

The term "Transvestitismus" or English transvestitism, was introduced in 1910 by Magnus Hirschfeld, a gay jewish sexologist. He mainly used it to describe people who had the urge to wear the clothes of the binary gender not assigned to them at birth. He derived the term from the Latin *trans*, which means opposite, and *vestis*, Latin for dress. In the years following Hirschfeld's publication, the introduction of the term "Transvestitismus", and with it the term "Transvestit" (german for transvestite) and Transvestitin (german for transvestite assigned female at birth), had a major impact on the categorization of the affected groups of people. Both in medicine and in police practice, a more explicit distinction was now made. But many affected also began to identify with the new terms, as they offered support and new possibilities for finding identity. Under National Socialism, the treatment of so-called transvestites was inconsistent.

Some individuals were prosecuted under the paragraphs for "causing a public offence" and "disturbing public order", as had already been the case to some extent in the Weimar Republic. Still others were not prosecuted, often primarily if they could prove that they were supposedly heterosexual. The attribution of sexual orientation was based on the person's gender assigned at birth. So those who could prove that they were heterosexual by this definition and perhaps even had a family with children, were often treated less harsh. Still others were sent to concentration camps, and some who had been assigned male at birth, were sentenced under §175, which was mainly used to persecute gay men.

There was a separate "Reich Office for Combating Homosexuality and Abortion" during Nazi rule, which was commissioned with several cases of so-called transvestites, because so-called transvestitism was often considered a subcategory of homosexuality. People accused of transvestitism were under general suspicion of homosexuality. Heinrich Himmler, well-known NSDAP party functionary, Reichsführer-SS and Reich orator even said in one of his speeches, and I quote:

"I see it as a disaster if [...] we masculinize women in such a way that with time the gender difference [...] disappears. Then the road to homosexuality is paved." By this he meant that he thought it would be bad if the militarization of the state spread to women as well, because then men would be conditioned to love masculinized women, which, he argued, would encourage homosexuality.

So-called transvestitism was also sometimes equated with masochism. It was argued that it was masochistic for those who were assigned male at birth to "reduce" themselves, so to speak, to the

lowly position of a woman within society For those who had been assigned female at birth, it was considered presumptuous to want to be more masculine than accepted.

During National Socialism, many people in general retreated into the private sphere. For queer people, this meant that their networks and magazines dissolved and meeting places like bars were closed or had to serve a different audience. In addition, it must be said that, as is well known, not only queer media but also other media was censored or banned since the so-called "Gleichschaltung" as early as 1933, which also meant that undesirable magazines became illegal.

The last known magazine was published illegally until 1937, when it was stopped after a raid on the editor's home with criminal proceedings against her. The publisher was Hella Knabe, a Berlin seamstress, who had published the magazine as her customer newsletter. In publishing the magazine, she was accused of the criminal offense of distributing pornographic material. Hella Knabe specialized in tailoring for transvestites, who often described themselves with that term.

Her customer reach extends beyond Berlin. From Kiel, Aachen, Bad-Dürrenberg, even far into the west of Germany, to Idar-Oberstein and many other places. Which is why the seamstress was also accused of running a Germany-wide transvestite network. The criminal file of the trial against her, which can now be found in the Berlin state archives, contains not only her customer newsletter, but in it there exist numerous letters written to her by her customers. In the letters, they describe their personal stories, experiences, thoughts and feelings related to their gender identities. In this small series, trans people read letters written by authors who called themselves transvestites. They wrote the letters to the tailor Hella Knabe, who printed them in her customer newsletter.