of unequal relationships, but it's also stymied by taboos. Many survivors, male and female, saw women's sexual victimization as a stigma to be concealed.
- 29:12 Marion Kaplan: The film, *Long as the Road*, shot on location in a Jewish DP [displaced persons] camp, displaced persons camp, in Germany in 1947 offers a powerful example of this. In it, the young woman wants to confide to her male

partner about something that happened to her during the war. But the man gently hushes her and tells her that it's better to forget. Viewers understand both that he hopes she will stop thinking about her trauma assumed to be sexual barter or rape, but also that he does not want to know. If or when there was sexual barter. How do we understand this? As a choice? As a choiceless choice? Perhaps the memoir of Marie Jalowicz Simon published in 2015 can offer some clues. Born to a middle-class Jewish family, in 1922, she was only twenty. Young, slight, and pretty when she decided to go underground in 1942. Luckily some non-Jews helped her throughout her subterfuge as a half-Jew. But her sexual relationships with men made a significant difference in her survival. Her first situation, meant having sex with the husband of the woman who had just taken her in. Quote, I just let him have his way. She left after two days. The next man who sheltered her, a Bulgarian painter actually fell in love with her and offered to take her to Bulgaria. She agreed, hoping to make her way to Palestine from there, but those plans fell through. Still, she spends safe weeks with this man whom she also thought of as her lover, although she realized they would never have had a future together if she survived.

31:04 Marion Kaplan: She also bartered sex for a quote engagement, at least for an attempted engagement with another worker, someone who did not speak more than a few words of German, a relationship that lasted only one day. Luckily for her, one man who offered her a hiding spot confessed - her words - to her that he quote, was no longer capable of any kind of sexual relationship. She was overcome, quote by relief and jubilation. Marie Simon also allowed a woman who sheltered her for several weeks to kiss her goodnight every night and caress her body on one occasion describing the event as not unpleasant, but a sin. Her last relationship was two years long with a Dutch worker who had come to Germany on his own before the forced laborers and who was an anti-Nazi. An intermediary told her, told this inexperienced young man that Marie would be quote, his sexual liberation and that she would keep house for him. She saw him as a safe haven. They lived as a couple, although he occasionally hit her, angry at her love of reading. He could also be quote, pleasant and considerate, and they always had a lot to talk about with regard to the war.

32:22 Marion Kaplan: How do we analyze this story? I asked before, are these choices or choiceless choices? How do historians, even the victims, distinguish between forced and consensual relationships when the latter could mean the difference between life and death? I don't have an answer. The interesting and arresting part of Simon's story is that she understood her situation, bartering sex for safety, and still sometimes even liked the man she was with. In no sense did she see herself as purely a victim of these men, even when she let one of them quote, have his way, she disliked her immediate circumstances with men, but survival remained foremost in her mind. She makes it clear that she was a victim, not of these men, but of the Nazis. It's taken many years for scholars to publish about rape. Not only

because taboos exist around the subject. Sarah Cushman wrote of the difficulty, difficulty of representing sexuality without crossing the line to pornography. She also reminded us of Elizabeth Heineman's assertion that quote, failure to investigate evidence that appears time and time again is in an academic sense, bad scholarship. In a moral sense, it disregards the imperative both to commemorate past victims and to prevent future atrocities.

33:54 Marion Kaplan: Sources were and are available, but complicated and scattered. Older testimonies do exist. Still, we need an ensemble of data from victims, witnesses, and perpetrators. To complicate matters further, much of the testimony is partial. Nazi documents, army cases, post-war trials of perpetrators have their own issues, although they also need to be used with care. Scholars Regina Mühlhäuser and Zoe Waxman and Beverley Chalmers among others have raised these topics and offered examples. I would argue that their work should not only be seen as specialized histories of rape during war but also as Holocaust scholarship. They have to be integrated and so far they aren't. Further substantiating this notion, David Cesarani in his one thousand-page book *The Final Solution* showed that almost every atrocity against Jews in Poland, Latvia, Lithuania, and Ukraine included rape and sexualized violence against Jewish women. Sometimes by Germans, sometimes by the Germans' local helpers. Who were the main perpetrators of these rapes against Jewish victims? Research highlights the Einsatzgruppen and the Wehrmacht as perpetrators. The Wehrmacht is the German army and Einsatzgruppen were these SS murderous, uh -

35:21 Speaker 1: Squads.

35:23 Marion Kaplan: Squads. Thank you. Particularly after the beginning of the war of annihilation against the Soviet Union. Some of this information comes from later testimonies of German soldiers since rapists often killed the victims to prevent incrimination of the perpetrators. Other German soldiers proved reluctant to talk about these events, even after the war, either to avoid being seen as brutal or for fear of admitting to what the Nazis had termed Rassenschande or racial shame. Yet new research makes absolutely clear that we can no longer accept this excuse. Racial shame did not as a rule inhibit sexual contact in the East. Inside Germany, courts treated the transgression harshly, but most soldiers got away with it on the Eastern front. As Millhauser has pointed out sexual violence while seen as a quote, crime against military discipline and racial purity became a normal part of everyday warfare. And gang rape also strengthened loyalty within the squadron. In other words, rape may not have been part of the Nazi's original genocidal plans, but figured in the continuum of violence, even near execution sites.

- 36:41 Marion Kaplan: Looking ahead. I would like to raise some areas that need further attention in both older and newer historical fields. Aryan women who I might have not discussed in this talk, but who many see as quote, second-tier agents of terror to quote Doris Bergen, need further investigation despite the good work already done in that field. And I still consider interactions between Jewish and non-Jewish women a necessity. There have been only a few attempts so far, especially for women in hiding in Germany. So there have been some attempts that show non-Jewish women helping Jewish women in terms of hiding. But we have very little on these Jewish non-Jewish interactions. I would also like to see more actual gender research, real contrasts between women and men, a kind of integrated history. In addition, by looking at race and class together with gender and sexuality, we uncover the imbalances of power relations between what men and women in public and private. The different factors that helped men and women survive, and the breakdown of social and cultural norms among Jews and non-Jews often with regard to how women were treated.
- 37:58 Marion Kaplan: We can also learn how class or ethnicity was expressed through gender roles in ghettos and camps, or forced labor, or hiding, or passing. This would include not just gender, but masculinity studies. You'd want to know how men fit these roles and how women fit these roles and then compare them. There's been important research on women's bonding experiences and camp sister relationships in extreme situations, but we need more and more comparisons with men. We have seen young girls adopted by young female strangers or by girls from their hometowns in camps. Camp sisters tried to stay together giving purpose to their lives and protecting each other as long as they could. We've also learned that women sometimes created fictive families. For example, Ruth Kluger in her wonderful book, *Still Alive*, which I would recommend to everybody. Ruth Kluger's mother adopted a daughter in Auschwitz. The three survived together and remained a family in the United States till the mother died and now the two sisters are still together.
- 39:09 Marion Kaplan: How widespread was this? And do we find similar relationships among men, besides Primo Levi? Because he writes about one. I also see family histories as opportunities to highlight gendered reactions and gender roles when facing persecution. Although family histories have sometimes elided or ignored gender, newer studies raise these issues. The history of mothering during the Holocaust also needs more attention. One camp survivor repeated almost as a mantra, I had a mother, I had a mother. Underlining how her mother made the difference between life and death. How did mothers manage to feed, clean, or nurture children? How did they flee? For example, Lea Lazego with two children and a three-month-old infant climbed the Pyrenees on foot in 1943. She arrived in Lisbon in time to have the children sent to relatives in the United States. I can't even imagine that climbing mountains with two children and a three-month-old and she did it. The important issue here besides the all-important one of survival is that

gender roles proved malleable. Women often performed roles expected of men and sometimes vice versa.

40:27 Marion Kaplan: We might also think about sites where women transgressed many familial and gender norms. As I already mentioned, for another example, as housewives in Germany or as resistance fighters. But later returned to more traditional gender roles in post-war displaced persons camps, or when starting lives over in new countries. Remember, it was also the 1950s and that's a period of lots of women, American women, returning to these traditional roles. So it's not so surprising that survivors might also pick up the cultural context from which they, in which they were now living. Waxman concludes that gender was the last thing to survive the camps. It may have been the last thing to survive more generally. The history of emotions open still more intimate avenues to explore. How did the victims make sense of their daily lives and how did they express it? How did they feel? We have often assumed that we knew, that as we take memoirs, letters, and diaries more seriously, they inform us of frustrations of hopes, of fears. After many exasperating visits to inhospitable consulates, one woman concluded, it would have taken the pen of a Kafka to depict the world of visas in all its surrealistic absurdity, that of a Dostoyevsky to render the nightmare of the petitioners' struggle for survival. Finally, in front of the American console, a young man felt his knees quote, trembling and shaking. What can we learn about gendered reactions? Did they flatten? Or did later memories of persecution and escape return to gender stereotypes of the emotional woman and the strong man?

42:13 Marion Kaplan: So what is to be done? Once the list of desired research is complete, the big job awaiting all of us Holocaust historians is the need for integration. The goal to integrate a gendered approach into mainstream Holocaust studies to more fully incorporate women's lives as a primary analysis, and to pay attention as well to Jewish men who also experienced demasculinization. Unable to support or even protect their families. Here I mean work like Doris Bergen's that seamlessly integrates gender into her *War and Genocide*. I do not mean simply quote, women and, but the comparisons between Jewish women and men, as well as the relationships between the two genders. As well as relationships within single-sex couples during Nazi persecution. And these observations must be integrated with class, geography, and age. For example, poor women in Warsaw had a much harder time than wealthier women in both in the ghetto and on the Aryan side. As much as we emphasize chance or luck, and you hear a lot about that when you're studying survivors - it was luck, it was chance - it's true. We still need to explore who may have had better prospects, a woman who knew four languages? A nurse? A doctor, or a seamstress? Finally, as broader genocide studies have taken other ethnic murders into account, we may learn from them analyzing the gendered similarities and significant differences across time and national boundaries. We've come quite a way regarding how the topic of women has entered some of the literature, but we still have a distance to go. Since I

When Biology Became Destiny: How Historians Interpret Gender in the Holocaust (2019)
Holocaust Living History Workshop

always take the long view, I'm optimistic we'll get there slowly, but surely. Thank you very much.

- 44:16 [When Biology Became Destiny: How Historians Interpret Gender in the Holocaust January 17, 2019]
- 44:24 [Featuring Marion Kaplan, Ph.D. / Skirball Professor of Modern Jewish History New York University]
- 44:30 [Presented by / The Holocaust Living History Workshop / Deborah Hertz, Ph.D. Director, The Jewish Studies Program / UC San Diego / Susanne Hillman / Program Coordinator / The Holocaust Living History Workshop]
- 44:34 [UC San Diego Library / Audrey Geisel University Librarian / Erik Mitchell / Interim Director of Communications and Engagement / Nicole Kolupailo]
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