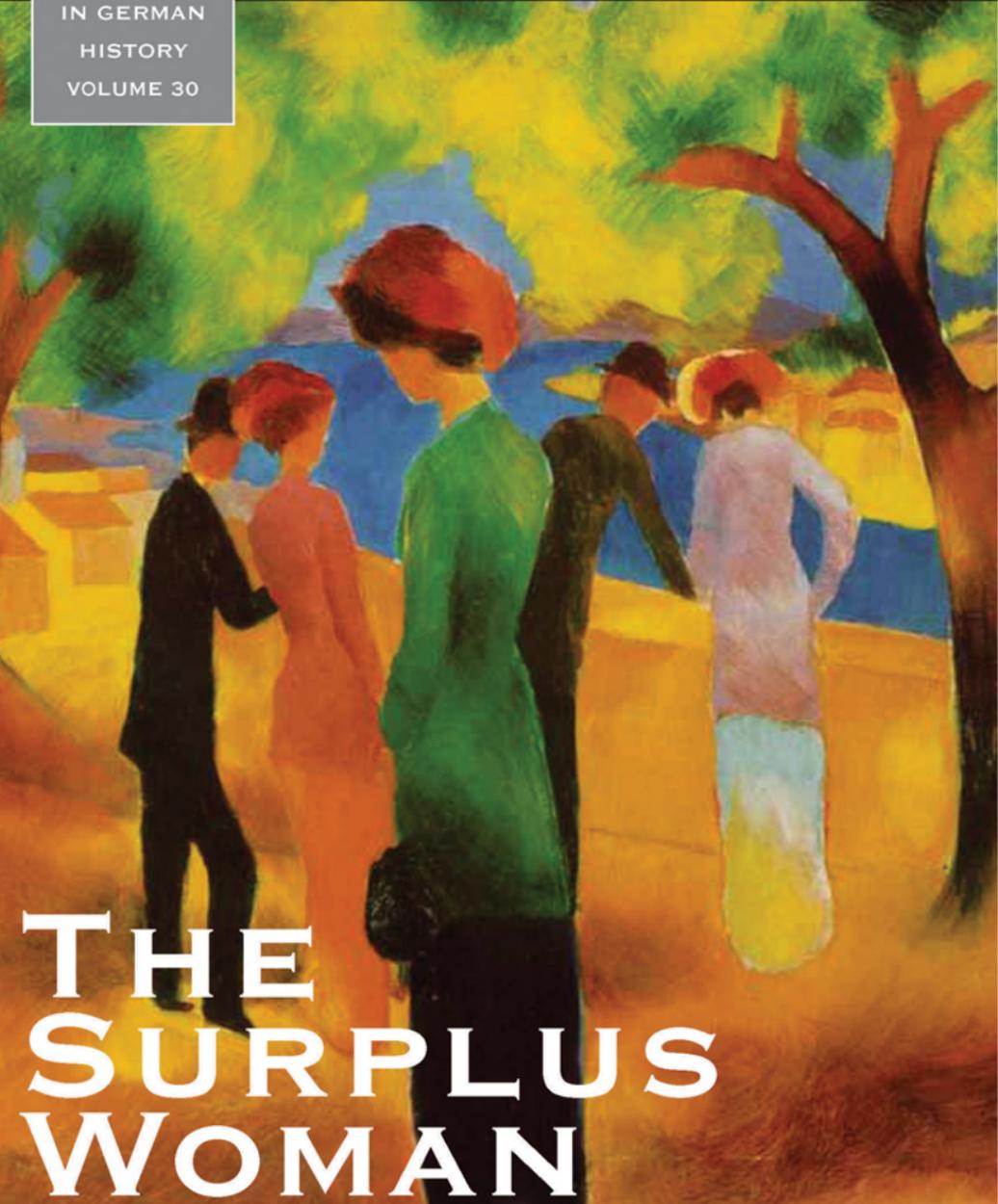


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**THE
SURPLUS
WOMAN**

UNMARRIED IN IMPERIAL GERMANY, 1871-1918

CATHERINE L. DOLLARD

The Surplus Woman

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THE SURPLUS WOMAN

Unmarried in Imperial Germany, 1871–1918



Catherine L. Dollard



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*For
Catherine Wesdock Test,
Eileen Test Dollard,
and Lynne Dollard Mowery*

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ABBREVIATIONS

ADKF	Archiv des Katholischen Frauenbundes
ADL	Allgemeiner Deutscher Lehrerinnenverein (General Association of German Female Teachers)
BDF	Bund Deutscher Frauenvereine (Federation of German Women's Associations)
BfM	Bund für Mutterschutz (Federation for the Protection of Mothers)
DBBF	Deutsche Bund zur Bekämpfung der Frauenemanzipation (German Federation to Combat Women's Emancipation)
DDP	Deutsche Demokratische Partei (German Democratic Party)
DEF	Deutsch-Evangelischer Frauenbund (German Protestant Women's Association)
ESK	Evangelisch-Soziale Kongress (Evangelical Social Congress)
KDF	Katholischer Deutscher Frauenbund (Catholic German Women's Association)
SDAP	Sozialdemokratische Arbeiterpartei (Social Democratic Worker's Party)
SJDR	Statistisches Jahrbuch für das Deutsche Reich
SPD	Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands (Social Democratic Party of Germany)
VSDR	Vierteljahrshefte zur Statistik des Deutschen Reichs

SINGLE WOMEN IN IMPERIAL GERMANY



*T*he first issue of the magazine *Die Frau* (*The Woman*) announced its purpose in October 1893 with an ambitious subtitle: “A monthly journal for the complete life of women in our time.”¹ The lead article by editor Helene Lange described the term ‘woman’ as bringing forth “an abundance of pictures and thoughts ... the poetry of the domestic hearth, the creative and protective mother, the faithful nurse and educator ... pictures of completely carefree grace.”² Only women of privileged classes had ever been so carefree. But Lange declared that in the past few decades, such cozy images had been disrupted when “a callous hand brushed across the domestic hearth and directed millions of women out into the world.”³ The “callous hand” extended from the arm of industrialization. Lange contended that industry had displaced millions of middle-class females from their roles as domestic helpmates in the homes of parents, married brothers, and wealthier families seeking governesses or household managers. These forced outcasts comprised the *Frauenüberschuß*, or surplus of women. In her overture to the women of the modern age, Lange decried the “bitter peril” and “spiritual distress” that confronted the unwed bourgeois women of the German empire.

But *Die Frau*, along with the broader German women’s movement, did not intend to leave these women in such a dire predicament. Together, the publications, organizations, and leadership of the women’s movement would bring about “a new time ... in which the woman ... would stand before great challenges, her horizons would expand, her view would deepen; when powers which had so far slumbered would uniquely have to unfold.”⁴ Out of the ‘bitter peril’ of the unmarried, strong and dynamic females would emerge. Compelled by the *Frauenüberschuß*, the German women’s movement crafted its mission.

Eleven years after *Die Frau* began publication, women's rights advocate Elisabeth Gnauck-Kühne published a volume of fairy tales "for the young and old."⁵ Gnauck-Kühne's foray into fantasy was unusual for an author who spent most of her career engaged in demographic and social analyses. She intended to evoke in these stories the traumas of the modern age, especially those affecting women. One stirring tale, "*Die Nachtigall*," depicted the life of a nightingale who lived in a lush green valley. The splendor of the land inspired the nightingale:

"When I see such beauty my heart swells with air in my breast and I have to sing" ... Joyously and devoutly, the song sounded through the quiet evening air, so that the frogs in the pond stopped croaking, the gnats stopped dancing, and over in the farmyard the young farmer in shirtsleeves ... took the pipe out of his mouth and called through the open window into the gloomy room: "Listen, listen, the nightingale is singing." And those returning through the valley ... stood as if transfixed and put their finger to their mouths, held their breath, and waved to stragglers to be quiet: "The nightingale is singing! Listen, listen, the nightingale is singing!"⁶

The nightingale lived quite happily—until one day a frog disparaged her song. The frog accused the nightingale of fraudulence, arguing that the bird's joyful noise misrepresented reality: "You are alone. Even the gnats are swarmed together, and my kind also answers me—just listen." And sure enough, a chorus of croaks responded to the call of the nightingale's antagonist. The frog offered advice: "Think of the future, seek a companion, build a stable nest and make yourself useful. Then you will have reason to sing."⁷

The bird brooded and soon became overcome with sadness at her isolation:

The nightingale began to sing again, but softer and with a deeper tone and the song sounded like a question: Why, why am I alone? And she thought about who might answer her if she called out. The thought never left her ... Then a hot pain seized the nightingale. "Wherever I look, I see couples," she sobbed softly. "Only I am forsaken." And she felt a longing as if her pounding heart would break, and it would have broken in pain if she did not sing. But she sang; she sang as never before. The song welled up mightily ... it sounded tender and sweet as a harp ... In this way the nightingale lightened her heart and consoled herself, until she thought, "Even if I am alone, I am rich in my pain, for I have my song, my song!"⁸

Companionship soon alleviated her despair: "One evening ... a hesitating, twittering sound answered her. The nightingale trembled, she did not know why and did not want to believe her ears. But the tone resounded louder and louder and the guest flew nearer and nearer until he was sitting right next to her: yes, her companion was there!" The nightingale and her partner built a nest together and "her longing was filled, her pain quieted. She was no longer alone."⁹

After some time had passed, the frog was awakened in the midst of a sunny day's nap by a sudden movement in the trees:

Was he seeing right? Yes, really and truly, a bird flew over the water directly toward the old willow: it was the nightingale! "Hello! Hello, dear nightingale!" the frog called out happily

... But after he had observed her for a little while, he added uncertainly: "You are looking around so restlessly, is something wrong? Can I get you a fly or something?"

"No, oh no," whispered the nightingale, "I thank you, but I have everything I would wish: I am full, I am full."

"But you look around so strangely, as if lost ... are you looking for something?"

Then the nightingale gave a loud sob. "I have lost my song. I seek my pain and my song—my song."¹⁰

Elisabeth Gnauck-Kühne's nightingale grapples with the contradictory chords of her natural calling amidst the censure of bystanders. The bird at first thrived in her solitude, never considering it to be isolation. Solo and unburdened, she fulfilled her natural calling by offering to the world her gift of song. But once faced with outside judgment, she began to question herself and to envy all around her. Only song brought solace; her music became a vessel to fill a life judged as empty. Indeed, her gift to the community became ever more beautiful and stirring, as her *Lied* (song) was enriched by her *Leid* (pain). The pain lingered on until it ultimately was soothed by the companionship of a mate. The nightingale created a home and dedicated herself to a new life—but at great cost. In assuaging the pain wrought by isolation, the song of the nightingale had forever been quieted.

Gnauck-Kühne considered this fairy tale to be an allegory of the experience of single women at the turn of the century.¹¹ Like the nightingale, unattached women had unique contributions to offer society. But in attempting to share their talents, they invariably faced criticism and rebuke. Just as the frog derided the bird's song, single women also confronted charges of uselessness. Yet mockery and ridicule could become a source of empowerment for *alleinstehende Frauen* (women standing alone),¹² just as suffering enhanced the splendor of the nightingale's call. The very particular nature of an unmarried woman's loneliness had the potential to infuse society with beauty and generosity. When Gnauck-Kühne's protagonist mates, readers are meant to lament the loss of the nightingale's singular song. Gnauck-Kühne hoped that the tale would also compel its audience to hear and respond to the gifts of those solitary nightingales whose *Leid* might never be quelled by a mate, yet who nonetheless ever attempted to transform the world through their *Lied*.

The History of European Single Women

Life without marriage: anxiety about such a fate plagued many middle-class German women at the turn of the century. The notion of a demographic crisis called the *Frauenüberschuß* fueled discussion of women's rights in Imperial Germany. Both contemporary observers and historians have described the German *Frauenfrage* (woman question) as a *Ledigenfrage* (singles' question) and the *Frauenbewegung* (women's movement) as a *Jungfrauenbewegung* (movement of

virgins, connoting old maids).¹³ The distaff surfeit served as both discourse and demographic concern in considerations of the female role in society and culture. Helene Lange's description of the disrupted domestic hearth and Elisabeth Gnauck-Kühne's fantasy of the solitary life are both representative of a central theme of the debate regarding German women's rights. Recounted in speeches, petitions, newspaper articles, prescriptive literature, demographic studies, fiction, journals of sexual science, attacks against the women's movement as well as apologia in favor of it, and even in fairy tales, the plight of the single woman informed and formed discussion of German women in the *Kaiserreich* (Imperial Germany).

The importance of the female surplus in Germany is made clear in the 1902 *Handbook of the Women's Movement*.¹⁴ Edited by Helene Lange and her companion, Gertrud Bäumer, the work asserted that one of the primary causes of the German woman question was "the numerical ratio of the sexes ... A tremendous surplus of women developed in the cities of the Middle Ages. Not to such an extent, but nevertheless also perceptibly, the same unfortunate condition exists in the nineteenth century ... It has further intensified in the course of the nineteenth century due to emigrations ... but also from the greater mortality [of men]."¹⁵ While the description relies upon vague demographic assertions, it is firm in its contention that a perceptible increase in the majority of females plagued the late nineteenth century. A 1911 encyclopedic entry on the *Frauenfrage* further described the displaced female: "the number of unmarried women is increasing ... They must create an existence. The oft-repeated saying: 'the woman belongs in the house' is a foolish and empty cliché as long as each woman cannot be given a husband and a home."¹⁶ The notion of a surplus of unmarried women was a central pillar of debates surrounding the changing nature of society throughout the *Kaiserreich*.

This book investigates the ways in which anxiety about too many single women served as a leitmotif in the German culture of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. By identifying single women as the focus of study, this work fits into a growing body of historical scholarship.¹⁷ The interest in marital status as a subject of historical investigation has increased alongside the development of the field of women's history. Marital status provides both a social category and a descriptive arena by which female experiences can be examined. As Judith Bennett and Amy Froide have noted in *Singlewomen in the European Past, 1250–1800*, "the histories of European women, European families, and European societies look very different when single women are a part of the story."¹⁸ The essays edited by Bennett and Froide identify class, age, sexuality, religion, and region as key factors that differentiate the experiences of single women of the pre-modern era.¹⁹ But even among widely disparate circumstances, Bennett and Froide note important similarities among single women, both positively in regard to single women's ability "to use their meager resources—cash, goods, credit, property—with fewer restrictions" than married women, as well as negatively in that unwed women were more vulnerable to persecution and ridicule because of

their “unprotected” status.²⁰ Still, the prospect of marriage itself served to connect both single and wedded women, as did stringent limitations on autonomy based upon sex rather than marital status.

Books by Martha Vicinus, Elaine Showalter, Rita Kranidis, and Mary Louise Roberts have examined the distinct experiences of unwed women in modern Europe. These works portray the modern unmarried woman as playing an important role in reconfiguring understandings of gender. By identifying single women as a cohort meriting scholarly consideration, these authors show how the female unwed posed distinct challenges to established gender norms, either directly through calls for political and social reform or indirectly as a result of cultural anxieties about the unattached female as a threat to social order.

Martha Vicinus’ *Independent Women* identifies the advent of the nineteenth century as a turning point in the lives of single women in that “for the first time in history a small group of middle-class women could afford to live, however poorly, on their own earnings outside heterosexual domesticity or church governance.”²¹ Vicinus’ study identifies a “unity of purpose” among independent women seeking to reconstitute constructions of femininity in Victorian and Edwardian Britain. The present study of the German surplus woman is a scholarly descendant of Vicinus’ work in its topical orientation, but it does not share her emphasis on residential institutions as a central theme.²² This book instead examines the cultural construction of the single woman as both object and creator of social reform—and thus, as a destabilizing force in turn-of-the-century gender norms.

In interpreting the discourse surrounding surplus women as a signifier of conflicting attitudes about changing gender roles, *The Surplus Woman* thematically echoes Elaine Showalter’s *Sexual Anarchy*, a work which examined “the myths, metaphors, and images of sexual crises and apocalypse that marked both the late nineteenth century and our own *fin-de-Siècle*, and its representations in English and American literature, art, and film.”²³ My work shares Showalter’s view that “odd women” served as a source of sexual anarchy in turn-of-the-century European culture.²⁴ Showalter treats single women as one component of a broad range of symptoms indicative of apocalyptic anxiety.

In *The Victorian Spinster and Colonial Emigration*, Rita Kranidis also offers an integrated reading of literature and history. Employing a perspective derived from postcolonial literary criticism, Kranidis traces the history of British female colonial emigration while arguing that “the colonial emigration of spinsters is analogous to the displacement and dispossession of the poor.”²⁵ Kranidis is particularly interested in teasing out the “cultural value” of the bourgeois female unwed: “If the middle-class Victorian woman’s value was seen to lie in her perfect domestication, and if the unmarried working-class woman’s value in her sexuality, then the middle-class emigrant spinster emerges as a hybrid: Where might *her* value reside?”²⁶ She answers that question by “conceptualizing the emigrant female as an already commodified cultural subject.”²⁷ Identifying middle-class spinsters in exile as commodities provides Kranidis with a way of linking the

histories of colonialism, class, capitalism, and the woman question. Yet it is precisely this theoretical description of the commodification of unwed women that precludes a more evidence-rich reading of the lives of real single women.

Mary Louise Roberts' books, *Civilization without Sexes* and *Disruptive Acts*, provide the most comprehensive look at the experience and representation of single women in late nineteenth and early twentieth-century France. *Civilization without Sexes* identifies three female icons (the modern woman, the mother, and the single woman) that dominated the postwar discourse surrounding gender. Roberts argues that the unwed woman occupied unique rhetorical space in the decade following the Great War: "the single woman became a focus of debate because she symbolized shifts in the social organization of gender."²⁸ Unmarried women simultaneously stood as pathetic objects of scorn, subjects of political debate, and figures that presaged a new age.²⁹ *Disruptive Acts* investigates the nature of female performances in the venues of Third Republic theatre and journalism. Roberts portrays women who "simply and often unwittingly [were] trying to think themselves out of the corners into which they had been painted."³⁰ In recognizing the confining nature of those corners, these women—in dangerous ways—reasserted the resonance of the labels (old maids, whores, shrews, viragos) that they had been trying to escape, even as they forced public reappraisal of both womanhood and singleness.³¹ My work has been influenced by Roberts' interpretation of the discourse surrounding unmarried woman as a signifier of cultural anxiety.

Yet Imperial Germany provides a significantly different context for the study of single women. After a series of victories in Prussian-led wars, German national unification in 1871 initiated an era in which the elusive goal of national cohesion was pursued and in which debates about the contours of German national identity were widespread.³² The *Kaiserreich* occupied an age of extraordinary economic and demographic growth. *The Surplus Woman* provides the first sustained examination of the ways in which Germans conceptualized anxiety about marital status as both a product and a reflection of changing times. Unmarried women served as potent threats to social order during this time of change; thus, appropriations of the *Frauenüberschuß* were contested by women's rights advocates and their opponents.

The surplus woman debate was uniquely German. Certainly, debates about the role of bourgeois single women took place in other national settings. But the politics, laws, and culture of the *Kaiserreich* provided an exceptional context for interest in and engagement with the contours of female marital status. First, suffrage played a less consequential role in the German women's movement than it did elsewhere. Universal male suffrage existed only in the national elections of Imperial Germany; most German states (including Prussia, the largest and most dominant federation) featured voting systems based upon property and wealth. Moreover, until 1908, German women could neither join political parties nor attend political gatherings. Given these restrictions, female suffrage was viewed by many German activists as a proposition that was simply out of reach. The politi-

cal crucible in which the German women's movement was formed dictated a reformist path emphasizing paths of reform beyond the vote, including education and vocation. Second, the laws of the individual states of the German empire by and large prohibited married women from working in professional fields such as education, law, medicine, journalism, and engineering. Because married women were excluded from white-collar professional life, discussion about bourgeois female work necessarily centered upon single women.

Finally, the culture of Imperial Germany featured spheres of intellectual engagement that enhanced interest in single women. The realms of sexology and social science, both fields of *Wissenschaft* (knowledge) that underwent significant development during the German *Kaiserreich*, provided fertile scholarly ground from which to examine female marital status.³³ Psychologists, anthropologists, and physicians interested in sexuality discovered a pathology of aberrance in the unwed—and presumably unsexed—female. While central European sexologists lamented the atrophying old maid, demographers explored her social underpinnings. New developments in population analysis, accompanied by eugenically fueled anxiety about decreasing birth rates, informed the German understanding of the surplus woman problem.³⁴ Though these statistical studies tended to overemphasize current conditions and did not examine thoroughly the change over time, they still lent an air of empirical credibility to discussions of the *Frauenüberschuß*. In this way, *Kaiserreich* fascination with the distaff unwed foreshadowed the twentieth-century postwar Germanies, in which demographic inequities fueled discussion of abundant women as a “problem.”³⁵

The postwar demographic surfeits of unmarried women had no parallel in Imperial Germany. As chapter 3 elucidates, the German *Kaiserreich* experienced no significant change in marriage rates or in terms of the unmarried proportion of the female population. This book provides the history of an assumption—and it shows that the assumption was a mistaken one. Yet the nonexistence of an intensifying demographic surfeit of unwed women makes the discourse surrounding the *Frauenüberschuß* all the more important to understand. In the French context, Roberts has observed that “regardless of whether these anxieties were ‘right’ or ‘wrong’ ... they did preoccupy, worry, and even traumatize French men and women. For this reason, they are cultural realities in themselves and warrant our closest attention.”³⁶ This project similarly asserts that despite the lack of clear demographic evidence of a female surfeit—in fact, *because* of such a lack—it is essential to understand the ways in which the surplus woman became an important emblem of change in German culture. The facts of population did not create the interest in single women. Assessments of the plight of the unwed instead emerged as a consequence of the tensions and uncertainties that characterized an era of great social transformation.

Unlike her counterpart in France and Britain, the German single woman of the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries has not been the independent focus of historical analysis. This void is especially curious since the female majority is often cited in both contemporary and secondary discussions of the era.

Some historians of German women have considered the *Frauenüberschuß* as a peripheral concern or as background material; others have ignored it completely. Richard Evans' *The Feminist Movement in Germany, 1894–1933*, the first major English-language work on the early German women's movement, did not address the female surplus at all.³⁷ While Evans recognized the emphasis placed by women's rights advocates on opportunities for middle-class single women, he did not relate those reform activities to demography or to concerns about an excess of females.

Of those historical works that have addressed the German female surplus in the *Kaiserreich*, three sorts of assessments have emerged. The first model is found in the work of German historian Ute Frevert, who regards the female surplus as a simple consequence of change. She suggests that marital status played a role in the discussion of the 'woman question' due to a greater number of women exhibiting a "willingness to take fate into their own hands."³⁸ Frevert argues that there is little connection between the woman question and the *Frauenüberschuß* because the eighteenth century demonstrated similar demographic conditions without creating debate about women's roles in the greater society. But Frevert does not explore the peculiar emphasis on the female surplus in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, nor does she detail the demographic analysis behind her assertions.

The second type of historical assessment of the female surplus concludes that the *Frauenüberschuß* is interesting but ultimately inconsequential. The works of Herrad-Ulrike Bussemer and Amy Hackett fall into this category. After looking at aggregate marriage rates, Bussemer maintains that no perceptible change occurs in the nineteenth century and that discussion of the surplus woman phenomenon resulted from exaggeration.³⁹ Hackett provides a more thorough consideration of the *Frauenüberschuß*. She begins her analysis by observing how frequently discussion of the female surplus emerged in contemporary commentary of the *Frauenfrage*.⁴⁰ Hackett demonstrates regional variation of marriage patterns and links anxiety regarding marital status to social class. But Hackett concludes her discussion of the female surplus by noting that, "Demography alone, however important its contributions, cannot explain the women's movement."⁴¹

The works of Frevert, Bussemer, and Hackett recognize the omnipresence of the belief in a female surplus, but omit important questions: why were unmarried women considered to be a noteworthy cohort? Why were they constructed as a problem to be solved? These histories of German single women do not explore the rhetorical resonance of the idea for both advocates and opponents of the women's movement. In contrast, the third and most predominant mode of interpreting the female surplus of Imperial Germany can be found in the historical works of James Albisetti, Marion Kaplan, Patricia Mazón, Elisabeth Meyer-Renschhausen, Barbara Greven-Aschoff, Nancy Reagin, Lora Wildenthal, and Bärbel Kuhn. Each of these scholars acknowledge that the female surplus played a powerful role in creating the vision, practical work, and bourgeois orientation of the early organized German women's movement.

In his study of teaching as a female profession, Albisetti notes “the perception that Germany had rather suddenly acquired a large number of unmarried women who had to provide for themselves. Open to question is the accuracy of the numbers cited at the time, but not the fact that most contemporary commentators believed that a new situation had arisen and required a response.”⁴² While Albisetti confirms that many Germans believed in a female surplus of recent advent, his project does not require an investigation into the numbers or nuances of the concept. Marion Kaplan offers a similar reading in her examination of Jewish middle-class women in Imperial Germany. Discussing Jewish marriage, Kaplan recognizes the importance of the fear of spinsterhood in nuptial negotiations and notes that extra women could become superfluous in the bourgeois household economy.⁴³ Kaplan maintains that “the much vaunted *Frauenüberschuß* ... meant that not every woman could marry. In fact, the situation was worse for Jewish women.”⁴⁴ Kaplan’s work identifies the surplus as a fact of life in the Jewish middle-class milieu but does not delve into its foundations.

In *Gender and the Modern Research University*, Patricia Mazón asserts that the German women’s movement saw female university study “in terms of the woman question and as a partial solution to it.”⁴⁵ Significantly informing the woman question were “several concrete areas of social anxiety,” among the most pressing of which were “changes in the family structure brought about by industrialization. Overall marriage rates were thought to be declining, leading to a group of ‘surplus’ women. The consequences were considered to be especially disastrous for the middle class.”⁴⁶ The concern over what to do with daughters of the middle-class displaced by the changing economy helped to promote the discussion of female university study.

Elisabeth Meyer-Renschhausen’s study of Bremen cites the dual shame associated with single status; not only had the *Alleinstehenden* failed to find a husband, but injury met with insult when they found themselves forced to look for work. The woman question was both an economic and moral question: “Although unmarried aunts and daughters could no longer be supported, within the urban middle-class it was still considered a dishonor to send them outside of the home to earn money. Paid female work harmed the reputation of the family.”⁴⁷ Meyer-Renschhausen adds that among the middle-class, “a further cause of the *Frauenfrage* was the constantly extending training period of the sons, so that many could not think of marrying before the thirtieth or fortieth year of life.”⁴⁸ The increased professional training required of bourgeois men left many prospective brides to ruminate over what they were to do as they waited for a good man to come along—and to begin to wonder whether the wait was worth it. Meyer-Renschhausen emphasizes that class status informed the *Kaiserreich* debate about the female surplus. The long-acknowledged link between bourgeois interests and the mainstream German women’s movement cannot simply be explained on the basis of sympathy with the “doctrine of liberal individualism”—and its success or failure cannot be haphazardly linked to the fate of German liberalism.⁴⁹ It would be superficial as well to suggest that the middle-class women’s movement evolved

purely out of the reformers' self-interest. The *Frauenüberschuß* adds an important element to discussions of middle-class bias in the German women's movement: the belief that bourgeois women faced exceptional and singular challenges as a result of changing economic circumstances.

In a study of the middle-class women's movement, Barbara Greven-Aschoff further elucidates the plight of unwed women. She notes the "problem of the *alte Jungfer* [old maid] as family calamity," and contends that the *Frauenüberschuß* manifested itself as a socio-psychological issue as well as a demographic event.⁵⁰ Among the middle and upper classes, the time a young woman spent waiting for "a possible marriage could hardly be filled with productive activity. In the course of industrialization and urbanization, numerous functions otherwise necessary for housekeeping had become unnecessary, leaving for the maturing female generation only a type of 'parasitic' existence."⁵¹ Shifting economic conditions necessitated vocational change: "In view of marriage chances becoming more uncertain, the necessity of enabling young women an existence outside of the family of origin emerged. In pre-industrial societies, convents or ladies' institutes offered such possibilities to women of class. In the modern, secularized society, it is the arena of work."⁵² Greven-Aschoff expands upon the argument of those nineteenth-century middle-class women's rights advocates who asserted that demography was not the defining element of the female surplus. It was instead a question of *Beruf* (vocation, calling). To what were single women called? The industrial age made this question all the more urgent. Middle-class women waiting to marry had the leisure to know that they were, indeed, waiting. Nancy Reagin makes a similar point in *A German Women's Movement*. In her history of class and gender in Hanover at the turn of the century, Reagin's examination of women's work grapples with the concept of the *Frauenüberschuß*. Reagin concludes that the demographic data likely do not support the notion of a distinct and new oversupply of women at the turn of the century.⁵³ Her work confirms the notion that "the perceived reality was that many German bourgeois women were destined to remain spinsters."⁵⁴

In her history of *German Women for Empire*, Lora Wildenthal sees the female surplus as a significant justification for a female presence in the colonies of Wilhelmine Germany. Wildenthal describes how "feminists and other commentators on the 'Woman Question' fretted over a supposed surplus of women who remained unmarried, lacked careers appropriate to their social station, and would waste their maternal energies."⁵⁵ Both radical reformer Minna Cauer and moderate activist Hedwig Heyl agreed that placing women in German settlements to partner with men would offer a pragmatic alleviation of the female surfeit, yet their vision went beyond absorbing a problematic cohort: "Marriage was a worthy goal ... but German women could not be restricted to a wifely position. They needed a larger role that would permit them to exert positive moral influence."⁵⁶ Colonial placement seemed to offer a fruitful solution to the overage of women, but such a way out evaded core questions: "The colonial Woman Question sidelined feminist demands for social change by emphasizing numbers of German

women rather than the conditions of their existence. It promised that unmarried middle-class women could be converted from a social problem in Germany into a solution for the colonies.⁵⁷ Social class is thus a key element of Wildenthal's assessment of the female surplus. In the colonial context, the *Frauenüberschuß* elicited both sympathy and scorn; by the turn of the century, groups involved in placing women in the colonies sought ideal candidates for marriage but turned away applicants who were overqualified or who seemed too desperate to marry.⁵⁸ Wildenthal's study establishes the link between conceptions of a domestic female surplus and the colonial woman question, but the book's primary engagement is with the interaction of nationalism, race, and gender.

Bärbel Kuhn's *Familienstand Ledig*, a comparative collective biography of German single men and women during the period extending from 1850 to 1914, confirms that the demographic notion of a female surplus was an illusion⁵⁹ and asserts that "the woman question was discussed in contemporary journalism and in the public sphere as a 'social question' of the bourgeoisie, as the affliction of the unmarried daughters of the bourgeois classes."⁶⁰ *The Surplus Woman* shares its topical focus with Kuhn's work. Kuhn's book approaches the topic of single marital status by emphasizing the history of everyday life, biography, and a comparison between the worldviews of single women and single men, while the present work delves into the contours of a cultural construction amid the broader context of the German women's movement. The female surplus is not the central concern of Kuhn's inquiry; as is the case with the other historical works just described, the general belief in a perceived overabundance of women is a basic assumption that sheds light on other areas of German women's history. None of these works tease out the social and cultural contours of that assumption, nor is it their intention to do so. In a wide range of historical writing on the experiences of German women, the basic importance and middle-class orientation of the *Frauenüberschuß* is recognized. The nature, meaning uses, and progenitors of the concept have not yet been addressed by historians. This book seeks to do just that.

Constructing the Surplus Woman

The story set forth here provides the history of the *Frauenüberschuß*, a concept that reflected cultural anxiety in the face of social and economic change, demonstrated the era's fascination with the findings of sexual and social science, and served as one of the most important tenets of the German women's movement. This book affirms through demographic analysis that the female surplus was not a real population event and argues that the notion was instead a cultural construction that was foundational to the moderate, radical, and religious German women's movements. At the same time, this study seeks to go beyond a narrative account of social movements in order to examine the ways in which this cultural construction emerged, shifted, and signified deep anxieties about modern life. The surplus woman was the lodestar of German women's movements, but simul-

taneously was also the source of renewed ridicule and anxiety about the unwed woman. Her paradoxical nature hints at the great ambivalence with which many Germans experienced the rapidly changing world around them.

Four goals guide this discussion of the female surplus. First and most basically, the project intends to demonstrate the centrality of the *Frauenüberschuß* concept to the ways in which Imperial Germans viewed the age of change in which they lived. The notion of an overabundance of women at once demonstrates the predominance of marriage and motherhood as the female ideal; it adds an important dimension to the link between class status and German feminism; and it clarifies the origins of the reform program pursued by the women's movement, one which emphasized educational and professional opportunities over political calls for suffrage and expanded legal rights. The female surplus both created an air of urgency that brought attention to calls for change and provided a potentially powerful group toward which to aim reform.

Second, *The Surplus Woman* affirms the importance of marital status as a category of historical analysis.⁶¹ Recent historical work has asserted the importance of marriage and marital status in our understanding of the past. Examining the history of US marriage, Nancy Cott has made a convincing case that “the whole system of attribution and meaning that we call *gender* relies on and to a great extent derives from the structuring provided by marriage.”⁶² Elizabeth Heineman's *What Difference does a Husband Make? Women and Marital Status in Nazi and Postwar Germany* (1999) asserts “the proposition that marital status has, through much of Western history, been a basic category of difference for women, in some ways analogous to race, class, and gender.”⁶³ My work shares in that proposition. The category of marital status provides a very useful lens from which to investigate a society's leading assumptions about gender politics. Studying the signification of married men in the Soviet Union offers important insights into the social profile of the increasingly fragile Communist state.⁶⁴ Asking about the making of wives in colonial India contributes to our understanding of the turbulent interplay of custom, empire, and modernity.⁶⁵ Research into the meanings attributed to marital status sheds historical light on the configuration of gender, the rule of law, the importance of tradition, and the interrelationship of religious and civil life.

Equally important is the historical fluidity of marriage as a signifying category. Does marital status matter less in a certain time and place—or does it matter, say, more for women and less for men? Do widows and widowers form their own social cohort, and do they have more power in some cultures than others? To what extent did people talk about marriage or marital cohort within a specific historical context? These questions matter deeply to our understanding of the past. In the context of post–World War II and divided Germany, Heineman has argued that, “women's marital status is a profound cultural marker; it has striking material ramifications; and it is laden with political significance. Marital status no longer defines women as sharply as it did early in the [twentieth] century, but it has undergone an incomplete revolution.”⁶⁶ *The Surplus Woman* provides the

history of the conceptualization of single women in Imperial Germany, an era in which marital status mattered greatly in defining womanhood.

The third intent of this book is to help dismantle the paradigmatic view of the German women's movement as a dichotomous entity. Beginning with Richard Evans' work in 1976, the split between moderate and left-wing camps has dominated the scholarship of organized female activism in Germany. Certainly, the ideological and programmatic tension between moderates and radicals is well documented.⁶⁷ Archival material facilitates the predominance of the dichotomy, as protagonists from both sides left behind folders about the "*linken Flügel* (left-wing)" and the "*Gemässigen* (moderates)." But reliance on this bifurcated model does disservice to the two 'camps' involved, as well as to the movement as a whole. The socialist women's movement, led by Clara Zetkin, Lily Braun, and Luise Zietz, tends to be considered separately from both the moderates and radicals.⁶⁸ Women's organizations under a religious banner have also been viewed primarily as particularized entities.⁶⁹ The historiography of German women's activism to date has disproportionately reflected a vision of fragmentation—yet so many 'herstorical' paths tend to reify the organizational structure of the German women's movement. They do not allow for the consideration of commonalities, nor do they reveal the ideological complexity that guided so many disparate branches toward sometimes very similar ends.

The Surplus Woman joins with other historical works of the last twenty years that have sought to break down the model of left versus right. Nancy Reagin has rightly pointed out that the division into camps became far easier after the 1908 reform of the Law of Association, which permitted women to join and participate in the work of political parties. The 1910 split in the major leadership organization of the women's movement also sharpened divisions.⁷⁰ But Reagin's work makes clear that in the city of Hanover, even after 1910, a "politically 'neutral,' professional women's sphere" was the realm in which most female reformers sought to maneuver.⁷¹ Raffael Scheck's historical examination of female politics in Weimar Germany has urged scholars to recognize the broad range of perspectives even within political interest groups.⁷² The work of historians like Reagin and Scheck compel the field to move beyond the predominance of factions and to search anew for both commonality and difference.

This book argues that a variety of women, arguing from different perspectives, shared the view that the female surplus was changing women's lives. Mainstream moderates, vocal radicals, committed socialists, and religious leaders all articulated as a reason for their advocacy the belief that the industrial age had forever altered the conditions of female existence. All responded to the perceived crisis by suggesting that single women had something unique to offer the greater German society, be it via the professions; through maternal influence; as exemplars of the abuses of capitalism; or as living emblems of Marian purity in the modern world. These very distinct responses reflected different ideological bases, but commingled in a prevailing belief in the innate power of women. A shared vision of female potentiality—rather than a common feminism—united the branches

of the German women's movement. Analysis of the female surplus demonstrates a strong intellectual and spiritual connection, albeit structurally weak, between camps traditionally viewed as divided. Only when historians shed the prevailing paradigm of the dichotomous women's movement can the examination of other possible common threads commence.

The fourth aim of this project is, as much as possible, to examine the German women's movement in the terms of the world in which it emerged and which it sought to change. In this regard, my work follows in the path of historian Ann Taylor Allen, who has argued against "the tendency to judge the history of feminism according to criteria derived from the present."⁷³ Her study of 'spiritual motherhood' as a pillar of German feminism asks it readers to consider the "context of a specifically German national culture and German conceptions of citizenship."⁷⁴ Sociologist Margit Götttert, in a historical study of Helene Lange and Gertrud Bäumer, has described an "*emotionale Überschuss* (emotional excess)" that can arise when modern feminists confront the historical legacy of the first German women's movement. Götttert believes that such emotion "is not only a sign of disappointment over a 'politically incorrect' biography ... It also refers to the [historical] individuals themselves, whose life plans, activities, and political concepts are not so entirely comprehensible to the modern feminist vision, because they do not seem to fit into a conventional pattern."⁷⁵ Many leading figures of the women's movement argued from the standpoint that women are fundamentally different from men. Maternalist values, the sanctification of marriage, and despair over the prospect of diminishing marital prospects were all legitimate grounds from which the women described in this book argued for female liberation from subjugation. Such a posture is paradoxical when viewed from the vantage point of twenty-first century feminism. But in order to listen to the voices of the past, we must attempt to hear their original intonations.

Another historical work which has contributed to the historical approach of *The Surplus Woman* is Kevin Repp's *Reformers, Critics, and the Paths of German Modernity: Anti-Politics and the Search for Alternatives*. Repp's book identifies a reformist generation of the 1890s composed "of intellectuals and activists who stood firmly on modern ground at the *fin-de-siècle* but who were determined to reform that modernity in order to free it from darkening shadows already plainly visible on the horizon before the First World War."⁷⁶ Repp's reformers "felt just as at home with the discourse of cultural despair as they did with the discourse of progressive optimism."⁷⁷ The progenitors of the female surplus fit well into the reformist milieu described by Repp. Belief in and discussion about a *Frauenüberschuss* reflected the despair of a society wracked by extraordinary demographic and economic change. But the solutions to the surfeit offered by women's rights advocates also revealed a belief in social improvement borne out of reformist activity. Such efforts occupied what Repp has called a "quiet labyrinth of indirect avenues that led into the sub-terranean world of Wilhelmine anti-politics," a world which included "scientific studies, detailed proposals, legalistic reports ... professional careers, personal connections ... popular education, alternative

lifestyles, and many other strategies designed to make an immediate, palpable difference in the quality of people's lives."⁷⁸ Most of the reformers identified in this book were active primarily in the sphere outside of and beyond politics. They sought to make a difference in the life of the surplus women emerging out of the "darkening shadows" of the *Kaiserreich*. If they were successful, single women then might be best suited to lead the progression to a better nation and world.

The Surplus Woman assesses the female surplus as a dominant concept within the culture of Imperial Germany that helped to formulate gendered understandings of work, sex, class, and the role of marriage and motherhood in society. Cultural precepts and norms created the notion of the female surplus, and the belief in a female surplus in turn helped to reformulate the culture. The historian cannot extract the debate about 'too many women' from an environment in which such a statement could be made without tongue in cheek. Yet making that historical leap reveals the potentiality of the surplus woman. Organized German women of the *Kaiserreich* appropriated the plight of the single woman in their campaign to transform the society that had placed the unwed in such a predicament in the first place.

This book combines the approaches of cultural, social, and gender history. It is primarily a cultural history due to its engagement with the nuances of a discourse. In grappling with the ridicule surrounding unwed women, the text also provides a glimpse into what it may have felt like to live in German society as a single middle-class woman. *The Surplus Woman* employs the traditions of social history by examining the unwed female cohort via the lens of demography and by providing further historical evidence of the importance of social class as a fundamental predictor of experience—for the middle-class provided both the commentators who identified the perils of surplus-hood and the women who led the movement to provide rights for singles. Finally, this book builds upon the field of gender history by arguing for the importance of marital status as a category of analysis. Imperial Germans interpreted marital prospects as primarily female concerns; this study of unwed women then offers a gendered reading of German society by exploring the nature of a cohort that was simultaneously considered vulnerable and threatening.

Two main sections form the book. Because this is foremost the history of a constructed notion, the text opens with a consideration of the surplus woman as a cultural icon. Chapter 1 examines cultural and literary employment of stereotypes of the *alte Jungfer*, the German old maid who gained prominence in an era of economic change. The intensifying vilification of the 'old maid' in light of research into sexuality is considered in chapter 2. A demographic examination of the female surplus comprises chapter 3. Chapter 4 identifies the ways in which the construction of the female surplus combined with the ideology of spiritual motherhood to establish the mission of the mainstream German women's movement.

The second section offers a collective biography of seven prominent "women standing alone." Chapter 5 considers the work of education reformer Helene Lange and social work advocate Alice Salomon. These moderates embraced a maternalist

vision that limited female professions predominantly to unwed women. Chapter 6 explores the work of activists Helene Stöcker, Ruth Bré, and Lily Braun, each of whom saw radical potential in the female surplus. The *Frauenüberschuß* inspired these women to ask far-reaching questions regarding sexuality, single motherhood, and the viability of the institution of marriage. Chapter 7 investigates the socialist reading of the female surfeit by looking at the writings of Clara Zetkin. Building upon the work August Bebel, Zetkin considered the perceived excess of bourgeois women to be evidence of the failings of modern society, demonstrating that the industrial mode of production had forced middle-class women into competition with the working-class. The final chapter examines the unusual life and work of Elisabeth Gnauck-Kühne, a leader of the German religious women's movement. Gnauck-Kühne was a trained economist and statistician who saw in the surplus woman proof of the sacred female mission on earth.

As the reader embarks along the path I have set forth, a letter from one leading German women's rights advocate to another—Gertrud Bäumer writing to Elisabeth Gnauck-Kühne—provides an apt reminder about the nature of historical scholarship:

I am not of the opinion that there is in the writing of history an objectivity, an objective accuracy in the sense of mathematics . . . In the selection, arrangement, summary, and orientation of the facts, along with other evaluations based upon perspective, each representation of history contains a certain vision of the world. From the core outward, this vision assigns the important and insignificant, the interesting and uninteresting, sees certain lines of development as emphasized above all, and judges in this way or that the manifold ambiguous questions, in which a whole complex of causes are involved.⁷⁹

Undoubtedly, my own vision of the world is present in this description of Imperial German society and the lives of the women I see as important within it. As many voices have been included, hundreds more have been left out. I believe that the most interesting and significant have remained. This book does not contend that the *Frauenüberschuß* can explain the 'whole complex of causes' that created the German women's movement. But I am certain that the cultural, social, and gender history of Imperial Germany cannot be understood without it.

Notes

1. *Die Frau* 1(1) (October 1893): 1.
2. Helene Lange, "Was wir wollen," *Die Frau* 1(1) (October 1893): 1.
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Ibid.*, 2.
5. Elisabeth Gnauck-Kühne, *Goldene Früchte aus Märchenland. Märchen für jung und alt* (Bremen, 1904).

6. Gnauck-Kühne, *Früchte*, "Die Nachtigall," 100.
7. *Ibid.*, 101.
8. *Ibid.*, 102–105.
9. *Ibid.*, 105.
10. *Ibid.*, 106–107; *Ich suche mein Leid und mein Lied*.
11. Gnauck-Kühne to Augustin Rösler, 16 September 1900, in Helene Simon, *Elisabeth Gnauck-Kühne*, vol. 2, *Heimat* (M. Gladbach, 1929), 196–197.
12. The term connotes 'single women.'
13. See Eduard von Hartmann, "Die Jungferfrage," *Die Gegenwart* (34) (35) (1891): 113–116; 131–134; Ludwig Langemann, *Auf falschem Weg. Beiträge zur Kritik der radikalen Frauenbewegung* (Berlin, 1913); Bärbel Kuhn, *Familienstand Ledig: Ehelose Frauen und Männer im Bürgertum (1850–1914)* (Cologne, 2000), 37–100; Ute Planert, *Antifeminismus im Kaiserreich* (Göttingen, 1998).
14. Helene Lange and Gertrud Bäumer, eds., *Handbuch der Frauenbewegung* (Berlin, 1902).
15. Robert Wilbrandt and Lisbeth Wilbrandt, *Die Deutsche Frau im Beruf*, in *Handbuch*, vol. 4, eds. Lange and Bäumer, 19–20.
16. Theobald Ziegler, *Die geistigen und sozialen Strömungen des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts* (Berlin, 1911), 571–572.
17. While single women's studies is expanding (see especially <http://www.medusanet.ca/single-women/> [accessed 13 April 2006]), relatively little scholarship has investigated the notion of a population surplus of unwed individuals. One exception, coming from the fields of psychology and sociology, is Marcia Guttentag and Paul F. Secord, *Too Many Women? The Sex Ratio Question* (Beverly Hills, CA, 1983).
18. Judith M. Bennett and Amy M. Froide, "A Singular Past," in *Singlewomen in the European Past, 1250–1800*, eds. Bennett and Froide (Philadelphia, 1999), 4.
19. *Ibid.*, 7–13.
20. *Ibid.*, 14, 15.
21. Martha Vicinus, *Independent Women: Work and Community for Single Women, 1850–1920* (Chicago, 1985), 6.
22. *Ibid.*, 7.
23. Elaine Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle* (New York, 1990), 3.
24. *Ibid.*, 19.
25. Rita Kranidis, *The Victorian Spinster and Colonial Emigration* (New York, 1999), 131.
26. *Ibid.*, 174; emphasis in text.
27. *Ibid.*, 178.
28. Mary Louise Roberts, *Civilization without Sexes: Reconstructing Gender in Postwar France, 1917–1927* (Chicago, 1994), 154.
29. *Ibid.*
30. Mary Louise Roberts, *Disruptive Acts: The New Woman in Fin de Siècle France* (Chicago, 2002), 247.
31. *Ibid.*, 246.
32. For an overview of historical analysis of national identity, see Nancy Reagin, "Recent Work on German National Identity: Regional? Imperial? Gendered? Imaginary?," *Central European History* 37(2) (2004): 273–289.
33. On the evolution of sexual scholarship in central Europe, see Harry Oosterhuis, *Stepchildren of Nature: Krafft-Ebing, Psychiatry, and the Making of Sexual Identity* (Chicago, 2000); on the influence of social science in imperial Germany, see Erik Grimmer-Solem, *The Rise of Historical Economics and Social Reform in Germany, 1864–1894* (New York, 2003).
34. On the impact of decreasing birth rates on the women's movement, see Ann Taylor Allen, *Feminism and Motherhood in Western Europe 1890–1970* (New York, 2005), 10–11.
35. On the crisis of surplus women in post-World War II Germany, see Elizabeth D. Heineman,

- What Difference Does a Husband Make? Women and Marital Status in Nazi and Postwar Germany* (Berkeley, CA, 1999), 108–136.
36. Roberts, *Civilization*, 6.
 37. Richard Evans, *The Feminist Movement in Germany, 1894–1933* (Beverly Hills, CA, 1976).
 38. Ute Frevert, *Women in German History*, trans. Stuart McKinnon-Evans (New York, 1989), 119.
 39. Herrad-Ulrike Bussemer, *Frauenemanzipation und Bildungsbürgertum* (Weinheim, 1985), 23ff.
 40. Amy Hackett, “The Politics of Feminism in Wilhelmine Germany, 1890–1918” (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1976), 40.
 41. *Ibid.*, 66.
 42. James Albisetti, *Schooling German Girls and Women, Secondary Education in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton, 1988), 99.
 43. Marion Kaplan, *The Making of the Jewish Middle Class. Women, Family, and Identity in Imperial Germany* (New York, 1991), 99, 171.
 44. *Ibid.*, 171–172.
 45. Patricia Mazón, *Gender and the Modern Research University: The Admission of Women to German Higher Education, 1865–1914* (Stanford, CA, 2003), 51.
 46. *Ibid.*, 51–52.
 47. Elisabeth Meyer-Renschhausen, *Weibliche Kultur und soziale Arbeit; Eine Geschichte der Frauenbewegung am Beispiel Bremens, 1810–1927* (Cologne, 1989), 77.
 48. *Ibid.*
 49. Evans, *Feminist Movement*, 1.
 50. Barbara Greven-Aschoff, *Die Bürgerliche Frauenbewegung in Deutschland, 1894–1933* (Göttingen, 1981), 46, 47.
 51. *Ibid.*, 47.
 52. *Ibid.*
 53. Nancy Reagan, *A German Women’s Movement: Class and Gender in Hanover, 1880–1933* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1995), 101, 277.
 54. *Ibid.*, 101.
 55. Lora Wildenthal, *German Women for Empire, 1884–1945* (Durham, NC, 2001), 6.
 56. *Ibid.*, 135; the citation specifically addresses Cauer’s activism, but describes Heyl’s vision as well; for a description of Heyl’s views, see 162–168.
 57. *Ibid.*, 6.
 58. *Ibid.*, 164.
 59. Kuhn, *Familienstand*, 39.
 60. *Ibid.*, 37–38.
 61. Joan Wallach Scott’s influential essay, “Gender: A Useful Category of Historical Analysis,” in *Gender and the Politics of History* (New York, 1988), 28–50, made the case that “gender ... provides a way to decode meaning and to understand the complex connections among various forms of human interaction” (*Ibid.*, 45–46). Both as a function and a creative factor of gender, marital status is a category that “legitimizes and constructs social relationships” (*Ibid.*, 46).
 62. Nancy Cott, *Public Vows: A History of Marriage and the Nation* (Cambridge, MA, 2000), 3; emphasis in text.
 63. Heineman, *What Difference*, xii.
 64. Francine du Plessix Gray, *Soviet Women* (New York, 1989), 7–9, 32–39.
 65. Antoinette Burton, “From Child Bride to ‘Hindoo Lady’: Rukhmabai and the Debate on Sexual Respectability in Imperial Britain,” *American Historical Review* 103 (4) (1998): 1119–1146.
 66. Heineman, *What Difference*, 246.
 67. See Evans, *Feminist Movement*, 35ff.; Ute Gerhard, *Unerhört. Die Geschichte der deutsche Frauenbewegung* (Reinbek bei Hamburg, 1992), 138–162, 216–279; Greven-Aschoff, 87–107;

- Hackett, 151–171. On the historiography regarding the division between moderate and radical feminism, see Jean Quataert, “Writing the History of Women and Gender in Imperial Germany,” in *Society, Culture, and the State in Germany, 1870–1930*, ed. Geoff Eley (Ann Arbor, MI, 1997), 51–55.
68. See Karen Honeycutt, “Clara Zetkin: A Socialist Approach to the Problem of Women’s Oppression,” *Feminist Studies* 3 (1976): 131–144, and “Socialism and Feminism in Imperial Germany,” *Signs* 5(1) (1979): 30–41; Alfred Meyer, *The Feminism and Socialism of Lily Braun* (Bloomington, IN, 1985); Jean Quataert, *Reluctant Feminists in German Social Democracy, 1885–1917* (Princeton, 1979).
 69. See Ursula Baumann, *Protestantismus und Frauenemanzipation in Deutschland, 1850–1920* (Frankfurt, 1992); Alfred Kall, *Katholische Frauenbewegung in Deutschland* (Paderborn, 1983).
 70. See Kevin Repp, *Reformers, Critics, and the Paths of German Modernity: Anti-Politics and the Search for Alternatives, 1890–1914* (Cambridge, MA, 2000), 119–128.
 71. Reagin, *Women’s Movement*, 185.
 72. Raffael Scheck, “Women against Versailles: Maternalism and Nationalism of Female Bourgeois Politicians in the Early Weimar Republic,” *German Studies Review* 22(1) (1999): 33.
 73. Ann Taylor Allen, *Feminism and Motherhood in Germany, 1800–1914* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1991), 5; for a case like that described by Allen, see Renate Bridenthal, “‘Professional’ Housewives: Stepsisters of the Women’s Movement,” in *When Biology became Destiny: Women in Weimar and Nazi Germany* (New York, 1984), 153–155, in which it is argued that “German bourgeois feminism meandered through the early twentieth century with an ideological profile so low as to bring its feminist credentials into question” (154).
 74. Allen, *Feminism* (1991), 11.
 75. Margit Göttert, *Macht und Eros: Frauenbeziehungen und weibliche Kultur um 1900—eine neue Perspektive auf Helene Lange und Gertrud Bäumer* (Königstein, 2000), 10.
 76. Repp, *Reformers*, 13.
 77. *Ibid.*, 14.
 78. *Ibid.*
 79. Archiv der Katholischer Deutscher Frauenbund, Nachlass Elisabeth Gnauck-Kühne, Ordnen 15; letter undated, context suggests 1912.

PART I

Der Frauenüberschuß

THE FEMALE SURPLUS

The surplus woman was a cultural icon of the *Kaiserreich*. The following four chapters describe the construction of her iconography by examining cultural and literary readings of the German old maid; the impact of the field of sexology on single women; the imagined demography behind the crisis of the bourgeois female surfeit; and the effort to convey the unwed female as a “spiritual,” if not biological, mother.

THE ALTE JUNGFER



*I*n mid-nineteenth century Prussia, an etiquette book for young ladies promised its readers that it would guide them toward acquiring the proper disposition necessary for a successful marriage. The author, Henriette Davidis, was a prolific writer of cookbooks and other forms of female prescriptive literature. Davidis offered an extraordinary range of counsel, instructing her readership on the importance of prayer and moral character, advocating a strict schedule (no more than twenty minutes spent on dressing in the morning; every Monday as laundry day), and detailing the steps toward keeping home and body clean and healthy. Davidis maintained that because of “the heightened demands and increasing requirements of our time, it is of decisive importance that the young lady fundamentally prepares herself for her later calling of a housewife”; if she did not, the prospective husband might well look elsewhere.¹ If girls followed her advice, Davidis believed that competence would replace income as the most crucial factor in forming marriages: “With such a feminine education, respectable men without an income will be able to risk choosing disadvantaged daughters as life partners . . . And certainly such a choice would not be regretted!”² Davidis’ guidance sought to secure for each reader a family of her own.³

Most young middle-class German women in the second half of the nineteenth century anticipated that they would marry. Their education, both formal and informal, sought to prepare them for wedlock.⁴ Over thirty years after Davidis extended her recommendations, another book of guidance directed potential brides to develop skills that would attract exemplary husbands. These qualities included an “understanding reception of his opinions, sensitive consideration of his tastes and personal wishes in the questions which concern your mutual fu-

ture, loving forethought on that which would embellish his strengths to achieve his life's destiny."⁵ The primary purpose of female development was to mold the feminine nature toward embracing the beliefs and goals of the prospective husband. Marriage would be the central achievement of a woman's life. Advice book author Amalie Baisch asserted that the sole life objective of a female was "to wear the veil, to prevent the terrifying old maidenhood once and for all. She will have a husband at any price, and if the husband that she has dreamed about does not come, she will take just anyone who does."⁶ Baisch warned against this sense of desperation and urged her readers to search responsibly for a husband. Still, the message was clear: marry, marry well, and marry young—in every way make oneself as desirable a future wife as possible.

In Imperial Germany, marriage—and marriagelessness—encompassed the category of womanhood, at least as far as the law was concerned. The German Civil Code of 1900 continued the centuries-old practice of defining women on the basis of marital status, making them legally beholden to husband or father.⁷ Independent single women did not have a fixed place in the German social order. Only 7 percent of *Kaiserreich* residences were classified as single-person households, with most of those headed by men.⁸ Female singles lived in the shadows of the bourgeois family ideal which, in an age of increasing industrialization and urbanization, seemed for many to offer a protective zone outside of the competitive sphere of public life.⁹ Law and society placed unwed independent women in a murky, marginalized realm.

The terrifying specter of the *alte Jungfer*, the German incarnation of the old maid, fueled the insistence on marriage as the fulfillment of the female destiny. The social and cultural construction of the old maid in Imperial Germany echoed centuries of Western thought on the proper female role. A woman belonged in the private sphere, economically dependent and physically controlled through the institution of marriage. Woman as a wife, subjugated to the husband financially and legally, secured the integrity of the family and the purity of the state. Woman unattached challenged the social order. Such ungoverned women had been subjected to various forms of persecution through the ages, including accusation of witchcraft and condemnation as moral threats. But in the nineteenth century, unwed women took on a new role: idleness. In the English context, historian Martha Vicinus has noted that "increased wealth and the consolidation of the bourgeois social values in the early nineteenth century condemned spinners to unremitting idleness and to marginal positions in the home, church, and workplace."¹⁰ In Germany as well, conventional anxieties young women might have had about remaining unmarried intensified as the bourgeois family model gained stature and economic advancement made redundant many of the traditional domestic activities of single family members. If the middle-class single woman could not find a place in her own home and family, she had no choice but to locate herself elsewhere. And if she did not inherit an income or earn a salary, she was fated to become something of a nuisance.

The dominant literary construction of the *alte Jungfer* in Imperial Germany was that of pariah. While many observers of the day expressed sympathy regarding the dilemmas that confronted single women and anticipated that derogatory depictions of old maids might become outmoded, the governing images of single women in literature and social commentary nonetheless served to label unwed females as outcasts. This form of marginalization intensified during the *Kaiserreich* due to the perceived displacement of the unwed woman from her stereotypical role as family helpmeet. As Katharina Gerstenberger found in a study of female autobiography at the turn-of-the-century, middle-class German women “assessed the modern age by measuring their own experience of family life against the bourgeois family ideal.”¹¹ As women and their observers began to contemplate the challenges of a life led distant from that family ideal, the advances of the industrial era transformed archaic anxieties about the old maid into contemporary threats to the greater social order. This chapter considers the social and cultural constructions of the *alte Jungfer* by demonstrating the ways in which single women increasingly came to be portrayed as useless personages in turn-of-the-century rhetoric.¹²

Family Blossom Turned Family Burden

Raised to plan and hope for a future distinguished by love and protection, many young women who did not marry confronted enormous disappointment. These despairing figures formed the prevailing literary depiction of unwed German women. While undoubtedly a fair number of unwed middle-class German women chose not to marry, authors of popular and prescriptive literature chose to ignore the possibility that singlehood might have been an elected state. Women who remained single spanned the spectrum of German women as a whole, not a group about which one could make sweeping generalizations. The representations of unwed women set forth in advice manuals and in fiction certainly could not reflect the variety and complexity of single women’s experiences, hopes, and beliefs. Prescriptive literature, in particular, trafficked in a “discourse of female subordination.”¹³ It is important not to imply a correlation between the advice given in prescriptive literature and the advice taken by its readership—indeed, it is difficult to make claims as to how carefully young bourgeois German women read the proliferation of advice manuals. This chapter follows the example of Russian historian Catriona Kelly in its approach to prescriptive literature by viewing the texts “primarily as contributions to ideology, rather than contributions to practical life.”¹⁴ In its ideological formulation, the portrait of single woman as a victim—both of the times and of her own shortcomings—predominated in the literary representation of the *alte Jungfer*.

A girl must be a young maid before she becomes an old one. The notion of one’s own home and family predominated in images of the future, for every girl

“thinks about being a bride, a wife, and a mother, and imagines and pictures herself in her own home, lovingly and agreeably created and maintained.” The prospective husband occupied the center of the vision: “He, the dream with marvelous qualities, suddenly stands there in any variety of shapes, and all cherished ideals and wishes take on a distinct form—the young heart loves and wants her love to be returned!”¹⁵ This expectation and desire for fulfillment was repeated and perpetuated through novels, magazine articles, and advice books. But a 1900 guidebook pointed out that, for all too many, the dream would not be realized:

Then comes the time of comprehension, for some earlier, for some later. There stands the cold, sobering reality which states: this type of happiness is not meant for each, not even for half. The yearning eyes, the heart full of love must watch as the bliss for which one had hoped turns toward another—perhaps the sister, perhaps the girlfriend, perhaps someone quite unexpected, that one never considered as worthy! From this moment on an internal struggle begins for those not chosen for whatever reason.¹⁶

The struggle manifested itself both in the quest to fashion a new identity and in the search for a feasible manner in which to support and fulfill oneself usefully.

For the German old maid, the contrast between romanticized notions of marriage and the incipient symptoms of spinsterhood created a stark existential crisis:

How rapidly the years pass by, the only years in which happiness could come to her!—If the girl were twenty-three or twenty-four years old, a shiver passed over her heart at first quite quickly, softly, furtively: Why has he still not come? And ever stronger, longer, more icily the shudder next asks: Why will no one come to me? And not long thereafter: Why have I been rejected? Am I more wicked than the others, more humorless, more clumsy, more stupid? Because that was the worst of her vain hopes—not disappointment, although her rose had faded—not fear of a bleak future, although this fear clutched at her heart—the worst was the shame, the rejection, to be thrown away as worthless.¹⁷

Descriptions of the onset of *Altjungferntum* emphasized the loss of a certain destiny as much as they mourned fleeting youth. The idyllic bourgeois marriage may have been illusory, but at least a wife could come to terms with her unfulfilled expectations in the security of a home of which she was the mistress.¹⁸ Never to manage a home, never to confront the challenges of life partnership—these missed opportunities constituted failure for the archetypal spinster. The losses expanded exponentially when the forsaken unmarried woman considered that she would never be a mother.

Gabriele Reuter's 1895 novel, *Aus guter Familie*, demonstrates the maddening course of hopes quashed and imagination stifled. The reader is introduced to the protagonist Agathe Heidling at the celebration of her confirmation. Among the gifts she receives is a book entitled, “*The Female as Maiden, Wife and Mother.*” The book might well have been a companion piece to the works of Davidis and Baisch.¹⁹ But Agathe would not marry; her parents had invested their fortune in their only son's education and gambling debts, leaving no dowry for Agathe. She is fated to remain a maid becoming old, never experiencing marriage and

motherhood. The novel's tragic heroine is brought to a nervous breakdown by the gradual awareness that she will always live under the shame of having been spurned. At the moment of her collapse, Agathe reflects on the dreams of her youth: "Her whole life should have been love, love, love—nothing but love was her life's purpose and destiny... The wife, the mother of future generations ... The root which supports the tree of humanity ... Yes—but if a girl raises her hand and wants only to drink from the glass which has enticingly been held before her lips from childhood on ... Shame and disgrace!"²⁰ Agathe is institutionalized and treated with "baths and sleep medication, electricity and massage, hypnosis and suggestion."²¹ After two years she is released, but the life that follows is empty, almost a "living death."²²

As the novel ends, family members try to secure a place for Agathe in a woman's home, because "one can hardly take her into one's home, where there are children—a girl, who was in a clinic for nervous disorders. And Agathe perhaps has a long life before her—she is still not forty years old."²³ Doomed by marital status, Agathe Heidlind's story is in many ways the inversion of Theodor Fontane's *Effi Briest*, another enormously successful novel of the Wilhelmine era.²⁴ Both heroines suffered from the expectation of wedded bliss—Effi condemned by the marriage forced upon her; Agathe damned by the nuptials that had eluded her. Their dual tragedies highlight the tense cultural milieu of bourgeois marriage in the *Kaiserreich*.

Reuter's novel of the *alte Jungfer* struck a chord in turn-of-the-century Germany. Helene Lange and Helene Stöcker, single women and ideologically disparate activists, shared the view that the novel grasped something essential in the German female experience. Lange described the portrayal of Agathe as "true, true, eerily true," while Stöcker called the novel "a cry for help which could only be derived from the interminable, boundless martyring of a woman."²⁵ Reuter herself contended that "my novel had the effect of breaking through a dam behind which the floods had long been pent up ... All of Germany was preoccupied with the book."²⁶ While the author may have exaggerated the German obsession, the book nonetheless was a highly successful bestseller.²⁷ Agathe's tragic tale undoubtedly resonated both with girls hoping to marry and mature women unlikely to wed. The book also raised critical questions about the education of girls and the place of unmarried females in modern German society. Linda Kraus Worley has described Agathe's confining life through the lens of gender: "Agathe is denied access to 'masculine' pursuits, science, politics, even rational thought, and she experiences the few extra-familial opportunities open to unmarried women as one-sided and demeaning. The literal and social texts offered her are those of romantic love and dutiful filial piety."²⁸ But love and family offered her no return. Reuter dramatized an *alte Jungfer's* futile search for a new identity and left her heroine with a sterile, solitary existence. Agathe's fate captures an essential component of the spinster paradigm: betrayed hope. Worley notes that Agathe's "decay has not been caused by rebelling against the social codes, but by idealistically embracing them."²⁹ Deluded by the promises of youth, Agathe becomes a

despondent, forsaken adult. Reuter's character comes to despise the childhood expectations she could never escape.

Depictions of single women repeatedly portray their development as halted at the point at which they recognize that they will not secure a man. '*Alte Jungfer*' was a label of consensus; an old maid became such when both she and those around her expected that she would never marry.³⁰ While that realization occurred at no single moment, the designation necessarily existed as an acknowledgement of the disappearance of youth. Only the blossom of youth offers the promise of a future. When that future became elusive, the unwed girl joined the ranks of the spinsters who inevitably looked back at the coming of age with emotions ranging from nostalgia to wistfulness to bitterness. While Reuter's Agathe came to despise the hopes of her youth, others sought to remain fixed in time: "We can forgive the aging girl the wish to extend . . . youth, the desire to find happiness at the twelfth hour which seems to her to be the only thing worth striving for; but it is extremely sad to watch those efforts which each girl makes to reach that goal."³¹ Whether she sought to recreate her youth artificially or denounced it with sorrow, the old maid could not escape being defined by that time during which she had failed to meet her calling.

Her *Beruf* (vocation, calling) had been envisioned quite simply: to become wife and mother. Failing that, anything else was at best a substitute. For Marie Calm, yet another author of guidebooks for young women, the *alte Jungfer* was defined precisely by the fact that she had failed in pursuit of her destined *Beruf*: "She did not find marriage, the natural occupation of the woman, and has not chosen another one. She takes her place in life without specific duties, without real work."³² Calm advocated seeking other occupations, but single women would remain conspicuous because of their uselessness. The emphasis placed upon female utility is evident in the nomenclature. The English term "spinster" is etymologically derived from a traditional pre-industrial occupation of the single woman: spinning.³³ While the German terms "*alte Jungfer*" and "*alleinstehende Frau*" are not as occupationally precise, their late nineteenth-century usage implied a fate of displacement: the oxymoronic old virgin and the woman standing alone—the modifying adverb designating her isolation as noteworthy. The old maid either stood alone or became a burden on family specifically and society generally.

Most bourgeois single women did establish an income, either through inheritance or work. But the onerous nature of the *alte Jungfer* was an essential element of the pariah paradigm. No conventional route to social interaction lay before the single woman. Marie Calm reflected that as long as she lived with her parents, she had some social security. But without a family, her conspicuousness condemned her to an uncertain fate:

*O welche Lust allein zu sein!
Allein zu stehn—O, welche Pein!*

(Oh what joy to be alone! To stand alone, oh what pain!)³⁴

Standing alone, she fruitlessly sought community. In order to find it, the single woman regularly had to inflict herself on those with richer companionate lives. Amalie Baisch observed that, “if [a female] did not get a husband and along with that the only sphere of activity for which she had been raised was closed off to her, she consequently must seem to be a superfluous member of human society, useless as the fifth wheel on a wagon.”³⁵

In his 1854 *Natural History of the German People*, historian and journalist Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl asked, “How should we deal with solitary women? How should we reduce the legions, increasing daily, of those who through no fault of their own are pushed outside of the family to stand desolately in the selfish ... world, unoccupied, destitute, [and] mercilessly damned ... to a failed, aimless life?” Offering no demographic evidence of the mounting legions, Riehl’s tone was sympathetic as he noted that the aimless unwed had not purposely pursued such a pointless path. But his rhetorical solutions sounded a more unfeeling note: “Should they be barricaded in the cloister? ... Should the surplus of family-less females be sent across the sea to Australia? Should they be struck dead?”³⁶ One can only hope that his hyperbole was intended as a sad attempt at humor. The most practical solution to the plight of the unwed, Riehl suggested, was a familial culture that would provide loving sanctuary to their single sisters. Ironically, precisely those families who pushed her out into the cold world were to act as the saviors of the surplus woman.

Most observers of old maidenhood shared in the belief that other family members would likely be forced to carry the burden of the unattached woman. And some of them viewed their unwed relatives not only as intruders into the social realm, but, far worse, as parasites on limited family resources:

The evil exists, who can deny it? It is large and widespread and it seems to grow from year to year. In certain levels of society, there is hardly a family that will not be affected by it. I know no one who does not have among his nearest relations an aging aunt, cousin, or sister-in-law, who without support is more of a burden than a help to her family. Here live grown daughters as dilettantes, busying themselves with books and notes, an endless worry to advancing parents; there we find a sister as the hostess for her brother who for her sake denies himself fulfillment of the most passionate desires of his heart; in another place the sister of the wife is lodged in the house of her brother-in-law as a controlling biddy, a thorn in the flesh of the children.³⁷

While this portrayal exudes hostility, its themes are not unusual. Male relatives had been forced to sacrifice and suffer because of the unexpected addition to the family sphere. The uselessness of the surplus woman was most offensive to those who had to work to support her. She was less a person than an object, “a piece of house furniture, an accessory that one reluctantly and with difficulty drags along, a necessary inconvenience to the family.”³⁸ Such depictions transformed the image of the *alte Jungfer* from a sheltered figure to a troublesome, dehumanized object that obstructed normal social and economic intercourse.

The objectification of the single woman implies both intractability and inertia. In some of the most damning accounts of old maidenhood, the forsaken women were charged with willfully creating their onerous status. These arguments maintained that middle-class surplus women did not desire to transform their dependency, but instead relished the life of leisure provided by aimlessness. Such women concerned themselves with “the dilettantish collection of music, French, literature, and often are also busy with extremely quiet hopes, but incidentally—they are perfectly useless.” A solution followed: “What means should be employed to remedy this evil? I think it is the means that the poor employ, that is—work.”³⁹ Vilified as a lazy supplicant existing solely on the goodwill of others, the spinster in this vein was a freeloader who consciously created her own neediness. Victimizer rather than victim, she was to be condemned rather than pitied. Such a character stood in opposition to Reuter’s Agathe Heidling, who had constantly sought to be useful, but had been held back due to parental prohibitions.

Instead of noting the real hardships that faced middle-class women seeking independence, such commentators blamed single women themselves for the lack of professional and educational opportunities that they faced. The aphorism “whoever wants to work can always find work” characterized assessments of idle unwed women.⁴⁰ The charge of selfishness sometimes extended into a medical diagnosis. Leipzig physician Carl Reclam asserted that in order to improve what he believed to be the generally weak health of old maids, “the best remedy is work; mental and physical activity in daily succession, serious exertion towards a goal,—in this manner one forgets one’s own ‘I’ and its petty troubles.”⁴¹ But philosopher Eduard von Hartmann doubted that unmarried women of means had the capacity to work: “They now know well the tediousness of unemployment, but not the tediousness and exhausting monotony of all professional work.”⁴²

Such representations held that an unmarried woman could only overcome her egocentrism if she renounced the comforting prospect of family support. But these critics did not consider the impediments that family placed before single women seeking independence, nor the shame that bourgeois society attached to women truly standing alone. Condemnations of the *alte Jungfer* relied upon a double standard. The old maid was a cast-off, left barren by the vagaries of the marriage market and betrayed by her dreams of a happy future, yet she was simultaneously also the crafty engineer of a lifetime of ease and dependency. The unmarried woman was thus both ridiculed and feared. Portrayed as deliberately desperate, the *alte Jungfer* was a cultural construction central to the debates about the position of women in Imperial Germany.

The Shrew, the Romantic, and *die Tante*

It was difficult for contemporaries to reconcile consistently the images of heart-broken girls such as Agathe Heidling with the portrayals of dilettantes who lived

a leisurely life oblivious to the burden placed on those families who worked to support their whims. While views on the origins of single status differed, many observers of the day agreed that once a girl became a spinster, her character, her belief system, and even her body altered dramatically. The resulting old maid was a stock character in the cultural panorama, though the specific characteristics varied to accommodate both victims and lazy dilettantes. In 1906, the novelist Adelheid Weber offered a threefold characterization of traditional *alte Jungfern*: the bitter shrew; the simpering, foolish romantic; and the beloved aunt. While Weber viewed these caricatures as fading remnants of a judgmental era, a review of the literature suggests otherwise.

The most widespread parody of the *alte Jungfer* was that of vile harridan. Weber described her in the following manner: “[She is] large, gaunt, with a pointy nose and stabbing eyes. She has a small inheritance, lives alone with a herd of cats and a lapdog, despises children with a dry, grim, merciless hatred and horrifies the young girls whose reputations and happiness she pitilessly attacks. Lonely, hated, and hateful she lives and dies. And yet she had so much love to give that no one ever coveted. This she gave to her cats and dogs.”⁴³ Notorious for both her physique and her character, this figure is malicious. Yet she is also tragic in Weber’s eyes, for her life has been determined and destroyed by lack of love. Other accounts were not so charitable, inspecting every physical characteristic in relentless detail: “A young girl becomes old and ever older, the desired deliverance from virginity never comes. Youthful freshness is lost, rosy cheeks pale, skin wrinkles and folds; hair that framed a cute, sweet face used to be full and opulent, but now it becomes thin—the mop almost looks like a wig (and sometimes it really is one); the face develops an angular form with plunging eyebrows, a pointy nose, a yellowed complexion, dried lips, all of which sit atop a neck that is sometimes narrow and long, sometimes short and fat.”⁴⁴ While the physical aspects depicted might be attributed, however harshly, to the benign process of aging, the description explicitly links her appearance to the unfulfilled calling of the unwed woman—never achieving true womanhood as a wife and mother, her body has betrayed her literal and figurative fruitlessness.

Yet physical decay is only one aspect of a much greater deterioration. The old maid of this first type is utterly consumed by bitterness. The aged incarnation of the selfish dilettante, the spinster nag sees nothing but her own pain, lashing out at everyone and everything around her. Disappointment is the central component of her unhappiness, but a lifetime of stigmatization and ostracization has made her malevolent as well. Gertrud Bülow von Dennewitz, an advocate of women’s rights who wrote under the pseudonym Gisela von Streitberg, saw the origins of such nasty creatures in the culture of bourgeois youth. A girl terrified of never marrying knew well “the heartless mockery of young girls toward unmarried old women of harmless nature who might here and there show some peculiar traits.” Such adolescents dreaded a similar fate: “[They] know only too well how soon they themselves will be written into the register of the aged ... and already carry in their hearts the embarrassingly pressing fear that they themselves will be

left behind ... From such an individual then develops the embittered, jealous, malicious, in a word, unbearable *alte Jungfer*, of whom it is doubtful whether she makes her own or other's lives more miserable.⁴⁵ Even this sympathetic portrayal concedes the misery that is spread by such a harpy. Another account describes the solitary woman as an increasingly angry figure: "Through the habits of intellectual stagnation she becomes petty and bitter, she scatters her stubborn narrow-mindedness and inconsistency, making her environment contentious and stultifying [and] giving the designation '*alte Jungfer*' its sinister timbre."⁴⁶

Embittered, the unmarried woman spreads bitterness; unloved, she is only capable of hate. The model of the shrew is the most prominent among the various lampoons of the spinster. The image fueled charges that the only true destiny for the female sex was marriage and motherhood. The following 1873 analysis of the *Frauenfrage* sums up the attributes of this most unfortunate female:

There is an army of deformities and abnormalities which develop into peculiarities and by which one can precisely designate the *alijungfräulich* ... Sharp, surly criticism of the passions of youth which one can no longer enjoy; condemnatory envy which cannot look joyfully on the happiness of others ... sorrowful satisfaction when someone married encounters misfortune; generally loveless behavior toward others; eavesdropping curiosity and a gossipy desire to report something 'new'; pushy interference into the affairs of others; ... pedantic emphasis on dull, meaningless things and adherence to order.⁴⁷

Yet the same text also renders a profile of the shrew's opposite: the foolish romantic, a figure who exhibited "neglect of all order and unreliability in all affairs; ridiculous affection for particular loved ones, even animals; ... oversensitivity [and] tears at the slightest cause, and then further self-satisfied tears over those tears; ... repulsive excesses in the desire to please the palate; and more of the same sad things."⁴⁸

While neither of these parodies likely made for good company, both figures suffered from the ill effects of life without marriage. These two stereotypes existed in a dialectic—one cold and critical, the other excessive and emotional. What accounts for the stark differences between the two ridiculed figures? Both of these clichéd illustrations were based upon the experience of forsaken hope. But while one stereotype responds with bitterness, the second model of the old maid reacts to her fate with remarkable denial, her hopes still painfully intact, forever expectant of a transformation and forever unfulfilled.

This fanciful figure is more pitiable than the ruthless and angry shrew, for anger might at least serve as an outlet for pain. But the expectant romantic lives in a condition of denial. Never reconciled to her fate and never attempting to readjust, this fanciful figure exists as if frozen in time, waiting for her prince to come. This version of *alte Jungfer* is obsessed with remaining young and is therefore immediately recognizable.

Because she does not want to allow herself to become old, she desperately attempts to pass as a *Backfisch* by wearing coquettish hats, light dresses with stripes and polka-dots, [and]

ribbons in the hair in order to carry and polish herself like a lass of seventeen or eighteen years. Her behavior also remains naïve, she blushes and bats her eyes bashfully low if a young man speaks to her, and if any more or less natural topic is discussed in society, she will act as if she believed in the “Tales of the Stork,” she laughs loudly where it is entirely inappropriate, behaves childishly, ... endlessly thinks all young men are courting her and are in love with her, so that she finally is a comic figure. The poor foolish thing is laughed at by all sides.⁴⁹

An element of craving might be added to the parody, pointing out “a perennially coy teenage smile ... yearning gazes of desire toward gentlemen ... suits of bright and garish colors ... These and other similar effusions of unsatisfied longing form her repertoire.”⁵⁰

This romantic is indeed hopeless. Her myopic vision and evidently low self-esteem encouraged condemnation of the unmarried as a whole—if the women themselves could not move beyond a belief in fairytale endings, why ought society to help them? The extreme nature of the depictions made the single woman alternatively an object of humor, disdain, mockery, pity, and condemnation. The more extraordinary the lampoon, the less seriously any calls for reform could be taken. And, paradoxically, the more difficult and intractable the plight of unmarried women became.

Not all representations mocked as meanly as those just described. Adelheid Weber’s image of the addled romantic described a gentle woman who kept any hopes quietly to herself while working for her family: “Small, fine, with intimidated eyes and a smile always asking for forgiveness, [she was] the drudge mule of the family who did everything no one else liked to do ... who had a thousand duties but none of them great, precise, or liberating ... and from all she implored forgiveness for her worthless existence with her entire being.”⁵¹ Weber evoked a kind, submissive, selfless figure instead of a thoroughgoing fool. If this romantic maintained dreams, they were suppressed under an awareness of her present superfluity. Still, she could not escape the verdict of her youth and lived her life in the shadow of greater promises.

In her sympathetic description of this meek old maid, Weber set up the third member of her unmarried trinity: the beloved *Tante* (aunt). Neither angry like the shrew nor absurd like the starry-eyed ninny, the final model of the *alte Jungfer* was a figure to be emulated:

Our dear guardian angel to whom we as children bring our cuts and bruises, to whom young girls carry our hearts’ troubles, and brothers while students bring their empty wallets, and our mothers bring concerns about household and children. And who has for us all needles and stain remover, consolation and understanding, a penny in time of need, good advice and above all a loving word. Our aunt who has so entirely overcome life that she only lives for others, and has the best spirit that can be for a very lonely woman with a very large heart after a long bitter life.⁵²

Weber’s mixed review provided a glimmer of hope for unmarried women. While still afflicted by pervasive loneliness, the aunt is also cherished in the domestic

realm—where, of course, she ought to have been all along. The comforting embrace of a family could prevent a single woman from becoming vindictive or silly by giving her the opportunity to be “selfless, caring only for others, never for herself.”⁵³

Through such selflessness—the antidote to the more ridiculous forms of old maidenhood—the unmarried woman could as much as possible approximate the experience of marriage. Supportive aunts needed to conform to the goals and desires of the families to which they were attached by internalizing family concerns and making them their own. This subjugation of self to family or parish, community or country, was the only way in which a spinster could participate in any sort of “mutual future.”⁵⁴ The intimate details of family interaction could create a purpose in life for even the most deprived single women. Amalie Baisch’s version of *die Tante* “in spite of everything would always save a couple of pennies in order to provide sweets for the children of the house.”⁵⁵ The children crave the sweets and satiate the forsaken woman’s need to love. The plight of the surplus woman might have been solved by something as simple as giving candy to babes.

But what if penny candy could not solve the problem? The pariah paradigm of the *alte Jungfer* hinged precisely on the exclusion of the surplus woman from such cozy moments of family life. The shrew was embittered by her rejection from the family; the romantic was tragicomic in her zeal to be welcomed into it. Only the beloved aunt was partially saved, for through her good works she earned a place in the domestic sphere. But what if no family was available, or needy, or sympathetic? The cycle of rejection continued and the female unmarried was doomed to a more pathetic fate.

Buddenbrooks’ Anti-Modern Old Maids

Thomas Mann’s epic novel, *Buddenbrooks: The Decline of a Family*, employs the pathetic old maid as a symbol of stagnation in a society wrestling with the challenges of modernity. The book is set in nineteenth-century Lübeck and engages the saga of a prominent merchant family whose pursuit of success ultimately brings about its downfall. Success for the Buddenbrooks came in many forms: esteemed reputation, material comfort, pious respectability, civic influence—each of which could be acquired through two key means: a thriving business and successful marriages. But the family business encounters more bust than boom toward the end of the century, and Buddenbrook marriages falter and fail based on foolish choices and hollow bonds. When the last male Buddenbrook dies of typhoid fever in his teens, all that remains of the family’s former glory is a roomful of forsaken, unwed women. In that hopeless circle, the family’s decline is fully realized.

Buddenbrooks, published in 1901, was the bestselling German novel of the first half of the twentieth century.⁵⁶ While the novel follows the story of the core Buddenbrook family, constant witness to the many achievements and tribula-

tions of the family is a sextet of *alte Jungfern*: governess Ida Jungmann; finishing school director Sesemi Weichbrodt; paternal cousins Friederike, Henriette, and Pfiffi, known collectively as the Broad Street Buddenbrooks; and poor maternal cousin Clothilde. These important supporting characters in the novel emerge at every baptism, marriage, holiday, and deathbed, and are resiliently unchanging in their response to the drama of the main family. Their perpetual presence at family gatherings is a key way in which “the novel chronicles lives that are constantly anchored in the need to stylize experience into recurring rituals.”⁵⁷

Mann’s use of these flat characters echoes the typologies of old maidenhood found in prescriptive literature and in parodies of the women’s movement. Ida Jungmann, daughter of a deceased innkeeper, becomes a buttress to the Buddenbrooks, for “her rigid honesty and Prussian notions of caste made her perfectly suited to her position in the family. She was a person of aristocratic principles, drawing hair-line distinctions between class and class, and very proud of her position as a servant of the higher orders.”⁵⁸ Her lower middle-class roots make her a supportive bit player in the elitist strivings of the Buddenbrooks, a woman who is delighted to “boast of having grown gray in the service of the best society.”⁵⁹ Yet her indulgent spoiling of little Johann (Hanno), the ill-fated last male Buddenbrook, contributes to the boy’s weakness. After devoting much of her life to the family, Ida is dismissed after nearly a half-century of service and disappears from the tale.

Therese Weichbrodt, nicknamed Sesemi, bears the physical markers of the decrepit *alte Jungfer*. “So humpbacked that she was not much higher than a table,” Sesemi had “shrewd, sharp brown eyes, a slightly hooked nose, and thin lips which she could compress with extraordinary firmness.” Fräulein Weichbrodt runs the pension where the Buddenbrook daughters finished their adolescence and, through the years, she became an extended member of the family. Mann portrayed Sesemi as “somewhat comic, yet exact[ing] respect” due to her “religious assurance that somewhere in the beyond she was to be recompensed for the dull, hard present.”⁶⁰ She is a “lively old maid,” who, despite continuing certainty that “the end was not far off,” outlasts most of the novel’s protagonists.⁶¹

The aggrieved Broad Street Buddenbrooks form a carping chorus that consistently criticizes the airs of the wealthy merchant family. Their father had lost much of his inheritance through the willful choice of a wife of whom his family disapproved. The sisters are introduced as a dowry-deficient trio, none of whom “was, unfortunately, likely to marry.”⁶² The two eldest are variously described as “tall and withered-looking” and “long and lean,” (physical prototypes of the shrew), while their younger sister, Pfiffi, fills out as “much too little and fat” . . . “with a droll way of shaking herself at every word, a drop of water always . . . in the corner of her mouth when she spoke.”⁶³ Though Pfiffi resembles the foolish romantic, her nature—like that of her older sisters—is more resentful than ridiculous. Their favorite target of derision is their cousin Antonie, nicknamed Tony, whose two divorces and ceaseless pursuit of the family’s glory form an important tributary of the Buddenbrook decline. After Tony’s first divorce, they explain to

her that “it is every so much better never to have married at all.”⁶⁴ Throughout the novel, the Broad Street sisters “dart sharp glances at one another” as they take “speechless joy” in the accumulating failures of their wealthier cousins.⁶⁵ Mann portrays the sisters’ passive-aggressive mode of mocking the core Buddenbrooks through a mean-spirited intimacy that can only be gleaned through the continual proximity of family life.⁶⁶ The Broad Street sisters expose the flaws in the façade of upper-bourgeois respectability so craved by the Buddenbrooks. In developing these figures, Mann embraced and furthered a cutting depiction of hopeless, embittered *alte Jungfern* who had only “sharp, spiteful smile[s] at everything and everybody,” and who seemed to gain “mild satisfaction” in life only when viewing the “impartial justice of death.”⁶⁷

These minor figures never waver from their initial characterizations. Ida and Sesemi are unfailing in their commitment to the Buddenbrook project of advancement, codependents paying their penance of earthly service in exchange for eternal salvation. Never seeking personal influence, affluence, or change, Ida and Sesemi champion the ambition of the Buddenbrooks even as they themselves remain fixed in time. Their static presentation and consistent selflessness provide a most anti-modern inversion of the Buddenbrook quest. Alternatively, in their roles as resident harpies, the Broad Street sisters defy modernity much more defensively. While Ida and Sesemi are fulfilled by their absolute acceptance of middle-class servitude (much like Adelheid Weber’s *Tante*), the *Fräulein* Buddenbrooks are pointedly and resentfully resigned to their fixed status (in the same vein as Weber’s shrew). Advertisement of that status becomes their *raison d’être*. Mann’s old maids collectively stand as the most anti-modern creatures in a tale of failed modernization.

Mann’s employment of the *alte Jungfer* in *Buddenbrooks* comes to its richest embodiment in the character of poor cousin Clothilde. Clothilde was based upon Mann’s paternal cousin, Thekla. According to Thomas Mann’s sister, Julia, Thekla was an unattractive, “pious, dreary soul,” the opposite of Mann’s aunt Elisabeth (the engaging prototype of Tony Buddenbrook).⁶⁸ Clothilde is the most recurring of Mann’s ensemble of single women. Raised in the family circle after being left an orphan, eight-year-old Clothilde is introduced as “an extraordinarily thin small child, dressed in a flowered print frock, with lusterless ash-colored hair and the manner of a little old maid.”⁶⁹ Her prospective old maidenhood is established well before adolescence; by the age of 21, “her long face already showed pronounced lines; and with her smooth hair, which had never been blond, but always a dull grayish color, she presented an ideal portrait of a typical old maid.”⁷⁰

Clothilde exhibits two pronounced yet seemingly irreconcilable characteristics: hunger and resignation. Her hunger serves as a source of both wonder and cheap laughs: “Truly it was amazing, the prowess of this scraggy child with the long, old-maidish face ... She ate: whether it tasted good or not, whether they teased her or not, she smiled and kept on, heaping her plate with good things, with the instinctive, insensitive voracity of a poor relation—patient, persevering, hungry, and lean.”⁷¹ At a family baptism, she “is moved by the words of Pas-

tor Pringsheim and the prospect of layer-cake and chocolate;⁷² on a summer afternoon after coffee, “Clothilde, looking thin and old-maidish in her flowered cotton frock, was reading a story called ‘Blind, Deaf, Dumb, and Still Happy.’ As she read, she scraped up the biscuit-crumbs carefully with all five fingers from the cloth and ate them.”⁷³ Her hunger is larger-than-life: “It was a mystery how much good and nourishing food that poor Clothilde could absorb daily without any result whatever! She grew thinner and thinner ... Her face was long, straight, and expressionless as ever, her hair as smooth and ash-coloured, her nose as straight, but full of large pores and getting thick at the end.”⁷⁴ The insistent refrain of Clothilde’s insatiability bears the imprint of a sexual anaesthetic, diseased through disuse.⁷⁵ Mann’s pen led Clothilde toward her destiny as an increasingly unattractive old maid whose cravings can never be met. But Clothilde’s complete resignation to her fate as an inborn *alte Jungfer* equals her ravenous hunger: “She was content; she did nothing to alter her condition. Perhaps she thought it best to grow old early and thus to make a quick end of all doubts and hopes. As she did not own a single sou, she knew that she would find nobody in all the wide world to marry her, and she looked with humility into her future.”⁷⁶

Clothilde combines the characteristics of the stereotypical trio; though she looks like a shrew, her insatiability mirrors the folly of the romantic—and she lives the selfless devotion of *die Tante*. Clothilde’s destiny is complete when she secures a spot in a home for single women from elite families (through the extant, if wavering, influence of her cousins).⁷⁷ Only an institution specially made for archaic misfits could be Clothilde’s destination in the advancing world of the *Buddenbrooks*. Along with the other old maids of the novel, Clothilde cannot be made modern. Mann elucidates this point in a passage in which Thomas Buddenbrook, the last head of the family, ruminates on his own limitations and on his (ultimately futile) desire to extend a paternal bridge to his sensitive son, Johann:

Sometimes when the family were invited to dinner, Aunt Antonie or Uncle Christian would begin to tease Aunt Clothilde and imitate her meek, drawling accents. Then little Johann, simulated by the heavy red wine which they gave him, would ape his elders and make some remarks to Aunt Clothilde in the same vein. And then how Thomas Buddenbrook would laugh! He would give a loud, hearty, jovial roar, like a man put in high spirits by some unexpected piece of good luck, and join in on his son’s side against poor Aunt Clothilde, though for his own part he had long since given up these witticisms at the expense of his poor relative. It was so easy, so safe, to tease poor, limited, modest, lean, and hungry Clothilde, that, harmless though it was, he felt it rather beneath him. But he wished he did not, for it was the same story over again: too many considerations, too many scruples.⁷⁸

Throughout the novel, Thomas Buddenbrook combats his scruples, believing that his overactive conscience prohibits him from becoming “a Caesar even in a little commercial town on the Baltic.”⁷⁹ Thomas asks himself, “Why must he be for ever opposing these scruples against the hard, practical affairs of life? Why could he never learn that it was possible to grasp a situation, to see around it, as it were, and still to turn it to one’s own advantage without a feeling of shame? For

precisely this, he said to himself, is the essence of a capacity for practical life! And thus, how happy, how delighted, how hopeful he felt whenever he saw even the least small sign in little Johann of a capacity for practical life.”⁸⁰ Bourgeois advancement rested precisely in that capacity for practical life. Fearing that he had passed a scrupulous and philosophical nature on to his son, Thomas Buddenbrook yearned for signs that his son would grow to be a reasonable man. Despite his better instincts, Thomas is delighted whenever Hanno abandons his artistic presentiments and engages in the pedestrian and eminently practical exercise of ridiculing the family old maid.

Such gamesmanship meant success in the modern world—and Mann utilized unwed women as key items in the game. Ceaselessly objectified (indeed, Tony describes Ida as a standing piece of furniture),⁸¹ Mann’s timeless, resilient *alte Jungfern* provide the old-fashioned mark against which Buddenbrook success would be measured. The old maids of the novel stand in opposition to all of the markers of modernity: bourgeois ambition, personal vanity, technological advancement, and, most of all, the corruption of an idealized domestic sphere through marriages based on acquisitiveness. As Tony remarks to Clothilde in the book’s closing pages, “You are just as well off as we are now. Yes—so it goes. I’ve struggled against fate, and done my best, and you have just sat there and waited for everything to come round. But you are a goose, you know, all the same.”⁸² Tony’s history of failed marriages reveals how the pursuit of ambitious advancement destroyed the family that it was intended to enhance. The last male Buddenbrook—sensitive, overwhelmed Hanno—cannot survive the world of bourgeois capitalism and the barren competition of modern ambition. But the old maids remain, ridiculously placid and fixed in their passive opposition to a world of change.

In the novel’s final scene, the old maids (absent Ida, who has been dismissed) are joined by Tony and her daughter Erika, both of whom have been rejected by marriage and have stumbled into the ranks of unwanted women through calamitous divorces and separations. As they gather to say goodbye to a departing Gerda (Thomas Buddenbrook’s widow and mother of the dead Hanno), they reflect on all that has been lost. Mann underlines the family’s destruction by closing his epic with “eight ladies . . . dressed in black.”⁸³ He revisits the stock caricatures, evoking the Broad street sisters wearing “their old affronted and critical air” and Clothilde having “done wonders at the supper table . . . lean and gray as of yore.”⁸⁴ The last word of the novel is given to the immutable Sesemi, who swears with spiritual fervor that there will be a reunion of all Buddenbrooks in the afterlife. The battle in this life has been spent, and the Buddenbrooks have been vanquished. But old maid Sesemi stands ironically as “a victor in the good fight which all her life she had waged against the assaults of Reason: hump-backed, tiny, quivering with the strength of her convictions, a little prophetess, admonishing and inspired.”⁸⁵ Reason fails, but the old maids live on.

Buddenbrooks is a novel of the *Kaiserreich*, reflecting the slowly mounting crisis of a culture of untrammelled gain. In his minor cast of single women, Thomas Mann set forth a feminine sphere that could never compete in that culture of

gain. At the end of the novel, they stand as they did in the beginning: the ultimate losers of the nineteenth-century sweepstakes. The family's failure to advance is complete when it is relegated to the hands of these unwed, unwanted women. Who better to demonstrate the final futility of that process than the *alte Jungfer*, Mann's iconic caricature of anti-Reason? Refusing ambition, the unmarried women of the novel occupy a passive space in bourgeois culture, never adorning its garb nor pursuing its material rewards. The Buddenbrook family stands between capitalist advancement and "the worrisome ministration of old traditions—an unconscious regression from the work of creating a future for [the family] house."⁸⁶ The sphere into which the Buddenbrook family inexorably regressed was the anti-modern world embodied by Mann's *alte Jungfern*.

* * *

Adelheid Weber concluded that the trinity of the shrew, the romantic, and *die Tante*, "were the *alte Jungfern* of the past ... For our current girl no longer becomes an *alte Jungfer* ... she knows her own strength and is proud of herself."⁸⁷ Weber believed that the women's movement and the changing economy had created a variety of opportunities for single women. As the following chapters illustrate, discussions about the female surplus did transform perceptions of women's capabilities and contributed to the broadening debate about the nature of the female calling. But the spirit of the old maid did not fade from the cultural landscape. One reason for its abiding power was simply that single women had for so long been taunted, vilified, and feared. The historical roots of the *alte Jungfer* went too deep to wither easily.

Yet the signification of unmarried women as social and cultural pariahs gained new qualities and a deeper urgency in Imperial Germany. The picture of the productive spinster faded away as representations of the idle old maid gained sway. The advances of industrialization bolstered this notion of the spinster as an economic encumbrance. As embodied in Thomas Mann's *Buddenbrooks*, the old maid is resolutely unchangeable amidst the tides of modernity. The less useful single women were believed to be, the more extreme the characteristics attributed to them: spinsters became shrews, romantics became simpletons, beloved aunts became desperate codependents. The *Kaiserreich* characterization of single women as burdens provided fresh energy to the iconography of the *alte Jungfer*.

Notes

1. Henriette Davidis, *Die Jungfrau. Worte des Rathes zu Vorbereitung für ihren Beruf* (Bielefeld, 1857), vi.
2. *Ibid.*, 199.
3. *Ibid.*, 74.

4. On the dominance of the bourgeois family ideal in nineteenth-century Germany, see David Blackbourn, *The Long Nineteenth Century. A History of Germany, 1780–1918* (New York, 1997), 213–214; Ute Frevert, *Women in German History*, trans. Stuart McKinnon-Evans (New York, 1989), 109–112; Thomas Nipperdey, *Deutsche Geschichte, 1800–1866* (Munich, 1984), 114–130; and Nancy Reagin, “The Imagined Hausfrau: National Identity, Domesticity, and Colonialism in Imperial Germany,” *Journal of Modern History* 73(1) (2001): 54–86. Peter Borscheid, in “Von Jungfern, Hagestolzen, and Singles: Die historische Entwicklung des Alleinlebens,” in *Lebensform Einpersonenhaushalt*, ed. Sylvia Gräbe (New York, 1994), 38–41, describes the intensification of the bourgeois marriage ideal from the “family cult” of the Biedermeier era through the turn-of-the-century escalation in anxiety about sexual morality.
5. Amalie Baisch, *Ins eigene Heim. Ein Buch für erwachsene Mädchen und junge Frauen* (Stuttgart, 1893), 44.
6. *Ibid.*, 31.
7. *The German Civil Code*, trans. Chung Hui Wang (London, 1907) § 2, 1303, 1354, 1355, 1356, 1617.
8. Borscheid, “Jungfern,” 23.
9. *Ibid.*, 39.
10. Martha Vicinus, *Independent Women. Work and Community for Single Women, 1850–1920* (Chicago, 1985), 3.
11. Katharina Gerstenberger, *Truth to Tell: German Women’s Autobiographies and Turn-of-the-Century Culture* (Ann Arbor, MI, 2000), 178.
12. Important material for this chapter was found in Kassel’s *Archiv der deutschen Frauenbewegung*, where a folder entitled “*Alte Jungfer*,” compiled by archivist Jutta Harbusch, contains a historian’s gold mine of newspaper clippings, short stories, encyclopedic entries, and excerpts from scientific works. For a sampling of other representations of German unmarried women, see Bärbel Kuhn, *Familienstand Ledig*, (Cologne, 2000), 27–58.
13. A. James Hammerton, *Cruelty and Companionship: Conflict in Nineteenth-Century Married Life* (New York, 1992), 75; pp. 73–82 discuss the ways in which English prescriptive literature promoted an ideal of companionate marriage based upon mutual affection.
14. Catriona Kelly, *Refining Russia: Advice Literature, Polite Culture, and Gender from Catherine to Yeltsin* (New York, 2001), xxv.
15. Tony Schumacher, *Vom Schulmädchen bis zur Grossmutter* (Stuttgart, 1900), 195–196.
16. *Ibid.*, 196.
17. Adelheid Weber, “Die alte Jungfer von einst und das reife Mädchen von heut,” *Die Gartenlaube* 39, supplement *Die Welt der Frau* (1906): 609.
18. See Reagin, “Hausfrau,” for a discussion of the “imagined community of German Hausfrauen.” Reagin argues that, “domesticity functioned within the German bourgeoisie as a project of class formation but also ... became attached to a gendered national identity” (2001, 58).
19. Gabriele Reuter, *Aus guter Familie* [1895], 27th ed., (Berlin, 1931), 16.
20. *Ibid.*, 374.
21. *Ibid.*, 378.
22. Gabriele Rahaman, “Gabriele Reuter’s *Aus guter Familie* in the light of Klaus Theweleit’s Concept of ‘Entlebensdigung,’” *German Life and Letters* 44:5 (October 1991): 467.
23. Reuter, *Familie*, 380.
24. Theodor Fontane, *Effi Briest* [1894], 11th ed., (Berlin, 1903); for a comparison of *Effi Briest* and *Aus guter Familie*, see Alan Bance, “The Novel in Wilhelmine Germany: From Realism to Satire,” in *The Cambridge Companion to the Modern German Novel*, ed. Graham Bartram (New York, 2004), 32–36.
25. Helene Lange, “Aus guter Familie,” *Die Frau* 3(5) (1896): 317; Helene Stöcker, “Gabriele Reuters *Aus guter Familie*,” *Die Frauenbewegung* 2(4) (1896): 38; both quoted in Linda Kraus Worley, “Girls from Good Families: Tony Buddenbrook and Agathe Heidling,” *The German Quarterly* 76(2) (2003): 196.

26. Gabriele Reuter, *Vom Kinde zum Menschen*, (Berlin, 1921), 474; quoted in Rahaman, “Reuter’s,” 467.
27. Worley, “Good Families,” 196.
28. *Ibid.*, 200.
29. *Ibid.*, 201.
30. See for example Marie Calm, *Die Sitten der guten Gesellschaft* (Stuttgart, 1886), 93; Julius Weiss and R. Kossman, *Mann und Weib in ihren Beziehungen zur Kultur der Gegenwart* (Stuttgart, 1908), 420.
31. Calm, *Sitten*, 93.
32. *Ibid.*, 94.
33. *The Compact Oxford English Dictionary*, 2nd ed. (1989), s.v. “Spinster.”
34. Calm, *Sitten*, 95.
35. Amalie Baisch, *Aus der Töchterchule ins Leben* (Stuttgart, 1890), 8.
36. Wilhelm Heinrich Riehl, *Die Familie*, vol. 3 of *Die Naturgeschichte des deutschen Volkes als Grundlage einer deutschen Socialpolitik*, 2d ed. (Stuttgart, 1855), 106; cited in Borscheid, “Jungfern,” 42.
37. A. Kühne, *Giebt es ein Mittel, die Lage der unversorgten Mädchen und Wittwen in den Mittelständen zu verbessern?* (Berlin, 1859), 3.
38. Emma Vely, “Die unverheiratete Frau in früheren Zeiten und heute,” *Illustrierte Sonntags-Zeitung* 42 (1898/1899): 659–660.
39. Kühne, *Giebt es ein Mittel*, 8–9.
40. Gisela von Streitberg, [pseud. Gertrud Bülow von Dennewitz], *Die Verehelichten und die Ehe-losen Frauen* (Berlin, 1891), 82.
41. Carl Reclam, *Des Weibes Gesundheit und Schönheit*, 2nd ed. (Leipzig, 1883), 266.
42. Eduard von Hartmann, “Die Jungferfrage: Schluss,” in *Die Gegenwart* 35 (1891): 131.
43. Weber, “Alte Jungfer,” 610.
44. Weiss and Kossmann, *Mann und Weib*, 416.
45. Streitberg, *Verehelichten*, 67.
46. Andrea Pauloff, “Alte Jungfern,” in *Die Frau* 1 (1893–1894): 602.
47. *Die Frauenfrage und ihr Kern: Das Leben einer alten Jungfrau* (Gütersloh, 1873), 30–31.
48. *Ibid.*, 31.
49. Weiss and Kossmann, *Mann und Weib*, 416–417.
50. Hermann Heinrich Ploss, *Das Weib in der Natur- und Völkerkunde*, 7th ed. (Leipzig, 1902), 587.
51. Weber, “Alte Jungfer,” 610.
52. *Ibid.*
53. Henriette Keller-Jordan, “Tante Hannchen (Eine Erinnerung),” *Hessenland* (1901): 113.
54. Baisch, *Ins eigene Heim*, 44.
55. Baisch, *Töchterchule*, 6.
56. Donald Ray Richards, *The German Bestseller in the 20th Century* (Bern, 1968), 55.
57. Martin Swales, *Buddenbrooks: Family Life as the Mirror of Social Change* (Boston, 1991), 105.
58. Thomas Mann, *Buddenbrooks* [1901], trans. H.T. Lowe-Porter (New York, 1984), 6–7.
59. *Ibid.*, 192.
60. *Ibid.*, 69.
61. *Ibid.*, 197, 442.
62. *Ibid.*, 134.
63. *Ibid.*, 196, 430, 196, 602.
64. *Ibid.*, 197.
65. *Ibid.*, 226, 320.
66. *ibid.*, 226–227, 345–346.
67. *Ibid.*, 430, 476.
68. Julia Mann to Thomas Mann, 8 September 1897; reprinted as “Tante Elisabeth,” *Sinn und Form* 15(2–3) (1963): 487; A running joke in the novel emerges from Julia Mann’s description

of Thekla and Elisabeth: “‘You and Thekla, you are the beauties of the family!’ our father said one time to his sister Elisabeth in order to pique her most greatly” (1963, 487); in the novel, Thomas Buddenbrook recurrently makes the same joke about Clothilde and Tony; see Mann, *Buddenbrooks*, 77–78; 309–310.

69. Mann, *Buddenbrooks*, 7.

70. *Ibid.*, 149.

71. *Ibid.*, 22.

72. *Ibid.*, 327.

73. *Ibid.*, 77.

74. *Ibid.*, 200–201.

75. See Chapter 2.

76. Mann, *Buddenbrooks*, 149.

77. *Ibid.*, 437–438.

78. *Ibid.*, 505–506.

79. *Ibid.*, 227.

80. *Ibid.*, 506.

81. *Ibid.*, 379.

82. *Ibid.*, 603.

83. *Ibid.*, 601.

84. *Ibid.*, 602.

85. *Ibid.*, 604.

86. Gertrud Bäumer, “Thomas Mann, der Dichter der *Buddenbrooks*” [1903], in Jochen Vogt, *Thomas Mann* (Munich, 1983), 153.

87. Weber, “Alte Jungfer,” 610.

SEXOLOGY AND THE SINGLE WOMAN



Old maids have a long history. Prior to the late nineteenth century, condemnations of single women were based upon a simple premise: unwed women threatened the prevailing economic and social order. Indeed, fear of the unattached woman as a destabilizing force had contributed to the condemnation of widows during the witch craze of early modern Europe. By the turn of the twentieth century, as educational and professional opportunities became more accessible for middle-class single women, one might have been able to hope for the eradication of discrimination against the unwed. Yet a 1911 essay asserted otherwise: “The old maid, that brutal social malformation, was about to disappear ... but suddenly in the last few years, she has emerged again.”¹

A review of sexual scholarship indicates that representations of the *alte Jungfer* (old maid) took on new characteristics just when one might have expected the hackneyed stereotype to fade away. The emerging field of *Sexualwissenschaft* (sexology) at the turn-of-the-century offered fresh insights into the category of old maidenhood by openly discussing female sexuality and affirming the existence and importance of the female sex drive. Sexual scientists offered an interpretation of single women supporting Michel Foucault’s contention that “the society that emerged in the nineteenth century—bourgeois, capitalist, or industrial society ... set out to formulate the uniform truth of sex ... as if it was essential that sex be inscribed not only in an economy of pleasure but in an ordered system of knowledge.”² In pursuit of a uniform truth, *scientia sexualis* established controlling norms of sexual health and deviance. Yet, as historians Edward R. Dickinson and Richard Wetzell have observed regarding the historiography of German sexuality, “the field of sexual power/knowledge is constructed within a complex social environment ... it is not the property of a few academically trained doctors or

servants.”³ The sexologists addressed in this chapter responded and further contributed to a discourse on sexuality that reflected contemporary concerns about gender roles, women’s rights, separate spheres, and the meaning of marriage. The surplus woman stood at the nexus of those anxieties. Sexological examination of the female unwed rendered readings that were embedded in an era of cultural and social apprehension, even as they attempted to create a modern, scientific understanding of womanhood.

Richard Krafft-Ebing, the Viennese neurologist who pioneered Central European sexology,⁴ established in the late nineteenth century the paradigmatic view of sexologists on single marital status: “Mental illness is much more frequent among the single than among the married, a fact that ... is explained in that the ages of the single are more strongly represented in the population which exhibits a greater predisposition to illness ... [and] that the more hygienic conditions of married life and regular sexual intercourse have prophylactic effects.”⁵ The greater likelihood of mental illness befalling the unwed, combined with the belief that women in general exhibited “a greater disposition to mental illness than men,” meant a much higher likelihood of instability among single women: “If the female must bear alone the struggle for existence—as in the case of widows—then she succumbs more easily and rapidly than the man.” Beyond the psychic stress of solitary life, unmarried women suffered due to celibacy: “The female, by nature as much in need of sex as the man, at least in the ideal sense, knows no other respectable satisfaction of this need than marriage ... Through countless generations, her character is developed in this direction.” Thus, Krafft-Ebing and the generation of sexologists that followed him viewed the female surplus as a serious threat to female mental health: “Modern life with its increasing demands offers ever fewer prospects of fulfillment in marriage. This is especially true for the higher classes, in which marriages take place later and more seldomly.”⁶

Bourgeois surplus women emerged as objects of case studies among the early sexologists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Krafft-Ebing described the female proclivity toward mental illness in contrast to men:

As the stronger, through their greater intellectual and physical strength and their free social position, men can procure for themselves sexual satisfaction without trouble or can easily find an equivalent in a vocation which calls for their entire energy. But these paths are closed to the single females of the better classes. This initially leads to conscious or unconscious dissatisfactions with themselves and the world, to abnormal brooding. For some time, many sought a surrogate in religion, but in vain. Religious zeal, with or without masturbation, has brought forth a host of neuropathies, among which hysteria and mental illness are not infrequent. Only realize the fact that the greatest frequency of insanity among single females occurs in the time of the 25th to the 35th years of life, the time where the prime of life disappears and life’s hopes along with it.⁷

Naturally inferior to men, weakened by forsaken dreams, and sickened by sexual abstinence, single women occupied a precarious realm of mental health. Elite social status further imperiled them and the historical sanctuary of religious faith

could well make them even more ill. The female surplus thus provided fertile cases of dysfunction for the emerging field of sexual science to examine. The *Kaiserreich* bore witness to the reinvention of the alte Jungfer as new deviant.⁸

Lapdogs and Libidos

The field of *Sexualwissenschaft* emerged in the early twentieth century.⁹ The designation of the field marked a culmination of important work on the subject of sex, which had been conducted in the previous decades by psychologists, anthropologists, and physicians. Sexologists sought both to raise the understanding of the importance of sex to the human condition and to make the study of sex an important category of scientific knowledge. At the same time, as historian Harry Oosterhuis has argued, “nineteenth-century medical interest in sexuality was dictated by wider social anxieties.”¹⁰ Debate surrounding women’s rights informed the ways in which sexual scientists approached female sexuality in general as well as the sexuality of unwed females in particular. An examination of the work of Central European sexologists, including Iwan Bloch, August Forel, Sigmund Freud, Magnus Hirschfeld, Richard von Krafft-Ebing, Max Marcuse, Hermann Ploss, Hermann Rohleder, Wilhelm Stekel, and Otto Weininger, demonstrates that the stereotype of the *alte Jungfer* received new vigor as unmarried women came under the lens of sexual science.¹¹

While scientific examination of sexuality was relatively new, conjecture about the single woman’s sensual life was not. The mockery that pervaded cultural depictions of unwed women also penetrated discussions about the *alte Jungfer* as sexually abnormal. The keystone of such lampooning was the alleged attachment of the spinster to her pets. The association of unmarried women and animals has an extensive history and was a central feature of the persecution of women as witches.¹² Most turn-of-the-century accounts did not exhibit such a diabolical component; in fact, many justified the perceived affection of old maids for animals as a consequence of their lonely lives. Amalie Baisch’s advice book for maturing girls observed that most unwed women were “too proud to admit their unsatisfying existence and as a result take on a more and more unpleasant life of ambiguity. Everything good, loving, and heartfelt that remains in them is mainly wasted on dogs, cats, parrots, other pets; in such a way they resign themselves to a bad situation and add to it the horrible reward of ridiculousness.”¹³ Another account featured the loyal poodle and canary as the only friends an old maid ultimately could trust in a monotonous life.¹⁴

In his extensive biological and anthropological study of women, physician and ethnologist Hermann Heinrich Ploss implied a deeper relationship between single woman and household pet:

She is left with nothing to hope for and remains yet again excluded by the unfeeling male world ... Thus [she] retires into herself. She has only one who belongs to her heart, who

endures all of her moods, in whose devotedly silent bosom she can pour all of her life's sorrow and grief, and who, in the same way that the hostile world stands opposed to her, stands by her: that is her loyal roommate and bedmate: her lapdog. With him the withered rose sits desolately behind the ivy trellis that adorns her window and remembers with quiet wistfulness the days when she was still a fresh bud.¹⁵

The lapdog is the most familiar symbol in the iconography of the *alte Jungfer*. In cartoons parodying single women, the dog is a mainstay. Ploss' rendition of this well-known image was made vivid by the physical yearning latent in the description. The male world and all of its comforts have rejected her. Seeking relief, she comforts herself in the dog's bosom, sharing her life and even—especially—her bed.

Ploss hinted at bestiality; sexologists would be more explicit. Krafft-Ebing succinctly noted in *Psychopathia Sexualis* that, “The intercourse of females with beasts is limited to dogs.”¹⁶ In 1908, Iwan Bloch provided the following description of female bestiality:

The peculiar zoöphily of many city women ... is due not to any diseased predisposition but to the influences of continued intimate association with the animal. The role which dogs have always played in this connection is well known, not less known is the fact that they are trained by women to carry out the most perverse practices ... [It has been reported] that women train dogs, cats, and at times even monkeys *genitalia lambere* by smearing these parts with honey or putting sugar in them ... The “lap dog” is [not] the consoler only of old maids yearning for love; it is to be found at least as frequently in the possession of married women, to whom the pleasures of normal sexual gratification are by no means unknown.¹⁷

This characterization of the literal love between females and pets made three significant assumptions. First, Bloch situated the phenomenon among urban women, adding perverse particulars to fears about the proliferation of unwed women in cities. Second, Bloch took for granted that his audience had an inkling of his subject and thus relied on standing presumptions about women and their pets. Third, Bloch paused to establish the fact that married women joined and perhaps even exceeded single women in this base means of gratification. Yet the very need for such a clarification reveals the extent to which Bloch's discussion was founded upon conventional stereotypes of the old maid. Bloch offered no case studies to support his assertions. Instead, his findings regarding female bestiality were based upon the perception of shared assumptions about unwed women and their associated perversities.

Old maids preceded sexology. Indeed, the iconography of the antiquated spinster provided a wealth of traditional views for sexologists to examine. Some sexologists were more sympathetic than Bloch in regard to pets; August Forel saw the problem as being more psychological than physical: “Having lost [out on] love, all her mental power shrinks up. Her cat, her little dog, and the daily care of her person and small household occupy her whole mind. It is not surprising

that such persons generally create a pitiable and ridiculous impression.”¹⁸ But whether one explained the unnatural attachment in Forel’s compassionate terms or demonstrated the debauchery in Bloch’s dreadful detail, the paradigm of the odd and perhaps dangerous old maid remained. The topic of bestiality provided a conventional and simultaneously shocking means for sexologists to commence their consideration of surplus women as sexually abnormal.

Turn-of-the-century scientists sought to verify the existence of the old maid as well as to define her pathology. Max Marcuse took an interdisciplinary approach, observing that “the *alte Jungfer* [is] an anthropologically well-defined type to be regarded solely as the outcome of sexual abstinence and whose pathological characteristics quickly would be eliminated if regular sexual intercourse took place”; moreover, the work of neurologists, sexologists, and gynecologists “confirm that this *alte Jungfer* is not ... simply a product of indolence and lack of responsibility.”¹⁹ Another account placed the onset of old maidenhood in the mid twenties: “this seems to be the critical age [when young women] fall physically and mentally ill due to half-unconscious sexual arousal and the frustrated yearning for love and motherhood: mild mental disturbances with erotic overtones, sexual visions, fantasies and hallucinations emerge.”²⁰ The unspent potential for sexual activity, romance, and reproduction dominated such classifications of the *alte Jungfern*.

Ultimately, the scientific essence of the old maid could be verified only in the physical realm. If a woman did not meet her natural, biological calling, she joined the ranks of a group that was alternatively vilified, satirized, and pitied. The physician Julius Weiss argued that the phrase *alte Jungfer* could only be defined in sexual terms: “*Alte Jungfer*—the concept really must be more distinctly expressed ... The virgin is old if she comes to the thirtieth year and she has a right to the designation ‘*alte Jungfer*’ as long as her sexual maturity lasts, as long as she ovulates and can become a birth mother, as long as she menstruates.”²¹ The old virgin—the basic essence of the *alte Jungfer*—merited the status of maiden only as long as she was capable of reproduction. According to Weiss, once she passed through menopause, the sexual nature of the female was defunct and the status of her virginity was no longer relevant. The potential for sexual activity and reproduction thus dominated any classification of old maidenhood. The fact that unmarried females might also be sexually active did not enter Weiss’ discussion—further securing the image of unwed women as unsexed.

Iwan Bloch agreed that fertility was the kernel of female sexuality; it followed that sexually inactive single women necessarily fell outside of the norm. A member of the *Bund für Mutterschutz* (BfM; Federation for the Protection of Mothers),²² Bloch believed that women were more organically sexual than men due to their reproductive capacity. In *The Sexual Life of our Time* (1907), Bloch cited a passage from a contemporary novel in describing the sexual nature of women:

Women are in fact pure sex from knees to neck. We men have concentrated our apparatus in a single place ... They are sexual surface, we have only sexual arrow. Procreation is their

proper element, and when they are engaged in it they remain at home in their own sphere ... We may devote to the matter barely ten minutes; women give as many months ... They procreate unceasingly, they stand continually at the witches' cauldron, boiling and brewing; while we lend a hand merely in passing, and do no more than throw one or two fragments into the vessel.²³

Eminently sexual, the woman also was utterly dependent on a partner, if only for those few indispensable minutes. Bloch's accounts of female sexuality had women immersed in sex and enjoying it too,²⁴ but their particular biology nonetheless served to define them—indeed, from knees to neck. This remarkable passage at once frees women from the confines of bourgeois morality by celebrating their sexual selves, yet at the same time it reinvigorates the reproductive and domestic spheres by affirming them as the essential female haven.

August Forel also cited procreative drive as the sexual essence of the female:

The unsatiated desires of the normal woman are less inclined toward coitus than toward the assemblage of consequences of this act ... When the sight of a certain man awakes in a young girl sympathetic desires ... she aspires to procreate children with this man only, to give herself to him as a slave, to receive his caresses, to be loved by him only, that he may become both the support and master of her whole life. It is a question of ... a powerful desire to become a mother and enjoy domestic comfort, to realize a poetic and chivalrous ideal in man, to gratify a general sensual need distributed over the whole body and in no way concentrated in the sexual organs or in the desire for coitus.²⁵

Forel's females needed to have sex not in order to satisfy libidinous desires, but rather to achieve their true calling. That the calling was rooted in biology more than religion or civics did not change the fact that the female nature placed women in essentially the same role as church and state had assigned to them for centuries. Such views echoed traditional morality in asserting the inviolability of motherhood as the female *Beruf* (vocation, calling). Sexology made the calling more vital and earthy, less spiritual and transcendent. But the childless, unattached, and unsexed woman remained superfluous.

Sex and the Single Woman

But was she truly unsexed? If procreation was the root of the female, celibacy was the spoiler. At least one sexologist argued that true sexual abstention was impossible. Hermann Rohleder asserted that, "the sex drive is a natural occurrence. Abstinence is the opposite ... Everyone must know that perpetual abstinence is unnatural and that there is no such thing and there can be no such thing."²⁶ Forel, too, assailed celibacy: "Without love woman abjures her nature and ceases to be normal ... Still more than men [old maids] have need of compensation for sexual love, to avoid losing their natural qualities and becoming dried-up beings or useless egoists."²⁷ Science offered an important inversion of cause and

effect: instead of old maids resulting from inadequate sex appeal, insufficient (or non-existent) sex created old maids. Sexology thus challenged the many marriage manuals that exhorted maturing girls to become beautiful and deferential spousal candidates or instead face the specter of old maidenhood.²⁸ Still, the cause did not matter much if you were a single woman suffering the effects. And the effects, as described by sexologists, were dire. For if the sex drive was natural and abstinence debilitating (if not impossible), what happened to one who was denied monogamous heterosexuality and had no partiality for pets? Turn-of-the-century sexologists offered three answers: as a sexual anaesthetic, the single woman suffered from the ravages of repression; as a sexual hyperaesthetic, she was either sexually promiscuous or a rampant masturbator; or as a homosexual, she sought fulfillment with other women.²⁹

Sexual Anaesthesia

Wilhelm Stekel saw the *alte Jungfer* as the embodiment of sexual stagnation: “We need only cast one look at the abstinent, dried up, soured old maid and then at the joyous, blooming woman of the same age who enjoys the fruits of love to be convinced of the great value of properly indulging the normal sexual function.”³⁰ Celibate female bodies could cease to function in a feminine way: “among women who very seldomly”—or never?—“have had sexual satisfaction granted to them, there is frequently an extraordinary scarcity of menstruation.”³¹ Julius Weiss cited the old maid’s body as evidence of abstinence: “The unmarried girl who goes without sexual relations for her entire life ages earlier than the woman who is once, twice, or thrice married, bears a number of children, raises them and does all the work of a mother and wife. If exhausting demands are not made, the sex life in certain ways has a rejuvenating influence on the female.”³² Assuming that such a prolific mother survived multiple births (an increasing likelihood at the turn of the twentieth century), it followed that sexually active women enjoyed better health than the celibate. An editorial in the journal *Sexual-Probleme* compared the vibrant sexuality of ardent young women with their vacant counterparts: “girls who have a naturally fiery temperament ... feel the awakening of the sex drive earlier and stronger than phlegmatic grown *Jungfrauen* separated from the world of men.”³³

Iwan Bloch lamented the fate of those women who stood outside of matrimony and thus, regrettably, renounced the joys of sexuality: “How was it possible that to hundreds and thousands the simple right to love was refused, so that they were condemned to a joyless existence, in which all the beautiful blossoms of life withered away?”³⁴ His 1907 foray into the language of flora provided interesting similitude to an anonymous author who described more than fifty years earlier the bereavement of life without marriage: “As the natural form becomes stunted when it is ... hindered from its normal growth, so the spiritual life will also be marred by deformity if it cannot develop naturally. The solitary *alte Jungfrau* does not stand in the blessed ground in which the female nature carries its most beautiful bloom; is it not natural that she withers?”³⁵

According to Sigmund Freud, modern culture created the conditions for such withering: “Under the domination of a civilized sexual morality the health and efficiency of single individuals may be liable to impairment.”³⁶ The early Freudian writings on sexuality had enormous influence on the ways in which *Sexualwissenschaftler* assessed the female experience of nervous illnesses.³⁷ In an 1895 text on anxiety neurosis, Freud asserted that the condition “also occurs in widows and intentionally abstinent women, not seldom in a typical combination with obsessional ideas.”³⁸ Intentional repression intensified the struggle initiated by developmental repression; in the Freudian worldview, the abstinent woman was custom-made for anxiety neurosis, or—worse yet—hysteria.³⁹

The view of hysteria as rooted in the female body clearly is not unique to this era—the etymology reveals as much. But central European sexologists brought academic authentication to the category of hysteria by developing an association between hysterics and case studies of sexual repression. Historian of psychiatry Franziska Lamott has summarized the turn-of-the-century view of hysteria as one in which “frigidity is the hallmark of the *violation of the boundaries of female normality*. It is the sign of a pathology and represents the inversion of ideal femininity: the Non-Mother—the Hysteric.”⁴⁰ The pathology of hysteria emerged from a scientific framework, but the oddball status of the hysteric remained unchanged. Sexology provided a new causality for the centuries-old status of outcast. Early in his work on sexuality, Freud declared its centrality to the diagnosis of hysteria: “Whatever case and whatever symptom we take as our point of departure, in the end we infallibly come to the field of sexual experience. So here for the first time we seem to have discovered an aetiological precondition for hysterical symptoms.”⁴¹

The sexological argument went like this: without the opportunity to follow a more ‘natural’ life course of marriage, sex, and children, the unmarried woman repressed her urges in a noxious mix of tedium and chastity: “The monotony of daily life seems to us to be the real enemy of bachelors and *alten Jungfern*. It manifests itself into an overwhelming awareness of one’s own person and one’s petty concerns, which leads to hypochondria and hysteria.”⁴² Wilhelm Stekel provided the link between celibacy and hysteric behavior: “In consequence of the renunciation of sexual delights [girls] lose the ability to love. Disgust, modesty, and bashfulness have done away with desire ... Sexual yearnings and sexual inhibitions are in conflict with one another and the result is a more or less severe hysteria.”⁴³

Austrian philosopher Otto Weininger shared the view that hysteria was brought about mainly by a woman’s inability to admit to herself the reality of sexual desire latent within. In his disturbing yet nonetheless influential *Sex and Character* (1903),⁴⁴ Weininger criticized Josef Breuer and Sigmund Freud’s 1895 *Studies on Hysteria* for presenting “hysterics in particular as eminently moral individuals. All that hysterics have done is to allow morality, which was originally alien to them, to take them over from outside more completely than other people.”⁴⁵ Hysterical fits resulted when “sexual desire threatens to prevail against the seeming restraint ... Their reaction is always their last untruthful defense against the tremendous

eruption of their own constitution: the *attitudes passionelles* of hysterical women are nothing but this demonstrative rejection of the sexual act.⁴⁶ While he did not link hysteria specifically to a woman's marital status, Weininger's typology of hysterics connoted singlehood through the well-worn stereotypes of the maid and the shrew. Historian Chandak Sengoopta interprets Weininger's use of the dyad in the following manner: "The hysterical woman belonged to the psychological type 'Maid.' She was born, not made ... The Maid was opposed to the Shrew, who represented the type of woman least susceptible to hysteria. The Shrew vented her wrath (deriving from lack of sexual satisfaction) on others; the Maid vented it on herself."⁴⁷ Desire—or more precisely, fear of desire—impelled the mind of the Maid toward hysterical disturbances.

Freud also tapped into this fear of desire in the case history of Katharina, a "rather sulky-looking girl of perhaps eighteen."⁴⁸ While hiking in the Alps, Freud met a girl who complained of a nervous affliction. Since he could not conduct a full psychotherapeutic investigation while in the midst of his trek, Freud was forced to try "a lucky guess. I had found often enough that in girls anxiety was a consequence of the horror by which a virginal mind is overcome when it is faced for the first time with the world of sexuality."⁴⁹ Freud termed this condition as 'virginal anxiety': "The anxiety from which Katharina suffered in her attacks was a hysterical one ... a mere suspicion of sexual relations calls up the affect of anxiety in virginal individuals."⁵⁰ Freudian thought held that sexual apprehension could bring forth hysterical illness and frigidity among both girls and women.

Johannes Rutgers, a Dutch birth control pioneer, elicited the aura of *Altjungferntum* in describing the symptoms of his hysterical patients: "The absent sexual life reveals itself even more in the vascular system ... The blood, which in this period of life should be actively stimulating the reproductive organs, obviously takes an inverted turn in the case of abstinence! ... Muscle tone can become flaccid; the lymphatic circulation can become inertial. The clinical case will emerge as indolent, lymphatic, even scrofulous."⁵¹ The blood betrays the maiden; the body becomes barren. Neither child nor bride, this woman is destined to be a specimen. Rutgers saw her as an all too familiar character: "Who does not know a host of these '*suchenden Seelen* [searching souls]'? The more normal or elevated a person's disposition, all the more has she the desire and the need for love in its fullest fruition."⁵² Hysteria emerged from an empty and asexual life, conditions sexologists widely ascribed to unmarried women, especially those of the middle- and upper-classes.⁵³

Freud presented just such an elevated disposition in reporting the case history of 24-year-old Fräulein Elisabeth von R. One of five cases in Freud and Breuer's *Studies on Hysteria*, this text offers a fine demonstration of the sexological link between marital status and hysteria. Freud described Elisabeth as exhibiting great giftedness and ambition, traits he recognized among many hysterics.⁵⁴ Her positive nature belied her physical afflictions: "She seemed intelligent and mentally normal and bore her troubles ... with a cheerful air—the *belle indifférence* of a hysteric."⁵⁵ In noting such *belle indifférence*, even as he attempted to provide

a modern and scientific understanding of hysteria, Freud affirmed his readers' prejudices regarding the nature of the condition and in so doing revealed his own as well.⁵⁶

Freud's patient had a troubled history: in the space of just a few years, Elisabeth had nursed her beloved father through an ultimately fatal illness; her mother subsequently fell ill; Elisabeth's own health problems soon followed; her married sister then died after giving birth to her second child; and family tensions arose among the survivors of these tragic events.⁵⁷ An unhappy story, indeed—but how did this chain of misfortune lead to hysterical pain? Freud diagnosed the conversion as involving several factors: the worry produced through prolonged sick-nursing,⁵⁸ the confusion stimulated by Elisabeth's emerging sexuality,⁵⁹ and the anxiety created over the uncertainty of her future.⁶⁰ Myriad elements characterized Elisabeth's case, yet neither grief over her father's declining health, wistfulness for her fleeting youth, nor the frustrated misery of being unable to fall in carefree love were factors that emerged as most critical in Freud's evaluation. Instead, sex formed the centerpiece of this single woman's story, as inhibited sexual desire was the Freudian path toward affliction.

Thwarted love persecuted Elisabeth. After months of therapy, Freud realized a startling fact: his patient was in love with her dead sister's husband, and had been so long before her sister had passed away. The "psychical excitations" occasioned by her attraction to her brother-in-law and the extraordinary reservoir of will that enabled Elisabeth to "fend them off" created a mental strain her body could not bear.⁶¹ These excitations were caused neither by the impossibility of her affectionate inclination nor by the pure horror at the fleeting thought inspired by viewing her sister's deathbed—"Now he is free again and I can be his wife!"⁶² Sexual attraction prevailed: "A circle of ideas of an erotic kind ... came into conflict with all her moral ideas ... The coldness of her nature began to yield and she admitted to herself her need for a man's love. During the several weeks which she passed in his company ... her erotic feelings as well as her pains reached their full height."⁶³ Sexual desire and hysterical pain went hand-in-hand. Of course, the extreme circumstances of Elisabeth's case served as significant contributing factors to her pathology. But the Freudian diagnosis of hysteria mandated the existence of sexual repression; other circumstances were merely predispositional.

Yet not even erotic ideas could explain the particular physical manifestation of Elisabeth's hysteria. When she could no longer fend off the excitations created by sexual desire, she experienced such severe leg pain that, at times, she could not walk. Why? One factor was the fact that while nursing her father, Elisabeth's legs touched those of the ill man's, forming "an artificial hysterogenic zone."⁶⁴ This precipitating event was intensified by the great mental strain caused by Elisabeth's uncertainty and anxiety over her future; as Elisabeth moved out of girlhood, she was "overcome by a sense of her weakness as a woman and by a longing for love in which, to quote her own words, her frozen nature began to melt."⁶⁵ After a walk with her brother-in-law during a period of self-doubt, Elisabeth again experi-

enced excruciating leg pains. In hearing of this episode, Freud began to divine an answer to the question occasioned by the peculiar location of her pain: Elisabeth was loathe to become an *alleinstehende Frau*—a woman standing alone.

Fear of never marrying helped to make Elisabeth hysterical. The means of this process was a mechanism Freud termed ‘symbolization’: “She found ... a somatic expression for her lack of an independent position and her inability to make any alteration in her circumstances ... such phrases as ‘not being able to take a single step forward’, ‘not having anything to lean upon’, served as the bridge for this fresh act of conversion.”⁶⁶ Elisabeth had told Freud as much during a therapeutic session: “The patient ended her description of a whole series of episodes by complaining that they had made the fact of her ‘standing alone’ painful to her.” Freud observed that, “I could not help thinking that the patient had done nothing more nor less than look for a symbolic expression of her painful thoughts and that she had found it in the intensification of her sufferings.”⁶⁷ He did not consider the fact that marriage itself offered little promise to Elisabeth, a woman who had watched her sister be destroyed by its fruits.⁶⁸ Freudian diagnosis settled on a view of Elisabeth as frozen in time—her family ill and dying, her prospects for love obstructed by the most difficult circumstances, and her former self-assurance fading. It is no wonder that her body should freeze as well, her legs unable to take a step and no support to prop her up. How could she possibly stand alone?

Freud’s assessment of this case foreshadowed his 1905 *Fragment of a Case of Hysteria*, the case history of Dora. The symbiotic relationship between Freud’s female patients and the Freudian theory of hysteria has been described by literary scholar Evelyne Ender as a dynamic in which the patient “‘produces’ in her hysteria that which needs to be brought to consciousness and which stands in the place of consciousness. The spoils will be *his*, just as this knowledge extracted from *her* will constitute the foundation of *his* science of the mind,” resulting in a “simultaneous valorization and negation of the woman’s experience.”⁶⁹ Elisabeth’s marital status was central to Freud’s diagnosis, yet any autonomy she may have had in choosing this path was nullified by the psychotherapist’s account that left her entirely a passive victim to both her singleness and her sexual anxiety. Much like the later case of Dora, Freud’s own personhood is omnipresent in the hysterical narrative.⁷⁰ A modern psychoanalytical appraisal of the case of Elisabeth von R. has described the interaction of doctor and patient as “more like unfeeling interrogations or ... efficient paternalistic forms of taking control.”⁷¹ The paternalistic formulation of Elisabeth’s narrative manifests itself in the supererogatory role of the deceased father in the case history, while the living mother exists as only a pale presence.⁷² Father, first love, and brother-in-law acted upon Elisabeth’s weak psyche (despite her sharp intellect) to form her hysteria. Only a male hero, equipped with the valiant weapons of science, could rescue Elisabeth and provide her with the strength to stand.

In a feminist analysis of Freud’s case studies, Susan Katz has argued that when Freud “drew on traditional narrative forms, particularly the nineteenth-century

novel, in shaping the lives and case histories of his women patients, Freud perpetuated the belief in marriage as a standard for mental health.” Central to the literary typologies Freud inherited was “an equation of marriage with health, and, conversely, spinsterhood with illness.”⁷³ Such a narrative insisted that a spinster could only enjoy mental health if she “learn[ed] her place.”⁷⁴ Mental instability emerged when a single woman struggled with her social status. The illness of Elisabeth von R., “Freud implies, is brought on by her grandiose ambition to master her situation single-handedly.”⁷⁵ Indeed, Freud asserted that he was able to cure Elisabeth von R. by his revolutionary method of cathartic therapy;⁷⁶ a few years later, “by her own inclination, she . . . married someone unknown to me.”⁷⁷ These nuptials provided for Freud with both literary closure and therapeutic success, for “marriage indicates mental recovery.”⁷⁸

But not all hysterics and neurasthenics would marry. And not all sexologists, doctors, and psychologists of the early twentieth century shared Freud’s opinion of the giftedness exhibited by hysterics. But many, eventually most, did adopt his unshakeable conviction as to the centrality of sex to mental health. Freud wrote in 1905 that, “Anyone who knows how to interpret the language of hysteria will recognize that the neurosis is concerned only with the patient’s repressed sexuality.”⁷⁹ In the eyes of Freud and most other sexologists, single women became a scientifically problematic category due to the ravages of sexual repression and anxiety about ‘standing alone.’ Socially aberrant and sometimes hysterical, the repressed old maid remained a conspicuous character in imperial German society; *Sexualwissenschaft* added darker contours to the picture of her existence.

Sexual Hyperaesthesia

Imagine the options confronted by a middle-class, unmarried young woman at the dawn of the twentieth century. Science had revealed that she possessed an innate and scientifically validated sexual drive, the repression of which might lead to hysteria or at the very least an embittered fate. Erich Lilienthal, a turn-of-the-century novelist and one of the most scathing observers of *Altjungferntum*, offered this summary of the effects of life without sex: “The eternally barren . . . give away nothing of their worm-eaten treasures, their thin, wilted lips pointed at constant vigilance, fearful, petty weighing and haggling . . . They do not become old and gray and silent, they do not become benevolent and understanding, they . . . talk and agitate with their bitter sophisms and [they] accomplish nothing at all. They are completely useless.”⁸⁰ Anticipating such a fate, replete with “thin, wilted lips,” a rational woman might elect other options. Free love was one of them.

Or at least this was the dread of many contemporary observers who feared the damage that could be wrought upon society by sexually active single women. The claims of sexology fueled this type of anxiety. August Forel observed that, “it is a real pity to see so many healthy, active and intelligent girls become old maids, simply because they have no money and do not wish to throw themselves at the first scamp who comes.” His solution? “A little free polygamy.”⁸¹ Iwan Bloch and the BfM also proposed that the sexual and cultural landscape could be trans-

formed by responsible and committed relationships outside of marriage.⁸² Bloch believed that the epoch of the old maid would only end when the contours of marriage were changed. He condemned:

The heartlessness ... of modern European society, which *simultaneously* makes fun of the “old maid” and condemns the unmarried mother to infamy. This double-faced, putrescent “morality” is profoundly *immoral*, it is *radically evil*. It is moral and good to contest it with all our energy ... Let us make a clearance of this medieval bugbear of coercive marriage morality, which is a disgrace in respect of our state of civilization ... Two million women in a condition of *compulsory* celibacy and coercive marriage morality. It is merely necessary to place these two facts side by side, in order to display before our eyes the complete ethical bankruptcy of our time in the province of sexual morality.⁸³

Bloch proposed instead that all adults should counter “putrescent morality” by finding and enjoying love, companionship, and sex. Wilhelm Stekel used the example of prostitution to make the case for active female sexuality: “Love, regular sexual intercourse ... keep ‘immoral’ women fresh and healthy.”⁸⁴ Stekel’s argument did not facilitate unambiguously the cause of sexual reform. Based upon weak substantiation, Stekel’s position that “compulsory abstinence is more injurious than immoderate indulgence”⁸⁵ might justifiably have raised queries of just what types of indulgence, and at how immoderate a rate?

In fact, most sexual scientists placed the topic of active sexuality among the female unwed under the rubric of sexual dysfunction, centered on the notion of hyperaesthesia. The notion of the natural female sexual desire had problematic implications. As Michael Hau has argued in *The Cult of Health and Beauty in Germany*, “female desires ... could be the basis for the independent articulation of female interests. Furthermore, if women were capable of experiencing lust, whose fault was it if they did not?”⁸⁶ Would they seek fulfillment of that lust outside of the confines of marriage? Bourgeois morality held that the most frightening path an unmarried woman could elect was the pursuit of extramarital sexual fulfillment. Max Marcuse used the work of British sexologist Havelock Ellis to articulate the nature of the threat: “A great many women who are healthy, chaste, and modest, feel at times such a powerful sexual desire that they can scarcely resist the temptation to go into the street and solicit the first man they meet. Not a few such women, often of good breeding, do actually offer themselves to men with whom they may have perhaps only the slightest acquaintance.”⁸⁷ The emphasis on good breeding was the great threat created by the sexually free woman—uncontrolled reproduction and uncertain paternity: “under the influence of Malthusianism, sexuality outside of marriage was viewed as the source of [social] depletion.”⁸⁸ Fears regarding single women’s sexuality abounded during an age of eugenic science.

Sexual overindulgence informed the Freudian understanding of hysteria as well. One of Freud’s goals in describing the pathology of the disease was to “clear up the enigmatic contradiction which hysteria presents, by revealing the pair of opposites by which it is characterized—exaggerated sexual craving and excessive aversion to sexuality.”⁸⁹ An exaggerated sex drive among females was a perilous

prospect, one that could be considered dangerous if single women were the ones doing the craving. Freud identified this link in the early sexual lives of people who would later be diagnosed as neurotics: “Their sexual life begins like that of perverts, and a considerable part of their childhood is occupied with perverse sexual activity ... (usually before puberty, but now and then even long afterwards), and from that time onwards neurosis takes the place of perversion ... We are reminded of the proverb ‘*Junge Hure, alte Betschwester* [A young whore makes an old nun]’, only that here youth has lasted all too short a time.”⁹⁰ While Freud used gender-neutral language to describe the psychological evolution of these perverts-*cum*-neurotics, female deviance nonetheless was latent in the archetypal iconography of whore and nun. Even as he attempted to provide a scientific profile of the female psyche, Freud relied upon well-worn images that would resonate to his audience.

Hermann Rohleder ruled out extramarital sex as a source of relief for the unmarried woman. In a 1908 article on “*Abstinentia sexualis*,” Rohleder asked himself rhetorically, “Are the consequences of abstinence so severe ... that they warrant the recommendation of therapeutic extramarital intercourse among the unmarried? ... Today I will again answer no ... It is not the consequences of abstinence that have led me to this, but much more important things, prevention of a much greater unhappiness.”⁹¹ In this diagnosis without remedy, Rohleder sighed at the ill fortunes of those who suffered outside of marriage, yet the distanced air of resignation provided little alternative to a life without sexual companionship—other than getting married in the first place!

Perhaps the “much greater unhappiness” Rohleder hinted at can be found in the work of August Forel. Forel speculated on the enormous, untapped female sexual appetite:

Some women ... from their first youth experience violent sexual desire, causing them to masturbate or to throw themselves onto men. Such excesses in woman take on a more pathological character than in man, and go under the name of nymphomania ... Although in the normal state woman is naturally full of delicacy and sentiments of modesty, nothing is easier than to make these disappear completely by training her systematically to sexual immodesty or to prostitution. Here we observe the effects of the routine and suggestible character of feminine psychology, of the tendency of woman to become the slave of habit and custom.⁹²

This description of the hyperaesthetic female offers a dichotomy: the nymphomaniac who is likely pathological and certainly abnormal, and the obedient woman who, as victim of her own malleable psyche, is led down a path of dissolution. Forel did not resolve this tension between nature and nurture, drawing instead a portrait of a creature both plagued by inherent aberrance and hoodwinked by her own weak character and the diabolical suggestions of others.

The unwed woman was precisely the type most likely to fall into Forel’s trap. Because she could not exercise her natural urges, any innate perversity would manifest itself. In an era of such pronounced discussion of sexuality, “*The alte*

Jungfer in particular has become wild. The general pity, the general interest in these innocently unhappy victims of difficult social circumstances has gone to the heads of some of them, and they now show off everywhere in downright dangerous manners."⁹³ One case study examined the case of an unmarried hyperaesthetic, portraying the dangers uninhibited sexuality could create: "At eleven she was tempted to masturbation and always suffered from a pathologically increased sex drive ... at fifteen she craved sexual intercourse, since then she has had the opportunity to associate sexually with a series of men, without ever having had sexual satisfaction ... while she could procure the same for herself through masturbation anytime."⁹⁴ This study categorized masturbation as both a form and a catalyst of sexual perversion, a pursuit that could stifle other forms of sexual response.⁹⁵ Another sexologist went so far as to claim that in the early twentieth century, there existed a veritable "onanistic cult of *Jungfräulichkeit* [the virginal]."⁹⁶ Reflecting on this passion of the times, Max Marcuse asserted that the cult "applied not only to *Jungfräulichkeit*, but also to ascetics in general, whose goal ... is to declare sexual abstinence as absolutely harmless and thus presume for the unmarried (that is for hundreds of thousands in Germany) the requirement of lifelong abstinence."⁹⁷ Abstinence, masturbation, singleness; all were conflated in an intractable cultural and psychological miasma.

Thomas Laqueur has argued that the problematization of masturbation in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries reflected a desire to secure "new boundaries for heterosexuality ... the solitary vice was associated ... not only with sodomy but with every other sort of sexual and moral deviance as well."⁹⁸ The "onanistic cult" of virgins offered just such an enclave of deviance. August Forel believed that masturbation could actually create female aversion to marriage: "The effect of sexual hyperaesthesia is to direct the appetite toward any object capable of satisfying it. When the other sex is wanting, masturbation is generally resorted to; onanism does [women] generally as much harm as men."⁹⁹ If overindulged, the consequences could be severe: "[Some] women are driven to masturbation by a purely peripheral excitation; they have erotic dreams with venereal orgasms which torment rather than please them; but they do not fall in love easily, and may have difficulty in the choice of a husband. Their mind alone remains feminine, full of tact and delicacy in its sentiments, while their lower nerve centers react in a more masculine and at the same time more pathological manner."¹⁰⁰ Just as the female onanist might falter in the marriage market, the sexual hyperaesthetic served as a threatening presence in German society, due to her libidinous instincts or self-indulgent excesses. And perhaps she also risked the danger of developing emergent masculine characteristics—symptoms of incipient female homosexuality.

Homosexuality

The association of homosexuality with *jungfräulich* status was widespread in the literature of sexual scientists. In his seminal 1913 study of homosexuality, Magnus Hirschfeld offered a clear causal link between homosexuality and singlehood:

“Not through the unmarried status or impotency of persons does their same-sex orientation arise, but rather the latter is the reason for their unmarried status; likewise, the aversion of women to men is not the cause but rather the effect of their homosexual nature.”¹⁰¹ Hirschfeld suggested that a high proportion of solitary women were homosexual: “Of the intact virgins over the age of thirty whom I had the opportunity to examine, almost without exception all were themselves homosexual or had homosexual husbands.”¹⁰² Another *Kaiserreich*-era account of female homosexuality suggested that good news could be found for those heterosexuals still hoping to marry: “Because the number of single women approximately matches that of homosexual women, the unwed states of homosexuals offers to heterosexuals a greater probability of marriage.” Still, the author emphasized that, “it certainly should not be asserted that in this lies a universal means against *alte Jungfernschaft*.”¹⁰³ While not a solution to the old maid problem, the contrast to Hirschfeld does raise an important question: were old maids to be conflated with or distinguished from homosexuals? Since most sexologists were not willing to relinquish the category of the old maid, the link to homosexuality begged exploration.

Other commentators could or would not deal directly with the subject, only hinting at an unspeakable abnormality that existed among the ranks of single women. Julius Weiss suggested that, “Now and then one finds in the female sex an innate aversion toward the male realm. The physical urge remains strangely undeveloped. The cause sometimes lies in an abnormal developmental failure of the female sexual parts ... Occasionally this aversion is based in mental causes. The clever, thinking girl sees in her environment or among her relations some examples of unhappy marriages, deserted brides, wives who became ill, and so in her youthful soul she implants a type of hate that she completely controls.”¹⁰⁴ The single woman’s essential aberrance might have stemmed from a dysfunctional body or she might have consciously decided to reject marriage and men, thus making her a willful threat to the social order. Without explicitly identifying homosexuality, Weiss nonetheless asserted the deviance of such women, leaving the reader to conclude whether its origins were physical or mental.

Richard Krafft-Ebing was more direct. Krafft-Ebing enumerated what he believed to be the key causes of female homosexuality, including among them: “Constitutional hypersexuality impelling to auto-masturbation. This leads to neurasthenia and its pernicious consequences.”¹⁰⁵ Krafft-Ebing identified the most extreme cases as *Mannweiber*, androgynous figures who dressed and acted like men.¹⁰⁶ He described *Mannweiber* as aggressively homosexual and identified their abnormality as largely resulting from environmental and biological causes. The women to whom *Mannweiber* were most attractive included “inmates of prison [and] daughters of the higher classes of society who are carefully guarded in their relations with men, or who are afraid of impregnation—this latter group is commonly seen.”¹⁰⁷ A striking contrast between the least and most favored members of society! Krafft-Ebing’s view held that these extremes characterized the women most likely to become homosexual. Seduced by *Mannweiber*, includ-

ing “female servants, female friends with perverse sexual inclinations or female teachers in seminaries,” unattached women found themselves vulnerable to the worst kinds of dissolution.¹⁰⁸

Bleak fates awaited those innocent prey who succumbed to the lure of their pursuers. The trap, according to Max Marcuse, had been formed by the ravages of abstinence and would lead from experimentation to authentic homosexuality: “There are young people of both sexes, indeed up until not long ago young men, but in recent years also large numbers of women and girls, [who engage in what is] at first is only a pseudo-homosexuality, that is they are ensnared into homosexual activity that wears them down ... then eventually becomes genuine homosexuality.”¹⁰⁹ The perversity of female homosexuality could lead to threats of suicide or other dark consequences:¹¹⁰ “Lesbianism is often the precursor to sodomy and bestiality, the fornication with animals, especially with the very beloved lap dogs.”¹¹¹ The specter of such desperate, yearning, and ultimately perverse creatures—again with their pets—permeated the imagery of sexology.

The 1909 proposal to expand German criminalization of homosexuality to include female acts demonstrates a political consequence of the mounting sexological portrayal of female-to-female love as aberrant behavior. The 1909 Proposal for a new German Criminal Code was put forward in order to supersede the Code that had been in place since 1871, though the onset of World War I prevented the proposal from becoming law. In particular, the law would have extended the extant criminalization of male homosexuality (Paragraph 175) by adding Paragraph 250, intended to criminalize female homosexual acts as well.¹¹² In an assessment of feminist arguments against Paragraph 250, Tracie Matysik has noted the “difficulty of differentiating legally the sexual act from the social act.”¹¹³ Helene Stöcker worried that single women especially would suffer because of the undue scrutiny of lifelong friendships and living communities: “Precisely those women who greatly need tenderness when fate has denied them children and a husband wish at least to have an inner community, a common home. This recourse, pursued for economic reasons, often also involves a common bedroom. Hundreds of thousands of our educated women, teachers, artists, and employees in other professions live calmly and peacefully with one another.”¹¹⁴ Such calm and peaceful lives were represented in the leadership of the German women’s movement by Helene Lange and Gertrud Bäumer as well as by Anita Augspurg and Lida Gustava Heymann.¹¹⁵ In its bourgeois orientation and its reflection of the quiet despair of the surplus woman, Stöcker’s argument against §250 conveyed well the *Frauenüberschuß* and linked it to the increasing vigilance of an age of sexual anxiety. *Scientia sexualis* threatened to box the leaders of the German women’s movement into a dysfunctional corner.

In a 1904 speech given to the Scientific Humanitarian Committee established by Magnus Hirschfeld, Anna Rueling addressed the theme, “What Interest does the Women’s Movement have in the Homosexual Question?” Rueling directly tied the involvement of female homosexuals in the women’s movement to the female surplus:

The women's movement strives for long-neglected women's rights; it is fighting especially for the greatest possible independence for women and their legal equality with men both in and out of marriage. The latter is of particular importance, first of all because of present economic conditions, and second, because the statistically proven surplus of women in the population of our country means that a large number of women simply cannot get married. Since only 10% of these women inherit sufficient means to live, the other 90% are forced to enter the labor market ... The position and participation of homosexual women the women's movement and the movement's attempts to solve these problems are significant and deserve extensive, universal attention.¹¹⁶

Yet the leaders of the women's movements did not answer Rueling's call; in an era of debate regarding sexuality, their silence on the topic is noteworthy. Facing the sort of anti-feminist arguments asserting that, "what one generally calls the woman question is really only a spinster question,"¹¹⁷ women's rights advocates were loathe to engage in a discourse that portrayed those spinsters as sexual aberrants. It is little wonder that, as historian Margit Göttert has argued, women of the *Kaiserreich* who lived with and loved other women "sought to factor out of their self-portrayal their physicality and (homo- und hetero-) sexual desires because, among other reasons, they feared being reduced anew to natural and sexual beings."¹¹⁸ Sexology attempted to cast both single women and the women's movement into a defensive posture of having to disprove deviance by adopting asexuality, its lesser sister.

Most sexological literature followed the model established by Krafft-Ebing, whose work assessed homosexuality "as a pathological manifestation of the sexual life."¹¹⁹ His paradigmatic categorization of female homosexuals was essentially dualistic: the biologically and sociologically determined *Mannweiber* along with their prey, the protected and cautious females of the elite classes who viewed men with trepidation. Such a differentiation both minimized the need for any serious consideration of female homosexuality as elected or natural while also offering a simplified vision of women as aggressor or dupe, active or passive.¹²⁰ In the prevailing representation of female homosexuality, the unmarried *bürgerlich* woman still remained a victim—if she was the seducer, she was a *Mannweib* and the object of her genetic makeup or aberrant socialization; if she was the object of seduction, then she most likely had been an easy target because of previous unfortunate experiences with or rejections by men. Even as these women attempted escape through lesbian behavior, in the eyes of male observers, the realm of marriage and men still ruled the homosexual single woman. Her true calling remained a siren in the distance, forever signifying her as failure, outcast, and victim.

* * *

The signification of the unmarried woman as a cultural pariah gained a new tone and a deeper urgency during the *Kaiserreich*. The new form of denigration energized prejudice against the individual single woman. Organizations either run by or featuring a predominance of single women also could be cast as harbors for the dysfunctional. Historian Leila Rupp has demonstrated that at the turn of

the century, “as the barriers between women’s and men’s public worlds began to break down ... women without men—whether ‘spinsters’ or women in same-sex couples—came more frequently to earn the label ‘deviant’ ... These moves had consequences for the politics of women’s single-sex organizing.”¹²¹ During the *Kaiserreich*, both solitary women and the women’s movement as a whole came under a form of scientific scrutiny, an examination which judged them as certainly marginal and potentially pathological. It also attempted to tuck them safely away in a corner of deviance where they could not pose a threat to society.

The revitalized image of the *alte Jungfer* reflected the ways in which Germans struggled to grapple with the increasing relevance of sexuality in social discourse. *Sexualwissenschaft* appropriated the archaic *alte Jungfer* and made her new again. By identifying the pitiable nature of the old maid, providing a scientific explanation for her existence, and establishing a rich new language detailing her aberrance, sexologists transformed a stock character in the cultural panorama from caricature to deviant. As Erich Lilienthal put the resulting outcome: “Lusty old men have always been disgusting and many *alte Jungfern* have always been venomous. But a not insignificant part of the work of sexual reformers was to surmount precisely these types and dispose of them, not, however, to reveal to them new spheres of activity.”¹²² Lilienthal’s concerns centered on untapped arenas of licentiousness being opened to the unmarried, but far more problematic were the ways in which the study of sexuality provided fresh ground for condemnation of the unwed. The developing field of sexual studies delivered new and varied verdicts on the nature of single women: many repressed, some oversexed, others dissolute—and, at their worst, fonts of contamination to the broader society.

Notes

1. Erich Lilienthal, “Die skandalösen alten Jungfer,” *Sexual-Probleme* 7(6) (June 1911): 389.
2. Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, vol. 1 *Introduction*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York, 1990), 69.
3. Edward R. Dickinson and Richard F. Wetzell, “The Historiography of Sexuality in Modern Germany,” *German History* 23(3) (2005): 302.
4. On Krafft-Ebing (1840–1902), see Harry Oosterhuis, *Stepchildren of Nature: Krafft-Ebing, Psychiatry, and the Making of Sexual Identity* (Chicago, 2000).
5. Richard von Krafft-Ebing, *Lehrbuch der Psychiatrie*, 2d ed. (Stuttgart, 1883), 156–157; many thanks to Lisabeth Hock, Wayne State University, for bringing this discussion to my attention.
6. *Ibid.*, 154–155.
7. *Ibid.*, 155; in this same passage, Krafft-Ebing links the rise of the women’s movement to the female surplus.
8. See part 3 of Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (New York, 1985), on the ways in which the New Woman similarly was cast by the rhetoric of the American Progressive age as an “unnatural’ ... symptom of a diseased society” (1985, 245).

9. The term “*Sexualwissenschaft*” was originated by Iwan Bloch in 1906; see Oosterhuis, *Stepchildren*, 58.
10. Oosterhuis, *Stepchildren*, 27.
11. On Bloch (1872–1922), Hirschfeld (1868–1935), Ploss (1819–1885), Rohleder (1866–1934), and Stekel (1868–1940), see Vern Bullough, *Science in the Bedroom: A History of Sex Research* (New York, 1994); on Forel (1848–1931), see Heiko Weber, “Der Monismus als Theorie einer einheitlichen Weltanschauung am Beispiel der Positionen Ernst Haeckel and August Forel,” in *Monismus um 1900: Wissenschaftskultur und Weltanschauung*, ed. Paul Ziche (Berlin, 2000), 81–127; for an assessment of Freud (1856–1939) on women, see Teresa Brennan, *The Interpretation of the Flesh: Freud and Femininity* (New York, 1992); on Marcuse (1877–1963), see Erwin J. Haeberle, “Sexology: Conception, Birth, and Growth of a Science,” in *Emerging Dimensions of Sexology*, eds. R. Taylor Segraves and Erwin J. Haeberle (New York, 1983), 9–28; on Weininger (1880–1903), see Chandak Sengoopta, *Otto Weininger: Sex, Science, and Self in Imperial Vienna* (Chicago, 2000).
12. Bonnie S. Anderson and Judith P. Zinsser, *A History of their Own*, vol. 1 (New York, 1988), 166; see Susanna Burghartz, “The Equation of Women and Witches: A Case Study of Witchcraft Trials in Lucerne and Lausanne in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries,” in *The German Underworld*, ed. Richard J. Evans (New York, 1988), 57–74, for a case study that suggests that “age was a more important distinguishing characteristic of the accused than their civil status” (1988, 65).
13. Amalie Baisch, *Aus der Töchterchule ins Leben* (Stuttgart, 1890), 8.
14. Carl Reclam, *Des Weibes Gesundheit und Schönheit*, 2nd ed. (Leipzig, 1883), 265.
15. Hermann Heinrich Ploss, *Das Weib in der Natur- und Völkerkunde*, 7th ed. (Leipzig, 1902), 588; on the influence of Ploss’ landmark work, see Paula Weideger, “Introduction: A Double Portrait,” in *History’s Mistress: A New Interpretation of a Nineteenth-Century Classic* (New York, 1986), 13–34.
16. Richard von Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, 12th ed., trans. F.J. Rebman (New York, 1906; reprint, Burbank, CA, 1999), 470 (page citations are to reprint edition).
17. Iwan Bloch, *Anthropological Studies in the Strange Sexual Practices of All Races in All Ages*, trans. Keene Wallis, 1933 ed. (New York, 1933; reprint, New York, 1974), 184–185 (page citations are to reprint edition).
18. August Forel, *The Sexual Question*, trans. C.F. Marshall adapted from 2nd ed. (1906) (New York, 1925), 129.
19. Max Marcuse, *Die Gefahren der sexuellen Abstinenz für die Gesundheit* (Leipzig, 1910), 40.
20. Wilhelm Erb, “Bemerkungen über die Folgen der sexuellen Abstinenz,” *Zeitschrift für Bekämpfung der Geschlechtskrankheiten* (1904), 1; quoted in Marcuse, *Gefahren*, 39.
21. Julius Weiss and R. Kossman. *Mann und Weib in ihren Beziehungen zur Kultur der Gegenwart* (Stuttgart, 1908), 420.
22. See chapter 6.
23. Spinner, quoted in Bloch, *The Sexual Life of Our Time in its Relations to Modern Civilization*, trans. M. Eden Paul from 2nd ed. (New York, 1910), 84.
24. *Ibid.*, 86.
25. Forel, *Sexual Question*, 93.
26. Hermann Rohleder, “Die Abstinencia sexualis,” *Zeitschrift für Sexualwissenschaft* 1 (1908): 630.
27. Forel, *Sexual Question*, 129.
28. See chapter 1.
29. See Robert Nye, *Sexuality* (New York, 1999), 122–126, 137–144, on how turn-of-the-century sexology linked hysteria and medical neuroses to cases of sexual repression, sexual overindulgence, and masturbation.
30. Wilhelm Stekel, “Sexual Abstinence and Health” (1909), in *Twelve Essays on Sex and Psychoanalysis*, trans. and ed. S.A. Tannenbaum (New York, 1922), 6.
31. Marcuse, *Gefahren*, 59.

32. Weiss and Kossmann, *Mann und Weib*, 417.
33. "Zur Frage der Abstinenz," *Sexual-Probleme* 7(2) (February 1911): 152.
34. Bloch, *Sexual Life*, 249.
35. *Die Frauenfrage und ihr Kern: Das Leben einer alten Jungfrau* (Gütersloh, 1873), 30.
36. Sigmund Freud, "'Civilized' Sexual Morality and Modern Nervous Illness" (1908), in *The Standard Edition (SE) of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 9, trans. and ed. James Strachey (London, 1953–1959; reprint, 1968), 181.
37. The first use of the term 'verdrängt' (repressed) in its psychoanalytical sense linked repression to "hysterical deliria in saints and nuns"; Josef Breuer and Sigmund Freud, "Preliminary Communication," (1893–1895) *SE* vol. 2 *Studies on Hysteria*, 10–11.
38. Sigmund Freud, "On the Grounds for Detaching a Particular Syndrome from Neurasthenia under the Description 'Anxiety Neurosis,'" (1895) *SE*, vol. 3, 100–101.
39. *Ibid.*, 111.
40. Franziska Lamott, *Die vermessene Frau: Hysterien um 1900* (Munich, 2001), 85; emphasis in text.
41. Sigmund Freud, "The Aetiology of Hysteria," (1896) *SE* vol. 3, 199.
42. Reclam, *Weibes Gesundheit*, 265.
43. Stekel, "Sexual Abstinence," 44.
44. Weininger committed suicide shortly after completing *Sex and Character*, an extended version of his dissertation. Philosopher Steven Burns has summed up the impact of *Sex and Character* as "notorious, not for its author's dramatic demise or for what strikes us today as its anti-feminism and anti-Semitism, but for its deep and systematic critique of Viennese modernism and for its embodiment of what struck *fin-de-siècle* Vienna as genius"; Burns, "Sex and Solipsism: Weininger's *On Last Things*," in *Wittgenstein reads Weininger*, eds. David G. Stern and Béla Szabados (New York, 2004), 89.
45. Otto Weininger, *Sex and Character*, ed. and trans. Ladislaus Löb (Bloomington, IN, 2005), 243.
46. *Ibid.*, 244–245.
47. Sengoopta, *Otto Weininger*, 114.
48. Sigmund Freud, "Case 4: Katharina," *Studies on Hysteria*, 125.
49. *Ibid.*, 127.
50. *Ibid.*, 134; Katharina's case went beyond suspicion; Freud noted in a 1924 footnote to the case that Katharina had been sexually abused by her father.
51. Johannes Rutgers, quoted in Marcuse, *Gefahren*, 37–38.
52. *Ibid.*, 37.
53. On the bourgeois orientation of Freudian hysterics, see Brennan, *Interpretation*, 90.
54. Sigmund Freud, "Case 5: Fräulein Elisabeth von R.," *Studies on Hysteria*, 161.
55. *Ibid.*, 135.
56. See Jennifer L. Pierce, "The Relation between Emotion Work and Hysteria: A Feminist Reinterpretation of Freud's *Studies on Hysteria*," *Women's Studies* 16(3/4) (1989): 255–270; Pierce argues that Freud especially was reluctant to "delve further into the relationship between hysteria, predominantly a women's disorder, and intelligence, an 'unladylike quality.'" (1989, 266)
57. Freud, "Elisabeth von R.," 135.
58. *Ibid.*, 161–162.
59. *Ibid.*, 146; Brennan, *Interpretation*, argues that Elisabeth von R.'s case offers a prefiguration "of what Freud would subsequently identify as the basic bisexuality of hysteria," 104.
60. Freud, "Elisabeth von R.," 140, 155.
61. *Ibid.*, 157.
62. *Ibid.*, 156; Ian Parker, in "The Unconscious Love of Elisabeth von R: Notes on Freud's First Full-Length Analysis," *Psychodynamic Practice* 9(2) (2003): 146–147, finds that comparing Freud's subsequent accounts of Elisabeth's case reveals different variations on Elisabeth's expression of "I can be his wife" to "He can marry me" and Freud's own observation, "Now you

- can be his wife.” Parker suggests that this “could be read as a thought that relays other people’s [Freud’s?] expectations of her rather than something she would directly express herself.” (2003, 147).
63. Freud, “Elisabeth von R.,” 164–165.
 64. *Ibid.*, 145.
 65. *Ibid.*, 175.
 66. *Ibid.*, 176; original text reads: “*die Redensarten: Nicht von der Stelle kommen, keinen Anhalt haben, u. dgl.*”, in Sigmund Freud, *Gesammelte Werke*, 6th ed., vol. 1, (Frankfurt a.M., 1991), 244.
 67. *Ibid.*, 152; original text reads: “*Wenn die Kranke die Erzählung einer ganzen Reihe von Begebenheiten mit der Klage schloss, sie habe dabei ihr „Alleinstehen“ schmerzlich empfunden...*,” Freud, *Werke*, 217.
 68. Susan Katz, “Speaking out against the ‘Talking Cure’: Unmarried Women in Freud’s Early Case Studies,” *Women’s Studies* 13(4) (1987): 312.
 69. Evelyne Ender, *Sexing the Mind: Nineteenth-Century Fictions of Hysteria* (Ithaca, NY, 1995), 161; emphasis in text.
 70. On the construction of the Freudian hysterical narrative, Madelon Sprengnether, “Enforcing Oedipus: Freud and Dora,” in *In Dora’s Case: Freud-Hysteria-Feminism*, eds. Charles Bernheimer and Claire Kahane (New York, 1985), 268.
 71. Roy Schafer, “Conversations with Elisabeth von R.,” in *Storms in her Head: Freud and the Construction of Hysteria*, eds. Muriel Dimen and Adrienne Harris (New York, 2001), 328.
 72. *Ibid.*, 330.
 73. Katz, “Speaking Out,” 297.
 74. *Ibid.*, 303; Katz links this emphasis on ‘learning one’s place’ to social class as well as marital status. Regarding the case of “Miss Lucy R.,” an accompanying patient history in the *Studies on Hysteria*, Katz asserts that because Lucy was a governess, Freud’s narrative of her case and treatment of her as a patient emphasized the necessity of “submit[ing] with grace to [her] limited prospects” (1987, 308). Katz also suggests that the case of Dora might be read in terms of marital status because of the role of female governesses in the case history and because the prospect of staying single may have offered the only way for Dora to triumph “over middle-class sex-roles and morality” (1987, 315).
 75. *Ibid.*, 311.
 76. Freud, “Elisabeth von R.,” 138–160.
 77. *Ibid.*, 160.
 78. Katz, “Speaking Out,” 298.
 79. Sigmund Freud, “My Views on the Part Played by Sexuality in the Aetiology of the Neuroses,” *SE* vol. 7, 278.
 80. Lilienthal, “Skandalös,” 390.
 81. Forel, *Sexual Question*, 515.
 82. See for example Bloch, *Sexual Life*, 236–278; on the BfM, see Chapter 6.
 83. Bloch, *Sexual Life*, 276; emphasis in text.
 84. Stekel, “Sexual Abstinence,” 39.
 85. *Ibid.*, 40.
 86. Michael Hau, *The Cult of Health and Beauty in Germany: A Social History, 1890–1930* (Chicago, 2003), 78.
 87. Havelock Ellis, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex*, vol. 1 (Philadelphia: F.A. Davis, 1906), 186; quoted in Marcuse, *Gefahren*, 39.
 88. Peter Borscheid, in “Von Jungfern, Hagestolzen, and Singles: Die historische Entwicklung des Alleinlebens,” in *Lebensform Einpersonenhaushalt*, ed. Sylvia Gräbe (New York, 1994), 40.
 89. Sigmund Freud, “Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality,” *SE*, vol. 7, (1905): 165.
 90. *Ibid.*, 238; Strachey uses the German aphorism in the text with the footnoted translation as indicated.

91. Rohleder, "Abstinentia sexualis," 655–656.
92. Forel, *Sexual Question*, 97.
93. Erich Lilienthal, "Die Unverschämtheiten des schüchternen Jünglings," *Sexual-Probleme* 7(5) (May, 1911): 312–313.
94. Carl Laker, "Über eine besondere Form von verkehrter Richtung ("Perversion") des weiblichen Geschlechtstreibes," *Archiv für Gynäkologie* 34(2) (1889): 295–296.
95. *Ibid.*, 297–300.
96. Freidrich Siebert, *Sexuelle Moral und sexuelle Hygiene* (Frankfurt a.M, 1901); quoted in Marcuse, *Gefahren*, 76.
97. Marcuse, *Gefahren*, 76.
98. Thomas Laqueur, *Solitary Sex: A Cultural History of Masturbation* (New York: Zone, 2003), 267.
99. Forel, *Sexual Question*, 226, 234.
100. *Ibid.*, 226.
101. Magnus Hirschfeld, *The Homosexuality of Men and Women*, trans. Michael Lombardi-Nash (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 2000), 386.
102. *Ibid.*, 131.
103. Catullus, "Homosexuality und Frauenbewegung," *Das Neue Magazine* 73 (18) (1904): 565.
104. Weiss and Kossmann, *Mann und Weib*, 418–419.
105. Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia*, 327.
106. *Mannweib* is literally male/female or man/woman, connotes virago; Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia*, 64–79.
107. *Ibid.*, 327.
108. *Ibid.*
109. Marcuse, *Gefahren*, 82–83.
110. *Ibid.*
111. "Was heisst widernatürliche Unzucht beim weiblichen Geschlecht?," *Geschlecht und Gesellschaft* (1911), 272.
112. Tracie Matysik, "In the Name of the Law: The 'Female Homosexual' and the Criminal Code in Fin de Siècle Germany," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 13(1) (2004): 28.
113. *Ibid.*, 43.
114. Helene Stöcker, "Die beabsichtigte Ausdehnung des §175 auf die Frau," *Die neue Generation* 7(3) (1911): 111, quoted in Matysik, 43; see chapter 6 on Stöcker's views on the *Frauenüberschuß*.
115. Life partners Lange and Bäumer were leaders of the *Bund deutscher Frauenvereine*, see chapters 3 and 5; Anita Augspurg (1857–1943) and Lida Gustava Heymann (1868–1943) founded the The German Association for Women's Voting Rights and were leaders in the international women's movement; on their partnership and an analysis of same-sex relationships in the international women's movement, see Leila Rupp, "Sexuality and Politics in the Early Twentieth Century: The Case of the International Women's Movement," *Feminist Studies* 23(3) (1997): 577–605.
116. Anna Rueling, "What Interest does the Women's Movement have in the Homosexual Question?," in *Lesbians in Germany: 1890's–1920's*, eds. Lillian Fadermann and Brigitte Eriksson (Tallahassee, FL, 1990), 84.
117. Eduard von Hartmann, "Die Jungfernfrage," *Die Gegenwart* 40(34): 113.
118. Margit Göttert, *Macht und Eros: Frauenbeziehungen und weibliche Kultur um 1900* (Königstein, 2000), 16.
119. Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia*, x.
120. Gudrun Schwarz, "'Mannweiber' in Männer Theorien," in *Frauen suchen ihre Geschichte*, ed. Karin Hausen (Munich, 1987), 76.
121. Rupp, "Sexuality," 578.
122. Lilienthal, "Unverschämtheiten," 313.

IMAGINED DEMOGRAPHY



Anxiety about changing gender roles can be expressed in multiple ways. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the discourse surrounding the woman question featured varying emphases in different national contexts. The French evinced significant handwringing over the stagnation in birth rates that characterized the Third Republic.¹ In Victorian and Edwardian Britain, conjecture about the “odd woman” emerged in literary works by George Gissing and E.M. Forster,² but debates about both unmarried and married women’s roles were primarily focused on the themes of suffrage, empire, and emigration.³ Certainly, the women’s movement of Imperial Germany grappled with issues surrounding fertility, suffrage, and empire. But female nuptiality held unique prominence in discussions of women’s rights during the *Kaiserreich*. Social commentators who decried the ill effects of a female surplus expressed their concerns with the supposed support of social scientific evidence. Though few of the figures who wrote about the female surplus actually grappled with its demographic dimensions, their descriptions of the female plight rested upon a foundation they believed to be upheld by the authority of numbers.

Such a use of the *Frauenüberschuß* (female surplus) can be found in the work of Robert and Lisbeth Wilbrandt, authors of the fourth volume in Helene Lange and Gertrud Bäumer’s landmark 1902 *Handbook of the Women’s Movement*. The Wilbrandts believed that the female surplus was fundamental to the discussion of the woman question:

The most primary question is *the numerical ratio of the sexes* ... A tremendous surplus of women developed in the cities of the Middle Ages ... The same bad state exists in the nineteenth century ... it has further intensified due to emigrations, which from Germany com-

mence with 2/3 men and only 1/3 women. Just in the period from 1851 to 1880, about 300,000 more men than women emigrated ... Our surplus of women ... [also] results from *greater [male] mortality* ... The greater number of boys' deaths balances the surplus of boys at birth ... in the marriageable age from 20 to 30 years, it soon develops into the female surplus. In later years of life, dangerous and exhausting occupations, wars, etc., carry off so many more men than women that by their twentieth year, men just have 38.4 years to live, women still have 40.2.⁴

The issues raised in this description—migration and mortality rates—are key factors in any analysis of gender ratios. But this swift summary offers the most detailed analysis that the Wilbrandts provided of such a “primary question.” They did not examine whether marital statistics changed over time, nor did they assess marriage rates on the basis of age cohort. The Wilbrandts’ interpretation of the female surplus was based as much on conviction as statistical certainty.

In his sweeping account of the major intellectual and social currents of the nineteenth century, Theobald Ziegler similarly asserted that the question of women’s rights emerged as a result of the female surplus: “When precisely examined in our era dominated by material interests, [the woman question] concerns a question of existence and living ... Particularly in Germany, the number of women substantially predominates, in Germany the surplus amounts to almost one million.” This reading of population statistics was followed by an assessment of male attitudes toward marriage: “In addition to this comes the disinclination of our young men to enter marriage, and this distinctly so in the upper classes ... partly grounded in real social crisis, but also partly a consequence of morally reprehensible demands and habits in the young men’s world.” Ziegler continued that the allure of prostitutes steered young bourgeois men off track, but regardless of the moral failings of men of marriageable age, “the main thing is to understand the fact that the number of unmarried women is continually increasing, above more than below. They must create an existence.” Young women of the middle- and upper-classes suffered the most, for “the often repeated saying: ‘the woman belongs in the house’ is a foolish and empty cliché as long as each woman cannot be given a husband and a home.” Ziegler lamented that working-class women had to find work, but “elite daughters” were forbidden from such occupation.⁵

Ziegler’s description of the origins of the women’s movement begins with demography and ends with social class. His analysis does not query into the statistical legitimacy of the correlation between marriage prospects and social standing. Citing the population surplus of females over males at “almost one million,” Ziegler’s discussion quickly moves from statistical argumentation to judgmental moralizing. Both Ziegler and the Wilbrandts claimed demographic causality in their arguments for social reform, yet neither questioned the validity of their initial assertion of a female surplus. Myriad advocates of women’s rights and observers of imperial German society echoed this pattern of presenting the female surplus as fact sans specific evidence.

This chapter moves beyond anecdotal observations about the surfeit of women in order to assess whether or not a female superfluity existed, and if so, under

what circumstances. Demographic verifiability does not make the *Frauenüberschuß* more or less significant as a pillar of the women's movement and as an important vein of turn-of-the-century German social discourse. But statistical study provides important insight into why the notion of the female surplus emerged as an issue in Imperial Germany. If a distinct demographic upheaval created more women than men, discussion of the female surplus might at least partially be understood as a response to a pressing, socially conditioned reality. If demographic evidence does not demonstrate a surplus of women over men—or only reveals a very slight surfeit—then the historian must question why the notion of an oversupply of females became meaningful. This issue is especially critical in the context of the *Kaiserreich*, since World War I would create a more obvious and painful scarcity of men, no matter what had been the underlying reality of the prewar *Frauenüberschuß*. Proving a statistical basis for the cultural belief in a female surplus would not close the book on the importance of perception, since not all demographic shifts are noted by contemporaries. Similarly, failing to prove a statistical basis for the female surplus makes the question of cultural construction all the more pressing, since the discrepancy between fact and belief also invites fruitful avenues of research.

The rise of the European women's movements is inextricably linked to demography. Widespread concern over decreasing birth rates during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries catalyzed the debate about the proper role of the female. As Ann Taylor Allen has argued, "the debate on declining birth rates affected both feminist ideology and strategies."⁶ In Germany, attention to birth rates accompanied an increasing faith in statistics as reliable indicators of lived experience. Eugenic science also linked birth rates to national strength. Eugenicists argued that German fertility needed to continue to outpace that of the French (French birth rates per 1000 population stood at 24.6 in 1880 and had dropped to 19.6 by 1910); far more alarming was the fact that Russian birth rates (49.7 in 1880; 45.1 in 1910) markedly exceeded those of Germany (37.6 in 1880; 29.8 in 1910).⁷ Because the surplus of unwed and presumably childless women seemed to be especially problematic among the middle-class, German advocates of eugenics were concerned that the "quality" of the racial stock would be diminished as a consequence of a higher proportion of lower-class births. The problem of too many (non-reproductive) single women struck a deeply urgent chord during an era of eugenic thought and in the context of a decline in the birth rate.⁸

Three assumptions govern the scope of this chapter's analysis. First, since discussants of the woman question tended to write quite broadly about the German condition, it is important to establish an expansive scope. Much of the following research investigates demographic data regarding the entire German state, though some regional statistics are featured in order to provide a sense of divergent experience. The regions selected are the Prussian entities of Berlin, Hohenzollern, and Westphalia. The size of Prussia allows for broad regional comparison over the course of the *Kaiserreich* while maintaining a consistent source basis. The three cases provide useful contrast: Berlin as an urban area that experienced

dynamic population growth; Hohenzollern as a rural area that experienced absolute population decline from 1880–1895, and relative population stagnation before and after; and Westphalia, which enjoyed tremendous growth throughout the imperial period, primarily due to the intensive industrial development in the region (Appendix: Table 1).⁹ Figure 1¹⁰ visually demonstrates the extent of population growth in these areas in the late imperial period. Hohenzollern's population remained static, while the populations of Berlin and Westphalia more than doubled. These regions also differed in terms of religious distribution: Berlin as predominantly Protestant with an increasing Catholic population and proportionally large Jewish population; Hohenzollern as mainly Catholic with an increasing, though small Protestant population; and Westphalia as more evenly divided between Protestants and Catholics (Table 2).

The second concern that has affected this demographic investigation is the nature of the data available. It is outside of the scope of this book to conduct detailed local investigations of marriage statistics. This chapter relies on data provided from the Reich's Statistical Bureau and from secondary analyses. The limited sources reflect a more general problem confronted in demographic study of Imperial Germany. The Statistical Bureau generally did not view family statistics as an important category of data.¹¹ Marriage rates usually were compiled in a generalized fashion, causing one early twentieth-century demographer to observe that until the post–World War I period, “it appears as if the official statistics ... have considered a more exacting investigation of marriageability to be unnecessary.”¹² In addition to lacking the fine components of family structure, the figures regarding marriage are not delineated by class. Any observations regarding class differentiation in nuptial behavior have to be derived from the more general statistics available or developed via cross-tabulation from varied statistical data.

Nevertheless, rich sources of material for a broad inquiry into the existence of a female population surplus are available. The primary statistics in this chapter are predominantly derived from two sources: the annual *Statistical Yearbook for the German Empire* and its more detailed quarterly supplement, the *Quarterly Issue on the Statistics of the German Empire*.¹³ For local and specific cases, this chapter examines material from the secondary studies conducted by William Hubbard,¹⁴ John Knodel,¹⁵ and Jürgen Kocka,¹⁶ as well as the primary investigations of Friedrich Prinzing and Erwin Moll.¹⁷

While the Reich Statistical Bureau supplied consistent data on marriage rates and classification of the population by family status (single, married, widowed, divorced), evidence is more uneven regarding age at marriage and variance in regional nuptiality. The Statistical Bureau tended to pursue these latter topics as special projects and only investigated them in certain years. One can easily examine marriage rates throughout the imperial period and earlier, but studies of age at marriage and regional marriage rates are more episodic. For example, from 1902 through 1906, the quarterly issues provided extraordinarily detailed analyses of age at marriage for both brides and grooms in all areas of the empire.¹⁸ This level of specificity regarding marriage age only occurred in the first decade of the twen-

tieth century; only through intensive provincial research could similar figures be compiled for earlier and later periods.

The quarterlies do not record why such a detailed study took place from 1902 to 1906, but one cannot help but suspect that generalized anxieties about nuptial prospects and the extended wait for marriage contributed to the intensive level of investigation. As historian J. Adam Tooze has argued regarding the Statistical Bureau, “statistics are not neutral reflections of social and economic reality. They are produced by particular social actors in an effort to make sense of the complex and unmanageable reality that surrounds them.”¹⁹ Tooze finds that through the use and limitation of statistical enquiry, the Statistical Bureau attempted to present an overly harmonious picture of working life in Germany in order to mitigate anxieties about the death of artisanal trades and the increasing size of the proletariat.²⁰ Similarly, the intense (if brief) analysis of local marriage rates in the early twentieth century may have been an attempt to quell the hubbub surrounding the growing reputation of marriage as an elusive path for the women of the *Kaiserreich*.

The third factor that informs the present demographic investigation is a view of marriage as primarily a consequence of economic and social factors. Jürgen Kocka has argued that marriage acts as a vessel through which economic position and social stratification is perpetuated. He notes that the mechanisms creating a given marriage “point toward strong endogamy, i.e., toward the same social origin of those marrying. This satisfies the interest of reproducing the previously achieved status of the family; in the continuity of this status among successive generations; in the protection of accustomed quality of socialization for future children; in the same sociocultural . . . behavior patterns of those marrying, etc.”²¹ In sum, marriage is a vehicle for transmitting “established prestige.”²² In the nineteenth century, the “mechanisms” allowing marriage to maintain its primarily socioeconomic function over a more personalized notion of love included “closed marriage circles, legally secured marriage obstacles, strong paternal force, restrictively wielded permission for marriage, [and] arranged marriage.” These factors create the “tendency toward endogamy . . . despite the standard of romantic love as a marriage prerequisite and formally independent spousal selection.”²³

While the love match served as a dominant leitmotif of the Romantic and Victorian ages as well as in the prescriptive literature directed toward young German girls, historians have found that marriage functioned primarily as a socially configured institution rather than as a personally chosen relationship based on compatibility and affection.²⁴ Visions of love, destiny, and companionship increasingly formed public ideals of what marriage *ought* to be.²⁵ But in most cases, the ideal remained just that. In a review of nineteenth-century marital data and court proceedings in a Württemberg village, Peter Borscheid found that “romantic ideas had virtually no effect upon the choice of partner” and that “one married according to one’s wealth, standing, and prestige.”²⁶ Marion Kaplan came to similar conclusions regarding Jewish marriage patterns in the imperial period. While romantic notions made significant cultural inroads, “Jewish practices reflected

the continued importance of property in the middle class marriage bargain, despite changing ideologies regarding love.²⁷ In fact, Kaplan contends that the cultural vision of the romantic marriage was so predominant that Jews sought to hide the material foundation of most marital matches.

Lynn Abrams asserts that “spouses, and especially women (and not just the educated middle classes and feminist activists), held notions of marriage as a harmonious partnership long before the end of the nineteenth century.”²⁸ Yet while romantic ideals dominated the rhetoric and hopes surrounding marriage, economic and class considerations largely determined who would marry. Undoubtedly, most women and men sought affectionate companionship when evaluating a prospective spouse. But with very few exceptions, the range of those prospective spouses was fixed by income, property, and class. Viewing marriage as emerging primarily out of social conditions has significant consequences for a historical reading of unwed women. Derogatory characterizations of old maids rested upon the belief that these women were unlovable. In fact, they had been less jilted by men than by the socio-economic conditions of the time. Romance ruled discussion about marriage, but status and money determined its nature.

This chapter leaves romantic considerations of marriage to the imaginary realm of matches made in heaven and old maids left in an earthly hell. Specifically, the chapter addresses three topics: the female surplus in the context of the “European marriage pattern”; an urban/rural comparison of female nuptiality; and social class as a determinant element of the female surplus. The evidence suggests that while there may have been a slight increase in the female surplus among the urban middle-class, the *Frauenüberschuß* of Imperial Germany was far more a rhetorical signifier of anxieties regarding social and cultural change than a verifiable demographic event. Imagined demography created the surplus woman.

The German Experience of the European Marriage Pattern

In the decade extending from 1872 through 1881, the German marriage rate declined over 25 percent, from 20.6 married persons per 1000 population to 15 per 1000 (Figure 2). Examined in isolation, this fact might seem to affirm the existence of an increasing unwed population. But when the marriage rate is extended over several decades, a very different picture emerges (Figure 3).²⁹ The great fluctuations in the marriage rate of the 1850s and 1860s—exacerbated in the 1860s by the trauma of continued war—were followed by a dramatic rise in marriages in 1872. Yet, after the instability of the decades surrounding national unification, the marriage rate settled by the early 1880s around the level of 15.5. As Table 3 demonstrates regarding the number of marriages (rather than married individuals), the German rate exhibited remarkable consistency from 1840 through 1912, excepting the upheaval of the 1860s and 1870s.

If contemporaries had described the *Frauenüberschuß* as an event occurring solely in the decades surrounding national unification, then a clear correlation

between demography and the woman question could be asserted. But the female surplus gained its discursive momentum at the turn of the century. In fact, the dizzying decline in the marriages during the 1870s is not featured in any prominent analysis of the female surplus. This void of commentary about the anomaly of marriage rates in the 1870s hints that demography alone was not the engine fueling interest in the female surfeit.

In 1919, demographer Erwin Moll noted that the decade of the 1870s proved too tumultuous for reliable statistical study of marriage rates, asserting that the period to a great extent bore the impact of “the repercussions of the war of 1870–71, the ... economic boom in the beginning of the ‘70s and the following crisis.”³⁰ The 1872 pinnacle in marriages might be explained in two ways. First, the marriage rate reflected the euphoria of a war quickly won and a nation forthwith created. This correlation is hard to verify, but the timing of the ascent in marriage suggests correspondence to the broader political transformation. Second, marriages increased in the 1860s and 1870s because of changes in marital law. In 1868, the Prussian *Allgemeines Landrecht* (General Common Law) amended the marital law so that “prohibitions due to unequal status or religious difference were removed in 1868; from then on, those wanting to marry also did not need to furnish proof of their economic position for a marriage to be legal.”³¹ Similar legal changes occurred at the same time in non-Prussian states; only Bavaria maintained formal restrictions on marriage after 1871. The upheaval of war deferred the impact of these legislative changes, but marriage rates clearly reflect legislative change after 1871.³² Just as striking as the marked increase in marriages in the early 1870s is the subsequent stabilization of marriage rates in the 1880s to around the 1840 level. Legislative amendment of marriage requirements did not permanently alter the German marriage pattern, suggesting that other factors predominated in determining the rate of marriage.

Sex ratios also offer important data regarding the existence of the female surplus. A review of aggregate sex ratios indicates that women indeed outnumbered men in Germany at the turn of the century (Table 4). But a majority of women does not a demographic crisis make. The margin of excess had existed for centuries and is primarily indicative of the longer female life span in the West.³³ Comprehensive sex ratios include boys and girls outside of marriageable age. Moreover, in the case of Imperial Germany, the female proportion of the population remained quite consistent throughout the imperial period (Figure 4). The female share of the German population did not increase during the *Kaiserreich*. In fact, from 1871 to 1910, the female percentage of the population actually slightly decreased from 50.9 percent to 50.6 percent (Figure 5).

Comparative population statistics also suggest that Imperial Germany did not experience an unusual surplus of unmarried women. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Germany exhibited a smaller cohort of single women over 40 when compared to other major European states.³⁴ Given the relative stability of marriage rates (excepting the 1872 upheaval), the fairly consistent female share of the population, and the comparatively smaller single population, it would seem

that the *Frauenüberschuß* could be rejected as a demographic event. Even though a literal surplus of women existed in Imperial Germany, population studies have indicated that the modern age is characterized by a consistent female majority throughout much of western Europe—and not just in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.³⁵ But the concept of the demographically redundant woman cannot be dismissed solely via an examination of basic marriage and population statistics. In order to understand why, it is helpful to examine John Hajnal's 1965 description of a unique European marriage pattern.

The pattern identified by demographic historian Hajnal is characterized by a “high age at marriage and a significant proportion of people who never marry at all.”³⁶ The work of John Knodel has affirmed the authority of Hajnal's description of European nuptiality: “The outlines and implications of this very unusual, perhaps unique marriage pattern ... [have been supported by] considerable evidence ... to confirm the general picture of a pattern of late marriage and substantial celibacy persisting for at least several centuries and extending into at least the initial decades of the twentieth century.”³⁷ Studies of Imperial German nuptiality are just one case among many of late marriages and a fairly high proportion of the population remaining single. The European marriage pattern is in accord with the notion of surplus women, but both Hajnal and Knodel observe that this pattern can be traced back at the very least to the early eighteenth century.³⁸ Yet Hajnal also finds that “the proportion of women never marrying rose to levels probably unprecedented in much of north-western Europe by the end of the nineteenth century.”³⁹ His assertion of an increasing surfeit of women by the turn-of-the-twentieth century provides a model by which the reality of the female surplus can be tested.

Hajnal claims that a surplus of women existed by the early eighteenth century not only in the population as a whole, but also in the prime age bracket for marriage, primarily due to a heavier male mortality.⁴⁰ Still, Hajnal believed that a female majority did not necessarily mean that women of marriageable age were unable to find spouses. Because of high rates of widower remarriage, Hajnal asserted that many never-married women wed men outside of the prime age group. Known to demographers as “successive polygamy,” the remarriage of widowers figures predominantly in Hajnal's theory of an intensifying female surplus in the nineteenth century.⁴¹ Hajnal believed that because of a high rate of successive polygamy among widowers, who were almost twice as likely to remarry as widows, many of the excess women in the prime marriageable age bracket during the eighteenth century were rescued from the fate of spinsterhood. Hajnal contended that between 5 and 10 percent more women married for the first time than did men, establishing a high rate of male remarriage.⁴² Thus, while a female surplus had existed long before the late nineteenth century, Hajnal maintained that at least some of that surplus had been accommodated for by male remarriage. He argues that the extraordinary population change in the industrial age hampered the ability of successive polygamy to absorb the surplus women.

From 1901 through 1912, the German Statistical Bureau offered detailed statistics of family status at the time of marriage (Table 5). Over that period, an av-

erage 94 percent of all brides married for the first time. Among men, males never previously married comprised an average of 90 percent of all marriages. Previously unwed persons composed an increasing proportion of brides and grooms, though in general throughout Europe, widowed and divorced persons of both sexes had more advantageous marital prospects than never-married individuals.⁴³ Clearly, widowers and divorced males (who accounted for a very small but consistently increasing percentage of all marriages) married more frequently than did their female counterparts. But with just 4 percent more women than men marrying for the first time, the German figures of the early twentieth century fell below Hajnal's estimation of 5 to 10 percent as the rate that characterized the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. This statistic suggests that widower remarriage absorbed less of the female surplus in late Imperial Germany than it had in previous centuries, an ever increasing likelihood as a result of decreasing rates of maternal mortality. Still, the figures from 1901 through 1912 offer a fairly small sample, and it is difficult to account for German variance from the European pattern since Hajnal offered the range of 5 to 10 percent as a norm throughout Western Europe. Widower remarriage needs to be considered as one of a series of data sets, including average age at first marriage, mortality and birth rates, and migration. With this context in mind, it is worthwhile to explore Hajnal's discussion of an increasing female surplus in further depth. Hajnal employed three explanatory categories to illustrate the rise in the proportion of single women: age at marriage, the impact of mortality rates on widower remarriage, and migration patterns.

Age at Marriage

Hajnal claimed that an examination of age at marriage could reveal an increasing female surplus. In the modern European marriage pattern, men tended to marry women approximately five years younger than them. The difference in age at marriage holds important consequences for the creation of a female surplus. In a given cohort, there will always be more prospective wives than husbands. Simply put, there are more 20-year-old women than there are men of 25 because of the naturally higher male mortality rate, coupled with the fact that the older male pool has been further diminished by death (i.e., if births are constant every year, persons of 20 will always outnumber those of 25). This occurrence of what I will call the "marital age gap" forms a central pillar of Hajnal's contention of the increasing female surplus. Because the German population increased throughout the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries (Figure 6), while the German birth rate remained generally constant until it began to decline in 1901 (Figure 7), during the period under study the demand of potential brides at 20 was always higher than the supply of bridegrooms at 25. This scenario of an enhanced marital age gap provides a foundation for a possible exacerbation of the female surplus due to the potential for a relative increase in the number of women in the chief marriageable age bracket.

Average age at first marriage has crucial impact upon the socio-cultural fabric of a community. It has a clear impact on marital fertility and may suggest the

extent of social mobility in a population. Kocka has argued that, “marriage age is the most direct expression of differential quality of life ... it is strongly associated with independence ideals and beliefs about the numbers of minor children ... this decision is particularly determined by comprehensive normative expectations and requirements, differentiated by gender.”⁴⁴ Pertaining to the female surplus, either (a) a rise in male or female age at first marriage, or (b) an expansion of the marital age gap, would provide solid evidence for an increasing female surplus as a demographic event. But in the context of Imperial Germany, neither of these criteria is supported by evidence. As Table 6 demonstrates in regard to case (a), both male and female ages at first marriage decreased in the imperial period.⁴⁵ Moreover, age difference at first marriage remained remarkably consistent throughout the duration of the *Kaiserreich* and it never approximated Hajnal’s assumption of a five year marital age gap, instead averaging a gap of 2.6 years from 1871 through 1910.

Regarding an expansion of the marital age gap (case b), the data prohibit ascertainment of the relative sizes of the female and male cohorts at an average gap of 2.6 years. However, the Statistical Bureau did provide data regarding population groups divided into 5-year cohorts. Thus, we can examine the size of the female population aged 20 to 25 against its contemporary cohort of males aged 25 to 30 at several stages during the *Kaiserreich*. This comparison reflects Hajnal’s presuppositions regarding the approximate five year age-difference at marriage. But even in extending the marital age gap, the data show that the surplus of females from 20 to 25 did not increase during the imperial period in relation to the male population of 25 to 30 (Table 7). In fact, as Figure 8 shows, the female surplus defined by age cohort actually declined from 1875 through 1910.⁴⁶ The decrease in the female surplus of approximate marriageable age, despite the population increase and consistent birth rate, suggests that demography did not drive the perception of excessive women seeking marriage.

Despite the evidence of (a) decreasing age at marriage, and (b) a fairly small female population surplus measured by age cohort, one other data set regarding age at marriage provides limited support for the notion of a particular German experience of a female surplus. A comparative analysis of average female ages at marriage (case c) reveals that age at marriage was higher in Germany than in most other European nations throughout the nineteenth century (Tables 8, 9).⁴⁷ These figures include remarriages, so the average age is higher than that found among the figures depicted in Table 6. The comparative European data come from a 1902 study by demographer Friedrich Prinzing. Prinzing’s inquiry indicated that both Bavarian and Prussian female average age at marriage was consistently higher than its counterpart in France, England, and Italy. The less populated European nations of Belgium, the Netherlands, and Sweden exhibited average marriage ages approximate to or higher than those of the German regions, in part due to the presence of proportionally smaller industrial populations (generally characterized by early marriage).⁴⁸ But among the larger industrialized nations, the German states clearly had a higher female average age at marriage, even though those averages

fell into a distinct pattern of decline. The generally higher German averages in the earlier decades partly resulted from the legal marital restrictions that existed prior to 1868. Measures prohibiting marriage also help to explain why the Bavarian female age at marriage remained fairly high in the 1870s and 1880s, since Bavaria did not lift marital restrictions due to religion or social class. In addition, John Knodel has demonstrated that Catholic areas in Germany experienced higher rates of remarriage, another finding that helps to explain the elevated Bavarian age at marriage.⁴⁹

Prinzing did not clarify why average female marital age was higher in both Bavaria and Prussia than in England, France, and Italy, although he suggested that in England, working-class patterns of early age at marriage had been earlier and more firmly established.⁵⁰ Regarding the French case, it might be interesting for future research to explore the extent to which the intense French natalist rhetoric of the second half of the nineteenth century contributed to lower female ages at marriage. In any event, Prinzing's figures do show that German women on average waited longer to marry than the women of other western European nations. While this does not at all indicate a growing female surplus, it suggests that those German women who yearned for marriage—particularly elite women without occupation—had more time than their European counterparts to consider the implications of their uncertain status. Incipient old maids or wives in waiting? This question plagued German women longer. As social and cultural conditions made the issue of the feminine fate more pressing, the prolonged wait for German women to marry helps to explain why the notion of a female surplus received such attention in the Second Reich.

In summary, regarding German age at first marriage, we have observed the following: (a) ages at first marriage decreased in the imperial period and the marital age gap, averaging at 2.6 years, never reached the 5 year cleft presupposed by Hajnal; and (b) the surplus of females aged 20 to 25 over men aged 25 to 30 exhibited a trend toward decline from 1875 until 1910, suggesting that the number of prospective brides did not dramatically increase in Imperial Germany despite a consistent birth rate and growing population. Finally, (c) average female age at marriage stood higher in Germany than it did among comparatively sized European nations—a finding that does not demonstrate an increasing surplus, but which enhances the image of the elite would-be bride waiting longer. In the family sphere, the protracted state of doubt was likely to be both personally consequential and generally noted.

Impact of Mortality Rates on Widower Remarriage

Declining mortality rates contribute to Hajnal's assertion of a shift in the European marriage pattern and a rise in the number of never-married women at the turn of the century. In Germany prior to and after national unification, the mortality rate decreased from an average of 28.2 deaths/1000 residents in the 1840s to a rate of 16.4 by 1912 (Figure 9).⁵¹ Hajnal believed that the link between the declining mortality rate and an exacerbated female surplus could be found

in an examination of widower remarriage: “The decline in death rates reduced the number of widowers and hence the scope for successive polygamy. For example, in Sweden by 1901–1910, only 10% of all marriages were contracted by widowers, as against 19% in 1750–1800. This type of decline from about 20 to 10% is probably typical of much of Europe.”⁵² Other historians have noted the important role that widowers played in the nineteenth-century marriage market. Marion Kaplan has described the conventional vision of middle-class Jewish families: if daughters wanted to “save themselves from spinsterhood,” they could always “marry a widower.”⁵³ Yet the anticipation of available widowers needs to be examined in a demographic context. Hajnal provided no evidence outside of the Swedish case for his premise, and stating that that case was “probably typical” certainly was not enough upon which to base the rising presence of a female surplus. When Hajnal’s conjecture regarding successive polygamy is applied to the imperial German context, the notion of decreasing numbers of available widowers is only partially verified.

Only at the outset of the twentieth century did the German Statistical Bureau begin to provide detailed analysis of family status (single, widowed, or divorced) at time of marriage (Table 5). William Hubbard’s historical work offers a longer-term analysis of family status (Tables 10, 11).⁵⁴ Hubbard’s study reveals that widower remarriage as a percent of total German marriages declined from 14.7 percent in the early 1870s to 8.6 percent by 1912 (Figure 10). Some compensation for the decline in widower remarriage is found in the very small, but rising, proportion of divorced male remarriage (Figure 11). Hubbard’s study does not extend back to the eighteenth century, so it is unclear whether the German decrease was as drastic as the Swedish case described by Hajnal.

While the data clearly indicate a decline in widower remarriage, it is important to evaluate this event in connection with the contemporaneous increase in marriages by single men. The absolute numbers involved were quite small. Successive polygamy among both widowers and divorced men fell from 11.7 percent to 10 percent of all marriages from 1891 to 1912. This represents an average decline of 8,720 “successive polygamers” per year.⁵⁵ In order to determine whether or not such a descending slope pitched 8,720 German women into the unwedded abyss, the figure must be viewed in light of the number of marriages entered into by single men. Absolute marriages of never-married men from 1891 to 1911 increased from 349,151 to 461,616, a rise of 32.2 percent; this figure mirrors the increase in total German male population in this period, also at 32.2 percent.⁵⁶ Given margins for error, the extraordinarily small figure of 8,720 fewer marriages accounted for by successive polygamy—a figure which would represent only .12 percent of the 1910 population of women of marriageable age, a group who numbered over 6.7 million—is rendered statistically insignificant.

Migration

The third demographic pillar bolstering Hajnal’s assumptions of an increase in single women at the turn of the twentieth century is the rate of transatlantic

migration. Hajnal viewed European migration of the late nineteenth century as a “predominantly male affair.”⁵⁷ His contention largely corresponds with more recent studies of out-migration patterns. First, over the entire nineteenth and twentieth century experience of German extra-national migration, women accounted for a minority of two-fifths of total emigrants.⁵⁸ Second, while migration levels in the late nineteenth century were not as high as those of the 1850s, the dominant typology of migrants changed in this interim from family groups to a majority of single male industrial workers.⁵⁹

A detailed regional study of Mecklenburg-Strelitz migration tallied the proportion of women at 29.2 percent of all migrants from 1846 through 1914, confirming Hajnal’s observation (Table 12).⁶⁰ While this rate obviously cannot be extrapolated to all of Germany, the finding of female migration at less than one-third of total migrants in a region characterized by high migration,⁶¹ coupled with the fact that male migrants increased in number during the latter part of the imperial period, suggest that migration likely had an impact on marital prospects at least in some regions. As Table 12 suggests, that impact was most likely to be experienced among the working-class, since the middle-class accounted for a very small percent of migrants (in the Mecklenburg-Strelitz case, only 2.9 percent). Future research, including more detailed local studies, could provide a more rounded picture of the gender distribution of migration, but the working-class dominance of German emigration is well established.⁶² Since contemporaries reflected on the *Frauenüberschuß* as primarily a middle-class phenomenon, the potential of migration as an important formative component of the female surplus is unlikely. Moreover, turn-of-the-century demographic research maintained that migration had “negligible influence on the extent of marital possibilities.”⁶³

When assessed in the Imperial German context, the factors of age at marriage, mortality rates, and patterns of external migration do not conform to Hajnal’s hypothesis of an unprecedented proportion of unmarried women by the end of the nineteenth century.⁶⁴ A growing surplus of unmarried German women did not exist (Table 13; Figure 12).⁶⁵ The proportion of single women decreased consistently throughout the imperial period, while the size of the female married population grew.⁶⁶ As Friedrich Prinzing wrote in 1905, “the surplus of the female unmarried over the male is only very minor,” and even then only extant in a few provinces.⁶⁷ In order to understand why the belief in a demographic female surplus persisted, both its urban and middle-class dimensions need to be further assessed.

The Female Surplus as an Urban Event

Nineteenth-century European marriages occurred later and less frequently among urban populations than among their rural counterparts. Table 14 demonstrates the extent to which urban populations exhibited both higher ages at marriage and a higher proportion of unwed population, whether among German states, in industrialized England, or in predominantly rural Russia.⁶⁸ In the German

case, the extensive demographic research conducted by John Knodel and Mary Jo Maynes has indicated that “the supply of men in marriageable ages relative to women was greater in the countryside than in urban areas.”⁶⁹ A 1903 study by Prinzing presaged the work of Knodel and Maynes in comparing marriage rates and age at marriage in rural and urban areas. Prinzing’s findings led him to conclude that the “probability of marriage for both sexes is greater in the country than in the city.”⁷⁰ The pattern described existed fairly consistently throughout Germany, as Table 14 suggests. Knodel has observed that “the general patterns of higher urban than rural age at marriage and proportions permanently single characterized most although not all areas.”⁷¹ Cities were far more likely to experience fluctuation in marriage rates based upon periods of economic boom and bust.⁷² Marital conditions clearly differed based on city size, with the largest cities experiencing the highest proportions of single population and oldest average age at marriage (Table 15). A clear urban/rural dichotomy emerges from the data, leading to a hypothesis about the contours of the *Frauenüberschuß*: if a female surplus existed, it would have been more likely to occur in urban areas.

One exception to the predominance of prohibitive marriage conditions in urban areas can be found among rural populations that demonstrated population stagnation and a high proportion of women. The Prussian principality of Hohenzollern exhibited such conditions. Table 1 and Figure 1 demonstrate the static nature of the Hohenzollern population throughout the imperial period; Figure 4 shows that the female proportion of the population was significantly higher than the German average. In addition, Hohenzollern exhibited a comparatively quite high age at marriage for both men and women (Table 16; Figures 13, 14). Because of the smaller male population, marriage ages rose and marriage rates were consistently lower than the national average (Figure 15).

Jürgen Kocka has detailed a similar pattern for the rural Westphalian village of Quernheim, in which a tendency for men to marry outside of the community played a crucial role. He argues that, “The dissolution of the traditional regional marriage circle, progressing more quickly after 1860–1870, is one of the causes for the further diminishment of marital opportunities for elite daughters toward the end of the nineteenth century.”⁷³ Kocka finds that in the period from 1870 to 1914, only 39 percent of Quernheim noble daughters of marriageable age actually wed, compared to 59 percent for all noble children—revealing a male population much more likely to marry, and to marry away from home.⁷⁴ These nuptial conditions had significant impact on women’s lives as is evidenced by the quite high marital age gap in Quernheim among the elite classes—about 4.5 years by 1870 (Figure 16).⁷⁵ Upper- and middle-class men married women significantly younger than themselves, suggesting greater pressure upon elite women to marry by a “certain age.” The exceptional marital conditions of rural areas with stagnant populations offer a possible scenario for a female surplus of less renown than its urban correlate. With a very low male population and no clear tendency toward female migration, areas like Hohenzollern contained rural women with a “firm tie to the region” not experienced by their male counterparts.⁷⁶ Thus, we

must be careful not to consider the *Frauenüberschuß* solely in urban terms. While broad demographic studies, such as those of Knodel and Maynes, suggest an urban/rural difference, further research into very particular rural scenarios like those of Hohenzollern and Quernheim suggest that while the surplus woman was imagined in the cities, her real presence might have been in rural regions exhibiting a unique mix of demographic conditions.

Still, Knodel and Maynes' findings regarding the urban and rural marriage pattern necessitate a deeper analysis of the urban experience of the female surplus. A case study of Berlin provides a fruitful avenue by which to investigate the complexities of a possible urban oversupply of women. Berlin serves as a useful place of investigation for three main reasons: first, almost all of the female leaders of the German women's movements lived in Berlin for at least some part of their adult lives. Second, as the largest German city, the capital provides a particularly compelling portrait of the urban experience. Third, Berlin serves as a very functional example because it existed as an independent administrative entity within both Prussia and unified Germany; thus, the data available offer a clear comparison to other German states and to Germany as a whole. The Berlin nuptial pattern provides a mix of evidence. On the one hand, its marriage rates demonstrate fairly expansive marital opportunities, while on the other hand, more detailed analysis of the available statistics indicates an increasing presence of women of marriageable age.

Imperial Berlin fit well into the urban/rural pattern established in Tables 14 and 15. Berlin also exhibited higher than average ages at first marriage (Figures 13, 14). While the sample of ages at marriage represented in these charts are limited to the early years of the twentieth century during which the Statistical Bureau provided detailed analyses of such figures, the work of Knodel and Maynes suggests that it was likely that a higher than average age at first marriage existed in Berlin throughout the imperial period. In light of the extraordinary consistency of the German age at marriage, it would be worthwhile for future research to compare over a longer duration the Berlin pattern of decline in male ages at marriage against the female increase (shown graphically in Figures 13 and 14 as well as in Table 16). If female ages at first marriage increased throughout the imperial period, a *Berlinerin* wanting and waiting to marry would have had more time to consider what it would mean if she did not marry, or what she should do with herself in the meanwhile.

But higher age at marriage in Berlin may be countered by evidence indicating that those women seeking a husband enjoyed positive prospects. Throughout the imperial period, Berlin experienced a marriage rate higher than the national average (Figure 17). Berliners married more frequently than most Germans—much more often than did citizens of Hohenzollern and more than the residents of rapidly industrializing Westphalia, whose nuptial profile roughly paralleled that of greater Germany (see Figure 15). This fact mitigates the findings of Prinzing and Knodel and Maynes, who focused on age at marriage and the percent of single population. Given their findings, the higher Berlin marriage rate could have been

a consequence of a larger proportion of the population at marriageable age, as well as the possibility of greater successive polygamy. The latter scenario can be evaluated by studying Figures 10 and 11. These charts demonstrate that remarriage of Berlin widowers comprised a lower share of total marriages than it did in the national case (Figure 10), and successive polygamy of widowers declined in Berlin from 1871 to 1914. While divorced men made up for the decline of widower remarriage and absorbed the gap when compared to the national average (Figure 11), the slightly higher Berlin rate of total successive polygamy cannot account for the higher marriage rate. Berlin's higher marriage rate is best explained by a large population of marriageable age.

Demographic evidence regarding the female presence in Berlin supports this contention. In fact, the female population in Berlin rose dramatically during the imperial period (Figures 4 and 5). Particularly compelling is the sharp rise in the distaff presence in Berlin from 1875 to 1880, sparking a pattern of growth until 1895 and then entering a fairly stable rate of 52 percent of the total population thereafter. Figure 18 shows the absolute increase in the female population; the number of women in the capital city increased from just over 400,000 women in 1871 to well over one million by 1910.⁷⁷ But when this population growth (Figure 5) is compared to Berlin's marriage rate averaged by decade (Figure 19), no clear parallels emerge. The marriage rate peaked in the 1870s (likely as much due to changes in Prussian law as to the increasing female presence), while the female proportion of the population peaked in 1895. In addition, as early as 1841, the Berlin marriage rate was higher than the German average, while the female proportion of the Berlin population did not surpass 50 percent until the late 1870s. This comparison reveals that the marriage rate did not alter in response to the rising proportion of female population.

Figure 12 demonstrates that both in Berlin and throughout Germany from 1871 to 1910, the married share of the female population over 15 years of age increased, the single percentage decreased, and widows remained roughly constant. This increasing proclivity toward marriage again demonstrates that marriage prospects were neither insignificant nor decreasing for the women of Berlin; in fact, it was precisely the opposite. Table 17 makes clear the decrease in the single proportion of the Berlin female population.⁷⁸ But the absolute numbers indicated in Table 17 need to be carefully analyzed. More single women over 40 could be found in Berlin than in any other Protestant region of Germany⁷⁹ and the female population over 15 years of age more than doubled between 1871 and 1910. The presence of such a dynamically growing group—whether increasingly single women or not—helps to explain the sense of crisis that permeated discussions of the female surplus. Many unmarried women from rural areas were drawn to cities in the hopes of finding work, increasing the numbers of urban women and making the marriage market ever more crowded. Marital patterns in large cities also generally exhibited more fluctuation than in rural areas.⁸⁰ Given these conditions, it is not surprising that average marriage age was higher in the cities and the competition for spouses was more intense. The presence of women

in their fertile years, defined by the Statistical Bureau as women between 17 and 50, stood higher in Berlin than in either marriage-deprived Hohenzollern or in industrializing Westphalia, and towered above the national average (Figure 20, Table 18). Women of marriageable age had a much more demographically significant presence in Berlin than elsewhere.

Even though Berlin women had greater chances of marriage, their increasing presence throughout the imperial period helps to describe the air of urgency surrounding their numbers. Such a significant cohort of the female population had to play a transformative role in the socio-cultural panorama of the city. *Berlinerinnen* could and did marry, but single women nonetheless composed a larger share of the capital's population than elsewhere (Figure 21). The existence of an increasing female population in urban areas helped to fuel the imagined demography of the surplus woman.

The Middle-Class Experience of the Female Surplus

Helene Lange and Gertrud Bäumer's *Handbook of the Women's Movement* (1901–1906) sought to provide a complete assessment of the conditions that had led to the woman question of the modern industrial age. In its analysis of the female surplus, this extensive work characterized the demographic event as endemic to the elite classes. The fourth volume noted the trend toward an increasing rate of marriage among the youth, but argued that this statistical occurrence reflected only working-class experience: “The federal law of 1868 ... *favoured early marrying among workers*. But this almost exclusively affected industrial workers. And since they have increased much more expansively than the other classes ... then, if marital frequency had remained constant among the remaining population, the marriage rate must have on the whole risen due to its increase by the enormously accumulating, younger marrying proletariat.”⁸¹ This passage exudes a bourgeois worldview in its reference to the ‘enormously accumulating’ proletariat, hinting at some dark, uncontrollable force. But its assessment of age at marriage as a valuable statistic that could provide insight into social conditions anticipated the work of demographic historians like Hajnal and Knodel.

In their contribution to the *Handbook*, Robert and Lisbeth Wilbrandt considered why marriage rates remained fairly consistent (see Figure 3) despite the increase in proletariat marriages: “*The marriage rate thus must have decreased in ... particularly in the higher classes. That it is above all among the higher classes in which marriage is becoming later and rarer is easily understood: as marriage statistics show, nowadays the factory worker marries early, the civil servant late ... The marriage rates of the higher classes actually are much more unfavorable.*”⁸² Based upon assumptions about the marriage rates of the laborers, the Wilbrandts inferred distinctly different nuptial experiences for the working- and upper-classes. But they did not clarify why elite marriages must occur “later and rarer” and did not prove their assertion regarding early working-class marriage. Nor did the

text reflect on differences based upon region, religion, individual occupations, or gender. They instead based their argument upon simple suppositions about class experience.

Such class-based assumptions linked imagined demographic consequences to morality: “Certainly, one can argue that the proletariat ... often *carelessly* marry, while in the upper classes the general culture causes egocentrically-driven *caution*; indeed, the misery of the poor makes them indifferent to the worsening of their situation through marriage and the production of children, while the life of pleasure makes the wealthy disinclined to marry.” The Wilbrandts argued that neither the carelessness of the working-class nor the selfish independence of the elites enhanced the marital institution. Middle-class men who engaged in “civil service positions and particularly in scholarly professions” oftentimes pursued those occupations without any sort of “special inclination and talents, only because ‘study,’ as a pleasant and honored situation, seems to suit one’s status.” The draw of the academic profession led to too many scholars (a circumstance not unfamiliar to many academics today) leading to “small salaries beginning late: late marriage is the necessary result.”⁸³

The Wilbrandts concluded that bourgeois pursuit of intellectual cultivation and material acquisition hampered marriages and led to the female surplus: “By turning away from overvaluing university study and worshipping all of that which costs money, the middle class could itself enable earlier marriage, without our needing to be afraid of overpopulation. Earlier and more marriages would be better for the upper classes than late and rare marriages on the one hand, prostitution, liaisons, bachelorhood on the other.” The conventions of status created marital disinclination. “But until the marriage question is moderated by some reforms, we have to reckon with the existing reality ... In 1895 of the adult population ... only a little over half of adult women, 8.8 of 16.9 million lived in marriage; the remaining were single, widowed, or divorced.”⁸⁴ Like so many other reformers of the *Kaiserreich*, the Wilbrandts asserted demography as the end rather than the beginning of the analysis. Demographic facts were used to convey and criticize social mores. Impoverished workers exercised indifference to “careless” marrying and overzealous reproduction; the bourgeois indulged in “study” as a status marker; the state fostered these demoralizing tendencies by standing by and watching as prostitution and reckless bachelors engaged in illicit liaisons. Almost as compelling as the Wilbrandts’ digest of social ills was their concluding demographic observation, with the numbers presented in alarming terms. Half of women unmarried—oh no! Yet no acknowledgement of the increasing married proportion of the population was made (see Figure 12), and the absolute numbers discussed at the end of the Wilbrandts’ investigation of imperial nuptiality were several pages removed from their introductory comments regarding the consistent marriage rate.

The surplus woman lurked throughout the *Handbook*. As bourgeois men put off marriage, who waited for them? Elite, displaced women. Yet these despondent souls were far more imagined than demographically demonstrated by most dis-

cussants of the woman question. In a 1907 article on “Population Statistics and the Movement for the Protection of Mothers,” Walter Borgius recognized that nuptial statistics seemed to controvert the notion of a female surplus. But by contrasting quantifiable evidence with cultural assumptions, Borgius inverted the apparent reality of the numbers to argue in favor of a bourgeois female surplus: “The sinking in the marriage age and the increase of marriages stand in glaring contradiction with the generally dominant opinion that with rising culture and increasing prosperity the numbers of marriages decrease, marriage age rises ... How then is this strange development of conditions in Germany to be explained?” Borgius answered his own question by correlating marital age to social class: “Marriage age is known to be quite varied among different social classes of the same population. Thus, for example, the average male marriage age in Germany amounts is among: civil servants 33.41; representatives of literature and the press 30.62; farmers 29.61; for women: in agriculture 33.86; housekeepers, teachers approximately 30; among factory and mineworkers approximately 24 years.”⁸⁵

The rapid rate of industrial expansion accounted for the falling age at marriage for the German population as a whole. Borgius explained:

Now in the last decades, in Germany as in most other states, primarily those occupations which had exhibited a particularly low marriage age experienced a strong increase ... Thus a sinking of average marriage age or the increase in marriages explain themselves quite easily. The marriage age within individual occupations remained the same, perhaps here and there or even generally increased. But the enlargement of occupations with relatively low marriage numbers ... pressed the general average down so that both among the whole population and among marriages the proportion married increased, primarily in the most procreative age groups of 20 to 40 years.⁸⁶

The prevailing belief in decreasing marriages and higher ages at marriage was defended by Borgius as more than a convention; he asserted it as fact. His argument hinged upon evidence derived from working-class experience, followed by pure conjecture regarding the bourgeoisie.

Neither Borgius nor the Wilbrandts investigated the demographic profile of unemployed middle-class women. Borgius provided evidence of male and female age at marriage by profession and assumed that the unemployed female bourgeois candidates for marriage shared the higher ages at marriage of those employed. The Wilbrandts made a similar assumption by arguing that “earlier and more marriages” would benefit the elite classes. Did bourgeois wives marry late (and ever later) just because bourgeois men did? And did late male marriage among the middle-class actually intensify during the imperial period? These questions must be further examined. Our study is necessarily limited by source availability, for the Statistical Bureau did not regularly provide a breakdown of marriages based on social standing. Estimates of marriage statistics by social class thus can only be made via inference and comparison. The occupational censuses of 1882, 1895, and 1907 detailed the marital status by occupation. But these figures suffer from the same incompleteness of those provided by Borgius, since unemployed

women were not included. The best available data come from regional studies; the following analysis draws on Jürgen Kocka's work on Westphalia and Friedrich Prinzing's turn-of-the-century study of German professions.

Any consideration of marriage by class status must evaluate the extent to which endogamy (a pattern of marriage occurring within the same social category of origin) predominated. Imperial Germany was highly endogamous. Kocka has noted that, "despite the standard of romantic love," endogamy in the *Kaiserreich* persisted in "the upper classes more strongly than in the lower."⁸⁷ His study of nineteenth-century nuptial patterns in Westphalia, which examined rural, transitional, and urban communities, found a positive correlation between "men of potential professional ascendance and a higher marriage age."⁸⁸ This finding supports the Wilbrandts' presumption of "studious" men delaying marriage. The benefits of a late male marriage particularly served the middle-class. Generally, "marriage delay increases the saved marriage fund [and] improves qualification and thus position in the marriage market."⁸⁹ Late marriages had clear social and cultural implications: "A marriage age higher than average generally signifies either the wish to delay marriage and the establishment of a family to the good of a professional goal or professional ascendance, the lack of material funds that must first be earned, or family influence."⁹⁰ While each of these scenarios played a consequential role in individual decisions to delay marriage, professional credentialization likely had the most impact on marriage patterns. For potential bridegrooms, "marriage age depended more upon professional status than upon [the groom's] provenance."⁹¹

The importance of profession in determining marital age is demonstrated in Table 19 and summarized in Figure 22.⁹² The figures detail nuptial experience in the Westphalian town of Borghorst, a community that grew from 3,678 residents in 1871 to 8,572 in 1910, and which exhibited a transitional economy of agriculture, home-based work, and industry.⁹³ While the data compiled from this community cannot represent the German experience, they offer a helpful lens into class experience. First, the pattern of high age at marriage among nobility, shown in the data as "upper class," reflects a generalized European experience of late aristocratic marriage.⁹⁴ Second, Kocka's Westphalian study provides insight into the impact of social elevation on marital status. "Ascendant" class experience is determined based upon a father's occupation in comparison to that of a son or husband. This ascendance must be considered in accord with a larger tendency toward endogamy—ascendance was more likely to occur within the working- or middle-classes, and not across class lines. The figures reveal generally higher male age at marriage for all categories of ascendance, though the samples for the middle-class are admittedly very small. The third important pattern revealed by the Borghorst figures is that female age at marriage does not show a uniform elevation in marriage age to a male of "higher" class. The distaff case also demonstrates no clear pattern of higher age at marriage among the middle-class regardless of ascent or descent, while male age at marriage distinctly increases among the elite classes.

Table 20 shows that, throughout the nineteenth century, Borghorst middle-class men married later and averaged a higher marriage age than working-class men.⁹⁵ But middle-class women (with class status as derived from the father's profession) fit squarely into the middle of the marital age pack; they did not marry later as a result of their husbands slightly advanced age. Finally, as Table 20 indicates, ages at marriage for men and women of the middle-class actually decreased from 1830 to 1911. The Borghorst data lead to two important hypotheses: that bourgeois female marital age cannot be surmised based upon the ages of the men who courted them, and that bourgeois marital age actually decreased as industrialization and credentialization intensified—foiling, at least in this case, the presuppositions of the Wilbrandts and Walter Borgius.

Yet Kocka's study of the larger urban milieu upholds hypotheses of increasing middle-class age at marriage. In his study of industrializing Bielefeld, a city in which the middle-class comprised about 26 percent of the population during the nineteenth century (Table 21),⁹⁶ Kocka examined male ages at marriage and found a clear increase from 1830 to 1910 (Figure 23).⁹⁷ Contemporary accounts of extended training for bourgeois males would seem to provide a reasonable explanation for this increase. Unfortunately, figures were not compiled for female age at marriage in Bielefeld, still leaving the problem of extrapolating a female surplus based upon male proclivity to marry later. Ample evidence exists to support the positive correlation between bourgeois occupations and later male marriage. Prinzing contended in 1903 that late middle-class marriage was indeed characteristic of German nuptiality in the early twentieth century. He supported this finding by detailing male marriage age by specific occupation; his analysis also provides support for a pattern of later urban marriage (Table 22).⁹⁸ Using the same source base, a study of Prussian occupations from 1881–1886, Hubbard provides age at marriage for employed women as well (Table 23).⁹⁹ The Prussian evidence clearly shows that those occupations requiring the most training exhibited the highest marriage ages.

Prinzing also found evidence that middle-class unemployed women did marry later (Table 24).¹⁰⁰ Looking to the north, Prinzing cited a turn-of-the-century Danish study of age at marriage according to class, which detailed the average age at marriage among four social classifications determined by wealth.¹⁰¹ The study indicated that the highest male and female ages at marriage occurred among the middle-class. Prinzing linked the Danish example to the marriage experiences of middle-class German women, arguing that women of the educated classes but without large dowries faced the greatest difficulties in marrying.¹⁰² But the Danish figures cannot be imposed on the German case as they indicate a generally much higher age at marriage than that which characterized the *Kaiserreich*.

An analysis of age at marriage as delineated by profession (Tables 22, 23) suggests delayed marriage among the bourgeoisie as a whole, but it does not determine beyond a doubt that middle-class women married significantly later than they had before the intensification of professional credentialization. More regional studies need to be conducted in order to delineate the class status at time of mar-

riage among unemployed women, the group which composed the vast majority of bourgeois brides. The cultural concomitants of a rising male age at marriage—the perils of bachelorhood, the temptations of prostitution, the possibility of extended independence—certainly gained intensity as ages at first marriage increased. But this does not confirm that middle-class women also married later, or that fewer of them married. It likely meant that some were more impatient, or nervous, or annoyed as they waited. Yet as we have seen, women continued to marry and the proportion of married women as a cohort of the total female population increased in Imperial Germany.

It might instead be edifying to look at how young women waiting for a husband occupied themselves until the anticipated marriage. From the perspective of social class, experiences differed quite extraordinarily. Working-class women did not languish at the gate waiting for their suitor to arrive. They had no problems keeping busy, for the labor-reducing benefits of industrialization did not come as quickly into the worker's household as they did to the homes of the bourgeoisie. Outside of the home, women and especially young factory girls played a well-documented and important role in the progress of industrialization with their labor utilized most frequently in unskilled tasks.¹⁰³ Many working-class females also came to cities in order to work as domestic servants, resulting in a significant increase in the proportion of single women in urban areas.¹⁰⁴ Young urban working-class women who did not find their places in factories or domestic service might have joined the increasing numbers who turned to prostitution.¹⁰⁵ The lives of working-class German women did not lend themselves to the travails of a cultural malaise like that of the bourgeois *alte Jungfer* (old maid). Because working-class women did work, some likely were too busy to be unduly troubled by the wait for a spouse—and if they were, very few were in the position to leave a written legacy about such troubles. The *Frauenüberschuß*, a crisis built on the perception of a demographic event, simply was not perceived or expressed as a working-class phenomenon.

To the extent that the female surplus existed, the middle-class experienced it in the most pronounced way. The *Frauenüberschuß*, a conviction based on imagined demography, existed as a cultural construction amid measurable social conditions that provided it with some minimal foundation. The late marriage age of men in bourgeois occupations certainly suggests that middle-class women married later than their working-class contemporaries. But the extant evidence also indicates that the experience of the female surplus was far more culturally perceived than demographically created. The milieu of the *Kaiserreich* created an acute experience of the female surplus for bourgeois women far out of proportion to their actual excessiveness.

* * *

This chapter has sought to clarify the demographic reality behind the term *Frauenüberschuß*. Simple analyses of sex ratios and marriage rates demonstrate that no significant or new surplus of women existed in Imperial Germany. The application of German evidence to John Hajnal's hypothesis of a female surplus reveals a

general decline in age at marriage, no significant impact of successive polygamy, and a decreasing female surplus when examined by age cohort. All of these factors indicate that an aggregate German experience of a female surplus did not occur. Germany had a significantly smaller proportion of single persons over the age of 40 than other European states, although Germans did tend to marry later than other large industrial nations, providing some fuel for discussions of a special German path to marriage. But no pattern of intensification of that experience during the *Kaiserreich* can be derived from the statistical evidence available.

Searching for the surplus woman in cities and among the middle-class results in some qualified findings. Berlin's experience of massive growth included a dramatic rise in the female proportion of the population, which moved from a minority to a majority in the imperial period. While marriage rates in Berlin were high, and the percentage of married women increased, the absolute increase in the female population of marriageable age provided a visual field upon which catastrophic demography might be imagined. Regarding class, bourgeois men married later than their working-class contemporaries, suggesting that their brides did as well, though this conjecture is based on limited data. Far more certain is that bourgeois women waiting to marry did so in an environment in which that delay could be contemplated and possible fates debated. The largely rhetorical victim of the female surplus was the urban, middle-class woman. Especially in cities where many other women—just like her—could easily be found, the surplus woman likely would be amply aware of her status. How much more comforting to understand her precarious standing as a consequence of the benign facts of population? Out of these circumstances, women's rights advocates and others who debated the woman question imagined a demography that provided the urgency for change.

The drama of the female surplus lies in its inconsiderable demographic reality. History is governed as much by what is believed to be true as it is by that which can be objectively verified. Even if the *Frauenüberschuß* were far more statistically visible, the demographic actuality of an event does not necessitate its significance to contemporaries. Fluctuations in the profile of a population are not unusual, but in this case a small shift, barely detectable, caused great reverberations. As the following chapters demonstrate, discussion of the female surfeit exceeded the ubiquity and uniqueness of its statistical support. The female surplus was a demographic imaginary, but it was one that held deep cultural meaning.

Notes

1. See Edward Berenson, *The Trial of Madame Caillaux* (Berkeley, CA, 1992); Joshua Cole, *The Power of Large Numbers: Population, Politics, and Gender in Nineteenth-Century France* (Ithaca, NY, 2000); Anne Cova, "Féminisme et Natalité: Nelly Roussel (1878–1922)," in *His-*

- tory of European Ideas* 15(4–6) (1992): 663–672; Richard Tomlinson, “The ‘Disappearance’ of France, 1896–1940: French Politics and the Birth Rate,” in *Historical Journal* 28(2) (1985): 405–415.
2. *The Odd Women* (1893) by George Gissing (1857–1903) examines the experiences of British middle-class single women; for a feminist reading, see Dorothy Zaborzky, “Victorian Feminism and Gissing’s *The Odd Women*: ‘Why are Women Redundant?’” in *Women’s Studies International Forum* 8(5) (1985): 489–496. E.M. Forster’s (1879–1970) novel *Howards End* (1912) also explores the challenges of female independence; see Masako Hirai, *Sisters in Literature: Female Sexuality in Antigone, Middlemarch, Howards End, and Women in Love* (New York, 1998).
 3. See Angela V. John, “The Privilege of Power: Suffrage Women and the Issue of Men’s Support,” in *Women, Privilege and Power: British Politics, 1750 to the Present*, ed. Amanda Vickery (Stanford, CA, 2001), 227–252; Catherine Hall, Keith McClelland, and Jane Rendall, *Defining the Victorian Nation: Class, Race, Gender and the Reform Act of 1867* (New York, 2000); Rita Kranidis, *The Victorian Spinster and Colonial Emigration* (New York, 1999); Jon Lawrence, “Contesting the Male Polity: The Suffragettes and the Politics of Disruption in Edwardian Britain,” in *Women, Privilege, and Power*, 201–226; Laura E. Nym Mayhall, *The Militant Suffrage Movement: Citizenship and Resistance in Britain, 1860–1930* (New York, 2003); Janet A. Nolan, *Ourselves Alone: Women’s Emigration from Ireland, 1885–1920* (Lexington, KY, 1989).
 4. Robert Wilbrandt and Lisbeth Wilbrandt, *Die Deutsche Frau im Beruf*, in *Handbuch der Frauenbewegung*, eds. Helene Lange and Gertrud Bäumer, vol. 4 (Berlin, 1902), 19–20, emphasis in text; Robert Wildbrandt (1875–1954) was a political economist whose work focused on the topics of women and labor; the *Handbuch* seems to be the only writing of his wife, Lisbeth Wilbrandt, on the women’s movement; see Robert Wilbrandt, *Ihr glücklichen Augen: Lebenserinnerungen* (Stuttgart, 1947) 125–129.
 5. Theobald Ziegler, *Die geistigen und sozialen Strömungen des neunzehnten Jahrhunderts* (Berlin, 1911), 571–572; historian Ute Frevert has described the philosopher Ziegler (1846–1918) as “a representative of educated, liberal-minded, worldly Germans who combined a sense of patriotism with the knowledge that Germany was part of a broader European or even global setting”; see Ute Frevert, “Europeanizing Germany’s Twentieth Century,” *History & Memory* 17(1/2) (2005): 90.
 6. Ann Taylor Allen, *Feminism and Motherhood in Germany, 1800–1914* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1991), 173.
 7. B.R. Mitchell, *European Historical Statistics 1750–1970* (New York, 1975), 109–119.
 8. On the link between female singleness and eugenics, see Ann Taylor Allen, “German Radical Feminism and Eugenics, 1900–1908,” *German Studies Review* 11(1) (1988): 43, and Sheila Faith Weiss, *Race Hygiene and National Efficiency* (Berkeley, CA, 1987), 126–140.
 9. All tables appear in the appendix preceding the bibliography.
 10. All figures appear in the appendix preceding the bibliography.
 11. Franz Rothenbacher and Friedrich Putz, *Die Haushalts- und Familienstatistik im Deutschen Reich und in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland*, publication of the Bundesinstitut für Bevölkerungsforschung, no. 51 (Frankfurt a.M., 1997), 12.
 12. Erwin Moll, *Heiratstafeln für Bayern und Hamburg, 1880–1911* (Göttingen, 1919), 1.
 13. *Statistisches Jahrbuch für das Deutsche Reich* [SJDR] (Berlin, 1876; 1880–1914) and *Vierteljahrshefte zur Statistik des Deutschen Reichs* [VSDR] (Berlin, 1892–1914). Most of the statistics I have compiled have been taken from successive volumes; thus individual editions are cited only when an entire table or chart is derived from one volume. Statistics for a given year appeared in the volume published two years later (e.g., figures from 1904 appeared in the volume published in 1906).
 14. William Hubbard, *Familiengeschichte: Materialien zur deutschen Familie seit dem Ende des 18. Jahrhunderts* (Munich, 1983).
 15. John E. Knodel, *The Decline of Fertility in Germany, 1871–1939* (Princeton, NJ, 1974); “Town and Country in Nineteenth-Century Germany: A Review of Urban-Rural Differentials in De-

- mographic Behavior,” *Social Science History* 1–3 (1977): 356–382; *Demographic Behavior in the Past: A Study of Fourteen German Village Populations in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries* (New York, 1988); and John Knodel and Mary Jo Maynes, “Urban and Rural Marriage in Imperial Germany,” *Journal of Family History* 1 (1976): 129–168.
16. Jürgen Kocka et. al, *Familie und Soziale Plazierung: Studien zum Verhältnis von Familie, sozialer Mobilität und Heiratsverhalten an westfälischen Beispielen im späten 18. Und 19. Jahrhundert* (Opladen, 1980).
 17. Friedrich Prinzing, “Heiratshäufigkeit und Heiratsalter nach Stand und Beruf,” *Zeitschrift für Sozialwissenschaft* 6 (1903): 546–559; Friedrich Prinzing, “Die alten Junggesellen und alten Jungfern in den europäischen Staaten jetzt und früher,” *Zeitschrift für Sozialwissenschaft* 8 (1905): 615–622, 713–719; Moll, *Heiratstafeln*.
 18. VSDR, vol. 1 (Berlin, 1908), 137.
 19. J. Adam Tooze, *Statistics and the German State, 1900–1945* (New York, 2001), 3.
 20. *Ibid.*, 40–63.
 21. Kocka, *Familie*, 47.
 22. *Ibid.*, 46.
 23. *Ibid.*, 47.
 24. On the ways in which marriage patterns slowly came to be informed by notions of romantic love in the mid-nineteenth century, see Thomas Nipperdey, *Deutsche Geschichte, 1800–1866* (Munich, 1984), 117–121.
 25. Peter Borscheid, “Romantic Love or Maternal Interest: Choosing Partners in Nineteenth-Century Germany,” *Journal of Family History* 11(2) (1986): 159.
 26. *Ibid.*, 165, 167.
 27. Marion Kaplan, “For Love or Money: The Marriage Strategies of Jews in Imperial Germany,” *Women & History* 10 (1985): 154.
 28. Lynn Abrams, “Companionship and Conflict: The Negotiation of Marriage Relations in the Nineteenth Century,” in *Gender Relations in German History*, eds. Lynn Abrams and Elizabeth Harvey (Durham, NC, 1997), 105.
 29. For the years 1851–1871, rates for those areas that would ultimately form the German empire were compiled. See SJDR, graphics appendix, 1902.
 30. Moll, *Heiratstafeln*, 2.
 31. Hubbard, *Familiengeschichte*, 41.
 32. The marked upswing in marriages between 1868 and 1880 has also been observed by John Knodel; see *Decline*, 71; Knodel identifies similar causal factors to those described here.
 33. John Hajnal, “European Marriage Patterns in Perspective,” *Population in History*, ed. D.V. Glass and D.E.C. Eversley (Chicago, 1965), 127.
 34. Prinzing, “Junggesellen,” 616.
 35. See for example E.A. Wrigley, *Industrial Growth and Population Change* (Cambridge, 1961), 156.
 36. Hajnal, “European Marriage,” 101.
 37. Knodel, *Demographic*, 119.
 38. Hajnal, “European Marriage,” 112; Knodel, *Demographic*, 121–130.
 39. Hajnal, “European Marriage,” 130.
 40. *Ibid.*, 127. Hajnal does not explicitly define the prime marriageable age bracket, but *Kaiserreich* census data indicates the prime male marriageable age bracket to be from 21 to 35 and the female bracket at 18 to 32.
 41. The term “successive polygamy” originates from the work of Johann Peter Süssmilch (1707–1767) who has been called the founding father of German demography; see Jacqueline Hecht, “Johann Peter Süssmilch: A German Prophet in Foreign Countries,” *Population Studies* 41(1) (1987): 31; according to Hajnal, Süssmilch saw widower remarriage in theological terms. The greater tendency of widowers to remarry illustrated the workings of a divine plan favoring monogamy, but which accommodated for unmarried women via successive marriages of wid-

- owers; see Hajnal, "European Marriage," 128; Friedrich Prinzing also identified widower re-marriage as a significant factor in nuptiality; see Prinzing, "Junggesellen," 617.
42. Hajnal, "European Marriage," 128.
 43. Moll, *Heiratstafeln*, 2.
 44. Kocka, *Familie*, 59–60.
 45. Knodel, *Decline*, 70.
 46. I have not been able to account for the marked and singular increase in the female surplus of 1880; a detailed examination of birth and mortality rates for both the female and male cohorts born between 1850 and 1860 might account for the size of the female surplus. The male cohort 25 to 30 in 1880 would have been between 15 and 20 years of age during the wars of unification; it seems unlikely that war could account entirely for the overabundance of females in this group.
 47. Friedrich Prinzing, "Die Wandlungen der Heiratshäufigkeit und des mittleren Heiratsalters," *Zeitschrift für Sozialwissenschaft* 5 (1902): 661, 663; quoted in Steven Hochstadt, "Appendix: Demography and Feminism," in Priscilla Robertson, *An Experience of Women: Pattern and Change in Nineteenth-Century Europe* (Philadelphia, 1982), 550–551.
 48. See part three of this chapter.
 49. Knodel, *Demographic*, 164.
 50. Prinzing, "Wandlungen," 664.
 51. For the years 1841–1871, rates were compiled for those areas that would ultimately form the German empire. See SJDR, graphics appendix, 1902.
 52. Hajnal, "European Marriage," 130.
 53. Kaplan, "For Love," 136.
 54. Hubbard, *Familiengeschichte*, 75–76.
 55. This figure was calculated by subtracting the average total number of marriages by widowers and divorced men from 1911–1912 (ten percent of all marriages, or 51,290 marriages) from a projection of marriages by widowers and divorced men for that same year had the successive polygamy rate remained constant from the 1891–1895 level (11.7 percent of all marriages, or 60,010 marriages).
 56. Male population in 1890 stood at 24,30,832; by 1910 it had reached 32,040,166.
 57. Hajnal, "European Marriage," 130.
 58. Dirk Hoerder, "Introduction," in *People in Transit: German Migrations in Comparative Perspective, 1820–1830*, eds. Dirk Hoerder and Jörg Nagler (New York, 1995), 9.
 59. Hoerder, "Introduction," 5; Richard Doerries, "German Transatlantic Migration from the Early Nineteenth Century to the Outbreak of World War II," in *Population, Labour and Migration in 19th- and 20th-Century Germany*, ed. Klaus J. Bade (New York, 1987), 126.
 60. Axel Lubinski, "Overseas Emigration from Mecklenburg-Strelitz: The Geographic and Social Contexts," in *People in Transit*, 63.
 61. *Ibid.*, 57.
 62. Hoerder, "Introduction," 4–5.
 63. Moll, *Heiratstafeln*, 14.
 64. Hajnal, "European Marriage," 130.
 65. Hubbard, *Familiengeschichte*, 72.
 66. See Moll, *Heiratstafeln*, 4–6, on the decreasing size of the single female population in Bavaria and Hamburg.
 67. Prinzing, "Junggesellen," 618.
 68. Knodel and Maynes, "Urban and Rural," 131; Moll's study of Hamburg marriage rates from 1881–1911 provides an exception to the rule of higher urban marriage age; his study indicates age at first marriage was lower in Hamburg than in rural Bavaria; see Moll, *Heiratstafeln*, 19–20.
 69. *Ibid.*, 154.
 70. Prinzing, "Heiratshäufigkeit," 548.

71. Knodel, "Town," 349–350.
72. Moll, *Heiratstafeln*, 21.
73. Kocka, *Familie*, 97.
74. *Ibid.*, 93.
75. *Ibid.*, 202.
76. *Ibid.*, 104.
77. Hubbard, *Familiengeschichte*, 69–70.
78. *Ibid.*, 72.
79. Prinzing, "Jungesellen," 618; while Berlin's rate of 120.2 single out of 1000 population of women over 40 was higher than all other predominantly Protestant regions, it still had declined from the 1871 rate of 129/1000; Catholic regions of Bavaria, Baden, and Alsace-Lorraine exhibited higher 1900 rates of 143.8, 147.2, and 168.9 per 1000 population of women over 40, respectively, perhaps due in part to the existence of convents and lower rates of widower remarriage.
80. Moll, *Heiratstafeln*, 19.
81. Wilbrandt, *Deutsche Frau*, 20–21; emphasis in text.
82. *Ibid.*, 21; emphasis in text.
83. *Ibid.*, 22–24; emphasis in text.
84. *Ibid.*
85. Walter Borgius, "Bevölkerungsstatistik und Mutterschutzbewegung," *Mutterschutz* 3(10) (1907): 391–392; Borgius was a member of the *Bund für Mutterschutz*; see chapter 6.
86. *Ibid.*, 392.
87. Kocka, *Familie*, 47.
88. *Ibid.*, 338.
89. *Ibid.*, 61.
90. *Ibid.*, 320.
91. *Ibid.*, 339.
92. *Ibid.*, 256.
93. *Ibid.*, 214.
94. See Hochstadt, "Appendix," 548–551.
95. Kocka, *Familie*, 267.
96. *Ibid.*, 289; Bielefeld's population increased from 7,833 in 1830 to 20,033 in 1870 and to 78,615 by 1910.
97. *Ibid.*, 321.
98. Prinzing, "Heirathäufigkeit," 553; Prinzing cites v. Fircks, *Bevölkerungslehre und Bevölkerungspolitik* (1898), 227, as his source for the occupational statistics.
99. Hubbard, *Familiengeschichte*, 80, also citing v. Fircks, 227–228.
100. Prinzing, "Heirathäufigkeit," 550.
101. *Ibid.*, Prinzing defined class 1 as roughly equivalent to unskilled labor, 2 as skilled labor and petty bourgeoisie, 3 as middle-class professionals, and 4 as nobility.
102. Prinzing, "Heirathäufigkeit," 550.
103. See for example Bonnie Smith, *Changing Lives: Women in European History since 1700* (Lexington, MA, 1989), 274–280.
104. Knodel and Maynes, "Urban and Rural," 150.
105. On *Kaiserreich* prostitution, see Lynn Abrams, "Prostitutes in Imperial Germany, 1870–1918: Working Girls or Social Outcasts?," in *The German Underworld*, ed. Richard Evans (New York: 1988), 189–209; Julia Bruggemann, "Prostitution, Sexuality, and Gender Roles in Imperial Germany: Hamburg, A Case Study," in *Genealogies of Identity*, eds. Margaret Sönsen Breen and Fiona Peters (New York, 2005), 19–38; Regina Schulte, *Sperrbezirke: Tugendhaftigkeit und Prostitution in der bürgerlichen Welt* (Frankfurt a.M., 1979).

THE MATERNAL SPIRIT



*T*he most powerful women's organization in Imperial Germany, the *Bund Deutscher Frauenvereine* (BDF; Federation of German Women's Associations), embraced the female surplus as a central element of its program of social reform. The moderate activists who led the BDF not only employed the female surplus as a means of strategy, they also linked the concept to a maternalist vision that permeated all aspects of their reformist agenda.¹ Through an assertion of the primacy of the family, an interpretation of capitalism that emphasized the impact of economic change on middle-class households, and the advocacy of professional opportunities, moderates articulated a belief in the transformative power of spiritual motherhood. In doing so, they promoted a metamorphosis of the surplus woman from a figure unvalued and unmarried into a being who could sustain cultural renewal by wedding herself to the needs of the greater society. Moderate discussants of the woman question presented multifaceted solutions to the dilemmas that women confronted in the modern age. But all of their proposals rested upon two firm principles: first, work had to replace marriage as the primary occupation for displaced middle-class women; and second, this work would infuse the German nation with the blessings of spiritual motherhood. The female surplus served as the catalyst for both of these core principles of moderate German feminism.

The reformers of the BDF wrote with conviction about the depth and impact of the demographic crisis. In 1910, Alice Salomon pronounced in *Die Gartenlaube* that "when the German woman's movement came into being, it was at first quite predominantly a question of the *unmarried*. Women who did not find maintenance and a life's purpose in marriage demanded the right to higher edu-

cation, to independent professional activity.”² Anna Pappritz lamented that “not every girl’s fate turns in such a way that it leads to a happy marriage.”³ According to Helene Lange, Germans were witness to a new condition: “They saw around them girls who were forced by economics to stand on their own feet and did not know where they were supposed to find a place ... in German working life ... They saw others who ... had to languish in emptiness because of unbreakable tradition and insurmountable prejudice.”⁴ By appealing to sympathy, moderates hoped to catalyze a demand for change. Such compassionate rhetoric rendered the targets of reform as victims caught in emotional and economic distress.

But the argument was more sharply honed than a simple portrait of pain; it also sounded an urgent note by arguing that the dilemmas faced by unwed women were unique to this time in history. Lange claimed that Germany at the turn of the century was marked by “the spiritual and economic plight of the girls ‘*aus guter Familie*’ ... One must consider: never, as long as there has been a German history, has the daughter of the socially leading circles worked for an outside employer for money—never, except in cases of personal misfortune.”⁵ Lange and her fellow reformers had seized upon a powerful theme that would elicit the sympathies of those familiar with Gabriele Reuter’s popular novel, *Aus guter Familie*, which had sent the message that the “carnage [and] murder of Germany’s daughters must end.”⁶ By stressing the trauma of enforced solitude, calling on history, directing her concerns toward the upper-classes, and evoking a beloved tragic heroine, Lange sought to craft a movement borne out of necessity.

Yet a danger lurked in this type of argument. If only the unmarried encountered such challenges in the industrial age, how could women like Salomon, Pappritz, and Lange claim that they represented the interests of all women? Indeed, their vision was greater, their campaign more strategic. The *Frauenüberschuß* (female surplus) was interlaced with the ideology of spiritual motherhood to establish a distinctive platform from which to call for women’s rights. The chapter first looks at how mainstream women’s rights advocates employed the concept of spiritual motherhood and then examines the response of anti-feminists to the notion of single women as spiritual mothers.

Spiritual Motherhood and Female Activism

Historians have convincingly demonstrated the importance of maternalism to the evolution of European women’s movements.⁷ Emphasis upon “a woman’s identification as mother—in contrast to that of wife—which still subordinated her—offered an incontrovertibly powerful platform on which to base claims for emancipation and social recognition.”⁸ German activists argued that a more just and compassionate society could be formed by tapping into the female capacity for motherhood through work and volunteerism. A growing consensus has emerged that in comparison to other Western contexts, “German feminists ... appear to have been particularly inclined to use the concept of ‘spiritual motherhood’ or

‘organized motherhood’ as the basis for their demands for social and political reform.”⁹ Yet, as historian Nancy Reagan has observed, “terms like ‘morality’ and ‘spiritual motherhood’ were politically ambiguous, capable of being incorporated into a variety of political agendas.”¹⁰ The ambiguity inherent in the notion of spiritual motherhood contributed significantly to its widespread use by moderates, who believed that woman’s maternal energies could fundamentally alter the nature of schools, state, workplace, social relations, and the home. Such a wide grasp was best served by a broad definition. In the present discussion, spiritual motherhood is defined as the belief system asserting that the female capacity for motherhood holds a profound power that can transform society and culture.

The ideology of spiritual motherhood offered great potential energy to the moderate movement by providing a vision for the future that could correct the problems of the present society and also occupy women in the morrow. This belief system held at its core a notion of female difference from men, a difference that made women exceptional and powerful. This robust emphasis upon gender distinctiveness reflects a key contrast from the women’s movements of England and the United States. Those of continental Europe exhibited a much stronger focus on “elaborations of womanliness; they celebrated sexual difference rather than its similarity.”¹¹ Spiritual motherhood emanates throughout the panoply of books, speeches, pamphlets, and journals of the German women’s movement. For these notions to take hold, women and society both had to embrace a vision of female exceptionalism.

Spiritual motherhood contributed both ideology and strategy to the women’s movement. By celebrating the inherent maternal nature of females, mainstream activists could logically seek the expansion of female rights while simultaneously maintaining that the preservation of family and marriage was central to their mission. Such a posture moderated the tone of calls for change and formed the principal rhetorical stance of the BDF. Established in 1894 as an umbrella association of professional, charitable, and local women’s clubs, the BDF formed the organizational heart of the moderate women’s movement. The BDF leadership asserted that, “The women’s movement regards the sacred nature of marriage and the reinforcement of family life as the necessary foundation of all social relations.”¹² Marriage was not just acceptable, or useful, or even laudatory, but sacred. A 1912 expansion of the BDF’s “Principles and Demands” utilized exaggeration to make a similar point: “Can one really believe that thousands of serious-thinking women—at least half of them wives and mothers—band together with their eyes open, in order to destroy the family, the foundation of all human communal life, in which the woman is still more firmly rooted than the man?”¹³ The question reified the woman’s primary connection to the family—if not the woman, who else?

Anna Pappritz cited the search for a happy home life as the reason for improving female education: “Every girl longs to one day find the man to whom she can devote her love and trust, who will become her refuge and support for life. Her *own household*, husband and children are not only the *goal* of each girl’s *desires*, but they are also her natural life’s work.” Destiny played a significant role in achiev-

ing one's vocation: "But not every girl's fate turns in such a way that it leads to a happy marriage. Many thousands as unmarried [women], relying only on themselves, must find their life's purpose in professional work. But this life need not be joyless."¹⁴ Every girl wanted to marry, but not every girl could. Pappritz's interest in public morality led her to warn against the dangers that surrounded women who desperately wanted to be a mother and wife, but were prevented by circumstance from doing so. Moderates responded to such a predicament by promoting work that could engage maternal resources and change the world in the process.

Yet a dilemma resounded in advocating women's work while simultaneously arguing that the female *Beruf* (vocation, calling) remained primarily that of wife and mother. What prevented mothers from infusing the world with maternalism from their positions in the home? Indeed, mothers could do so through their families. But what of those who could not? The answer rested in the female surplus. Unable to marry or to assist their families, too many women had been robbed of traditional occupations. In her study of *Women Clerks in Wilhelmine Germany*, historian Carole Adams found that "in justifying the rights of unmarried women to employment," leaders of all-female clerks associations "were reduced to citing economic and demographic trends that necessitated employment for single women. They explained that housework had become easier and that family circumstances often required additional household income."¹⁵ Anna Pappritz described the consequence of a woman being forced away from her domestic vocation: "The consequences of this development are worse still ... for the morality of the people, because the valuable female influence which once in and through the house had educational and moral effects has been dismissed. The 'guardian of tradition' has been relieved of her office."¹⁶

Proving the displacement of the guardian of tradition entailed a very specific understanding of the impact of economic change upon women. The interpretation of the capitalist marketplace set forth by the BDF maintained that middle-class women, especially but not only the unmarried, had been rendered useless in the home through the advancement of consumer society. By using such an economic justification for their cause, moderates established a dynamic platform from which the movement gained urgency: women left the home because they had no choice. This forced departure demonstrated how essential it would be for women to reform the society that had treated them so unjustly. Pappritz charged that "the living conditions of the female youth have changed enormously in the last fifty years. In earlier times, the largest majority of girls out of school stayed as daughters of the house in the protection of their parents' house, where they found occupation as helpers to mothers until they created their own household by marriage." Capitalist consumerism and commodification had changed women's history: "Now many of those chores ... have moved into the factories, and thus the female youth are pushed from the protection of the parents' house into independent employment."¹⁷

In a parallel vein, Helene Lange cited economic realities as the justification for female university study. Since the late 1890s, individual women of means had

been able to apply for limited instruction at some German universities. Baden officially opened its universities to female matriculants in 1900; Prussia and most other states followed by the end of the decade.¹⁸ In asserting her case for female higher education, Lange in 1890 looked at British and North American universities and found Germany sorely in arrears. When asked why German women pursued university admission, Lange responded: “To answer the question ... is to give all the reasons for the great woman movement ... Material wants—the liberation of hand labor by machine labor, and the increasing tendency of men to remain unmarried, leaves a great number of women without visible means of support.” Lange went on to add a class component to her version of economic history: “The same circumstances create an intellectual want in circles where financial aid is not needed, and this want is equally hard to bear.”¹⁹

This explanation of the origins of the women’s movement brought together the key elements that propelled it forward: economic change, the resulting female surplus, and a bourgeois sensibility. Lange implicitly assumed that intellectual malaise existed only ‘in circles where financial aid’ was not needed. Gertrud Bäumer expressed the same class-consciousness in her discussion of female teachers as emerging from the “educated middle-class.”²⁰ Alice Salomon expanded upon Bäumer’s observation by directly linking the emergence of females as professional teachers to the female surplus: “When the state first began to employ women as teachers, the applicants mostly ... [had been] pushed into independent employment through the economic conditions of our time, in case they did not arrive at marriage—or because they had not arrived at marriage.”²¹ Salomon did not expand upon her reference to the ‘economic conditions of our time,’ but assumed that her middle-class audience, readers of *Die Gartenlaube*, was well versed in the trajectory of the economy in the industrial age.²² The story of the unmarried single woman seeking occupation outside of the home would be just as familiar.

Economic change forced a woman into the public sphere and devalued her very person. The following passage from a BDF publication conveys well this self-understanding of the moderate women’s movement:

The development of modern industry, which today manufactures most life necessities outside of the house ... has taken away most housework ... Along with the devaluation of her working capacity, the woman is in a certain sense devalued in the home; instead of becoming a producer ... she instead sinks to simple consumer. The patriarch of the working and middle class is today no longer in a position to provide necessary maintenance for adult daughters, single or widowed sisters, or other female relatives, in uncounted cases not even the wife, because the return which they formerly offered through ... the production of domestic necessities ... has been abolished. As a result, these women are simply forced by the impulse of self-preservation to provide for their own maintenance. By modern industry they are pushed *into* industry, the women of the middle class as well, into earning a living for themselves and frequently also for their families ... The cultural development will not allow itself to be stopped.²³

Echoing the sentiments of socialism—if not its politics—the BDF argued that the familial relationship was being diminished to its economics rudiments. If the

unwed female could no longer offer a return for her presence in the home, she could not remain part of the household. Patriarchs forced unattached women out into the workforce. Who would advocate their cause? Enter the women's movement!

The displaced bourgeois woman formed an essential component of the BDF's worldview. In the organization's reading of history, middle-class women simply were not accustomed to working outside of the home. At the same time, they also were more likely to gain greater leisure by the expanded availability of consumer goods. But leisure breeds sloth, or at least the suspicion thereof. Bourgeois women became the aching visible victims of the modern age due to their inability to take on new forms of work, either through individual incapacities or structural prohibitions. Men were also unintentionally to blame; in "the unpropertied middle-class, the man only comes late to an income which allows him to establish a family."²⁴ Or were his intentions perhaps more reproachable? Helene Lange contended that bourgeois men waited longer to marry "in keeping with their social status and favorable economic circumstances ... at the same time, thousands and millions of men exercise the freedom of their sex outside of marriage."²⁵

Faced with all of these challenges, women had to band together to seek relief. The bourgeois women's movement "originated out of out of economic momentum, out of the plight for women created by the transformation of goods. As a result, the women's movement had to draw the necessary social, legal, political, and ethical conclusions, to seek the right means to establish a remedy."²⁶ In a 1900 publication, the BDF linked the concurrent rise of trade unions and the women's movement: "The age-old wisdom that *unity makes strength* has never ... attained such universal meaning as in our time." Only by coming together could women ward off the catastrophes wrought by capitalism: "Affected by technical and industrial upheaval and forced into the labor market from the sphere of activity defined by the closeness of the home ... and forced to a self-awareness, women could not long shut themselves off from the necessity of organization in the interests of the individual as well as the whole." The BDF's explanation for the rise of the women's movement rings similarly to that of trade unionism and socialism. But the bourgeois orientation of the BDF emerges in their description of the transition from middle-class charity to feminist activism: "Quite timidly, in the shadow and under the protection of church associations ... the first women's associations ... developed for charitable purposes which then gradually emerged into independent establishments for the purpose of material and spiritual elevation and the liberation of their own sex." Who led this movement? "Certainly, those who first set out on the path of self-help were naturally not the most severely affected, the proletariat women, but instead the perhaps somewhat more independent bourgeois women."²⁷

The BDF acknowledged its bourgeois advent while also attempting to demonstrate its partnership with proletariat women. Just as trade unions emerged from the devaluation of the individual, surely no set of individuals had more reason to unite under a common banner than women—that is, displaced women. Marital status was once again implicit in this description; those women forced to

self-awareness after being turned out of the home might not have been explicitly single, but they were implicitly alone—or at least they were before they found common cause in the women’s associations. And the women’s movement intended more than simple fellowship. Their mission was no less than the full right to personhood for all women: “The bourgeois women’s movement, coming from a broader and more general point of view that the woman question is a question of all women, aspires in theory and practice and in every direction to the full right of the personhood for each.”²⁸

Maternalists believed that work provided the surest path to that personhood. More than anything else, moderate activists shared their commitment to expanding professional opportunities for women. Marie Stritt, speaking at the 1912 Berlin *Frauenkongress*, argued that the most obvious way to remedy the damage wrought by industrialization to family and society was through “the development of new compensated professions for women.”²⁹ Fifteen years earlier, the BDF had declared as one of its leading goals “to seek to influence public opinion, the circles of power, and legislative bodies ... above all, in various practical associational activities, to support the opening of all professional paths that are not in contradiction with the disposition of the woman.”³⁰ The BDF’s call to activity was suffused with maternalist sensibility. The caveat that all professions must conform to the ‘disposition of the woman’ tempered what might otherwise have been a radical campaign. A woman’s *Beruf* had to embody and enhance her essential female disposition. Women thus could not be considered as threats to male professionals because the female calling could only be met in those professions reflecting the maternal disposition.

The BDF insisted that their organization pursued work for women only because numbers left them with no other choice: “According to the last occupational census in Germany from the year 1907, 9½ million women are individually employed, i.e., about one third of all adult women overall. Of these 9½ million, 2.82 million are married and 6.18 million unmarried women. 55% of all female employed persons are under the age of thirty, the others are over thirty.” Female activism emerged as a result: “The conditions which these numbers illuminate were not arbitrarily sought after and created by the women’s movement; rather it is much more the reverse. The participation of women in employed life was brought about by economic circumstances, over which the women’s movement has no influence.” Facing circumstances beyond their control, the organized female response took the form of a social movement, striving to “lighten the obvious damage and abuses that this increasing employment can bring to the women themselves and to family life, and to establish women’s occupations in such a way that they become useful for the well-being of the people and satisfying for the women themselves.” Such satisfaction could only come with regret: “But ... within the women’s movement it is clear that it is impossible to turn back this development and reestablish the old ways of life.”³¹ The BDF saw Germany and its women as being swept along by the currents of modern society; the women’s movement fortuitously arose out of the fomentation. The program proposed was

twofold: to alleviate the trauma caused to women and the family, and to create suitable work. If these two could be done concurrently and in keeping with the female disposition, then the moderate women's movement would have created a new maternalist world that looked to the past for inspiration.

Calling for women to work served practical ends. First, the omnipresent displaced women would have direction: "Only when she sees her *life's purpose* in her profession will she feel the *joy* and pride of an occupation which provides a person with *internal security* and *true self-respect*."³² Second, even if middle-class women married, they might very well one day need to work. Helene Lange used basic demographic analysis to prove the point. In a discussion of the necessity of vocational training, she pointed out that the 1900 census exhibited 126,000 more women than men in the 16 to 30 age bracket, while in the cohort extending from 50 to 70, the overage of unmarried women totaled 514,000. To Lange, the numbers meant that "the woman question that results from these population conditions is before all other things a widow question, resulting from the earlier mortality of men."³³ Many women would one day have to work, regardless of marital status, so education had to prepare them for that reality: "Today in Germany we confront a state of affairs in which a third of the life span of all adult German women will be spent in employment, with two-thirds still belonging to the work of the family."³⁴ The preeminence of family life was secured, but work still loomed as an unwanted reality for many.

Alice Salomon encouraged female vocational education in order to prevent discord among women:

Should the woman then *choose* between profession and marriage; should the adult female sex disintegrate into the celibate employed and the unemployed wives, who would have to face each other alienated like two worlds whose sets of interests are separate, whose feeling of solidarity must remain undeveloped? How should it be determined from the beginning who must be raised as the unemployed wife and be equipped with knowledge of domestic science and pedagogy for her future responsibilities; and who should become employed, permanently unmarried and therefore be exclusively educated and trained for the profession?

Proper training would prevent such division: "Since nobody can forecast the future, nor that of a girl's life possibilities, the broad circles of the population must compensate themselves in educating daughters for occupations in which they will find employment through their work, in case they are not offered sustenance through marriage."³⁵ The foreboding dichotomy so ably presented by Salomon between the wed and the unwed, the domestic and employed, suggested a future that no audience except the most virulent vilifiers of the *alte Jungfer* (old maid) could happily envision. But if women simultaneously were trained to be both wives and professionals, both the individual woman and the greater society would benefit. Only the tenets of spiritual motherhood could bring forth such harmony. Maternal qualities were to be enhanced and strengthened for dispensation in the world, whether in the home or in specifically female professions such as teaching, child care, clerical work, nursing, midwifery, or social work.

The female potential to transform German society lay in the maternal capacity that existed whether or not a woman actually reproduced. The public sphere would be reinvented by a fresh female presence once unwed women, fully confident of their nurturing gifts, engaged in maternalist vocations. Maternal power could change the family, the culture, and women themselves. An 1898 BDF pamphlet argued that the female nature transcended marital status and literal motherhood. This possibility opened the door to a new understanding of womanhood: “What has been previously meant by femininity is by no means *the natural* quality of the female, but instead partly attributed by well-meaning idealists, partly an occasionally quite doubtful and contradictory composition of all possible characteristics, conditioned directly from her dependency, much more *instilled than innate*.” This proto-deconstructionist reading of femininity based its advocacy of women’s rights on an assertion of woman’s illimitable nature: “*Genuine femininity means genuine motherliness, but it is protection-granting, not protection-seeking, thus it requires not weakness, frailty, [and] helplessness, but instead strength, health, determined thinking and treatment.*”³⁶ Feminine strength entailed the freedom fearlessly to become whatever it was that fate asked of a woman and it mandated the confidence to greet that fate, alone, if necessary. The BDF’s vision celebrated female potentiality and promised that, in a maternalist society, women would no longer have to be victims of economic forces beyond their control. Though the surplus woman did not embark down an autonomous path voluntarily, once compelled upon it, the independence gleaned from her maternalist nature could be her salvation.

Such independence reconfigured the family by creating better mothers, better marriages, better opportunities for marriage, and, in a serendipitous twist, even better old maids. If female career opportunities could be expanded, Alice Salomon believed that “the eternally prevailing laws of nature are not artificially restrained, healthy sensuality is not suppressed, and in this way the teacher is liberated from emotional isolation.”³⁷ Hoping that she might one day wed but choosing a professional vocation in the meanwhile (instead of running to teaching as refuge once she failed to marry), the bourgeois single woman of the future would be a more natural, sensual, and connected individual than the aberrant, frigid, and solitary *alte Jungfer* of the past.

As for marriage, moderates maintained that the employment of women improved the venerable institution in two ways: it might make marriage more likely, and it definitely would make marriage more honest. First, a woman who could provide her suitor with an income in those early years of wedded life improved her marital prospects considerably.³⁸ Second, a working woman could avoid the oft-repeated complaint that, due to the frightening prospects of finding a spouse, women had little choice but to marry anyone who asked them. If a woman had an income or at least had been trained for a profession, she would be open to a new sort of partnership. “They no longer have to marry the first good thing that comes along (because he will provide for her a *livelihood*), since they see no other life goal before them.”³⁹ An independent woman would be better positioned to

realize her female vocation by choosing a husband based upon a shared vision of the future. The BDF “Principles” echoed this belief: “The unity of marriage should be based on the fact that the spouses thus recognize each other as equal personalities.”⁴⁰ The BDF’s narrative of the origins of the women’s movement again came into play. Change had been forced upon them, but once faced with the fact that conditions would not revert back to tradition, women, family, and marriage had to be redefined. The foundation of that redefinition rested in the independence of the working woman, always cast in terms of her genuine femininity and motherliness.

If a woman married, the family would be strengthened by an empowered maternal presence. The BDF held that “the more efficient female worker, the materially and morally independent woman and mother is also the better woman and mother, more faithful to her responsibilities. Under all circumstances, one would rather—and more easily—fulfill obligations which one takes on voluntarily, than those forced.” Maternalism brought volition to vocation; a woman who understood her calling would feel empowered in pursuing it: “Instead of becoming alienated from house and family, the independent woman who married her husband not to be ‘provided for,’ but out of true inclination and appreciation, who gave life to her children out of her own free resolution, not out of dull subordination ... will fulfill her responsibilities to this husband and these children, to this home that she helped to create and maintain ... all the more joyfully. The freer woman will be happier, therefore also will possess the capacity to make others happy, in greater measure than the unfree.”⁴¹ The BDF leadership and literature did not attempt to unravel the tangles implicit in locating the female *Beruf* in the home while also asserting that a woman could best fulfill that natural calling by training to stand outside of it. The terms ‘efficient female worker’ and ‘morally independent woman’ reflected and enhanced the bourgeois domestic sphere—and all of this in a text arguing for expansion of female employment. The BDF placed the female back where she belonged, but she had been renewed and invigorated by the new self-awareness brought on by her struggles.

The world at large could be transformed by the ideology of spiritual motherhood. How to enhance the culture of all society? Return to the truest female essence: “If the woman wants to exert the influence on the morality of the people ... then she must ... place her work into the service of public institutions, busy herself with child protection, youth education, and welfare work, and she must set her entire strength on working for the development of these institutions.” The rapid pace of German industrialization and urbanization made this work essential: “Such a large social and cultural state of emergency still prevails in our time that it is almost unimaginable, an emergency which demands the help of women, because in this area only the work of the woman can lead to the goal.”⁴² Expelled from their traditional domain, women would reconstruct all of German society as their new private sphere, infusing the culture with maternal protection, instruction, and care. In their banishment, surplus women had been forced to

catalogue their skills; thereafter, they could help to protect all others from the very type of disruption that had compelled them to change the world.

Anti-feminism and the *Alte Jungfer*

Great social debates invariably invite a reactionary response; the women's movement of Imperial Germany was no different in this regard. Historians have reflected on the powerful chorus of anti-feminism that arose in Germany, especially in the last decades of the *Kaiserreich*.⁴³ Anti-feminist thought did not originate in Imperial Germany, but it was certainly fueled by discussions of economic displacement and female sexuality at the turn of the century. Hostility against single women developed a new object of antagonistic rhetoric with the rise of women's associations, which featured unmarried females prominently among their leadership. The BDF and its constituent associations became places of activism and sisterhood for their members—but not without inviting new expressions of anti-feminism.

The leadership of German women's associations received plenty of abuse from satirists who viewed them as a collection of old maids. An 1897 picture book entitled *Die Berlinerinnen* included a chapter on "The Ladies of the Association."⁴⁴ Written by novelist Ulla Hirschfeld Wolff under the pen name G. von Beaulieu, the chapter offers a portrait of two iconographic members of a women's association: "the adjutant," usually an officer of the organization, and "the sentimentalist," an active participant too timid to hold a leadership role. Wolff's adjutant and sentimentalist mirror caricatures of the shrew and the romantic.⁴⁵ The adjutant is "an independent *Fräulein* who could not be satisfied in being the family aunt and aid in cases of sickness, but instead required an activity which could make use of her entire time and strength."⁴⁶ Wolff offered a physical description: "The female adjutant ... always [travels] in coach ... She does not wear dainty patent leather shoes, but rather rough leather boots and galoshes, along with a weather-proof raincoat over a black, unassuming, and seldom modern or chic dress. Her only decoration is a watch chain, a solid golden chain as upright ... as her entire existence."⁴⁷ This scrupulous character nevertheless tended toward the extreme, for the adjutant was so fearful of being ridiculed that she transformed into a *Mannweib*.⁴⁸ "Because she does not want to become like the well-known miserable fright, the '*alte Jungfer*,' she becomes tomboyish and manly. Her exterior is severe, her character rather inconsiderate. She is not gaunt and ghostly as the unmarried woman once was, but instead red-cheeked, tanned, and fully rounded, of indestructible health."⁴⁹

The adjutant is pitiful despite her gruffness:

Look at this girl ... then you will perhaps understand why her eyes are so clear and penetrating—she sleeps eight to ten hours, as long as the darkness sinks along with her vain dreams ... Yearning desire ... [or] a foolish thought never surface in her composed, intel-

ligent head. Clear and cool! When the morning comes and with it the sobering light of day, she opens her rested eyes and ... works like crazy. She has a good heart ... and goodwill for all. She is not a woman who concentrates herself on one person ... because she sees nothing else but him alone ... who is sun, air, and light. She is good-natured and helpful, but she never loses her head, naturally still less her heart; her keen eyes espy every wrinkle you have, every fleck on your clothes (while hers—incidentally—are an atrocity). If she is one day missing from the assembly, if one no longer sees her galoshes and her reliable umbrella in the corridor of the president, then she is gone ... [the obituary provides] no word of love and respect, only of diligence.⁵⁰

With her galoshes, woeful costume, and diligence borne of emptiness, the adjutant is hardly a figure worthy of respect. She also is hardly a woman. The severe appearance and masculine character make her a coarse nonentity—forgotten as soon as her life ends.

Another old maid emerges in Wolff's depiction: "Completely different from this is the type of the charitable old *Fräulein*. Although she devotes herself to association life with passion, it has to compensate her for everything else. But she has something of the whining and pitiful in her." The life of the sentimentalist is imprinted by the path not taken: "Certainly the memory is like a shadow. The sentimentalist had loved, but oh! so platonically; for she is *aus so guter Familie*⁵¹ ... The *Fräulein's* entire life is an almost, everything passing her by." Volunteering simply fills the hours: "Even in the association, she stands as an almost. She does not play a role there for she is too shy, too sensitive. Her illness hinders her as well; she cannot do much, though she would like to. Despite all, only activity in the association gives her a purpose in life, a support; it fills the hours that she steals from her illness."⁵²

Satirists and detractors of the women's movement viewed bourgeois female organizations as the great ersatz. Women's organizations were not to be taken seriously because they offered only a desperate attempt to replace the intended female destiny of family and home. The depressing traits of the membership negated any diligence and devotion affiliates might bring to a cause. Though the adjutant and the sentimentalist differed in character, they shared an overwhelming emptiness. Any association populated by such hollow figures had to be itself void of meaning. Wolff's depiction condemned middle-class female associational life by rendering it innocuous. The chapter concludes by describing the hesitancy of a young woman, "blonde Gretchen," to become a member of a woman's association: "She joins only if she cannot find a husband to whom she is able to give her entire self, if she resigns herself to her fate and white hair mixes into her smooth blonde part; then she becomes ill and feels lonely and unhappy, then—perhaps—she becomes a member of an association, just like the sentimental, timid *alte Jungfer*."⁵³ Neutered in Wolff's depiction, associational activity was at best a surrogate occupation.

Such a view of female organizations was widespread among casual, unsympathetic observers of the women's movement. Not quite benign, Wolff's presentation made light of bourgeois women's associations by presenting them as sororities

of the solitary. Michael Hau's *The Cult of Health and Beauty in Germany* places this sort of ridicule in the cultural context of the *Kaiserreich*. Hau argues that anti-feminists of Imperial Germany "tried to defend traditional *bürgerliche* [bourgeois] norms for the sexes. They denounced deviations from these norms and claimed that a lack of a clear sexual identity was a sign of degeneracy that was expressed in a person's physical appearance." Social commentators especially emphasized "feminized men and masculinized women" as signs of a society in danger of decay. Hau maintains that these sorts of arguments had "considerable appeal for feminists as well," since they could then use the decrepit old maid as a springboard for reform.⁵⁴ Depicting female physical aberrance offered dual utility, as both feminists and anti-feminists utilized the stereotype of the old maid in assessing the woman question.

A prominent, if short-lived, anti-feminist organization was the *Deutsche Bund zur Bekämpfung der Frauenemanzipation* (DBBF; German Federation to Combat Women's Emancipation). In inaugurating this new group, Professor Ludwig Langemann declared in 1913 that the *Frauenbewegung* (women's movement) was not a movement of women at all, but instead a *Jungfrauenbewegung* (movement of virgins, connoting old maids).⁵⁵ The group publicized its formation in newspapers throughout Germany. One announcement proclaimed that female activism was solely the product of "only the most contentious *alte Jungfer* and a few ambitious married ladies."⁵⁶ The DBBF utilized the statistics presented by religious activist Elisabeth Gnauck-Kühne in support of its view of the women's movement as decidedly unbalanced: "[She] has recently demonstrated statistically that of one hundred German girls, 89 manage to marry."⁵⁷ Langemann asserted that the unwed eleven were not nearly significant enough to merit a social movement: "From this number one thus sees with surprising clarity that the entire middle-class women's movement can establish no foundation among the broad classes ... where marriage numbers are still greater than 89%, but instead [the women's movement] is exclusively found in the narrow but influential stratum of the educated middle-class who demonstrate low marriage numbers."⁵⁸ Langemann held that while the unmarried might be pitied, they absolutely could not be given credence as leaders of a movement that represented only a minority interest.

The DBBF believed that unmarried women had cleverly chosen skillful allies to assist in their campaign for expanded rights. Against the majority, "the *Jungfrauenbewegung*, along with the assistance of *Salon* ladies, concerns itself with preventing millions of well-intentioned wives from forming the destiny of the German people."⁵⁹ According to the critique, the idle ladies of the *Salon* had united with forsaken single women in a self-interested crusade to force their will upon the remainder of German womanhood. The debauched culture of bourgeois bachelors also offered no small measure of support to the uppity female mission. The philosopher Eduard von Hartmann criticized single men for what he termed "self-serving isolation which now escalates more and more in the male world" and argued that if all men who could marry did so, "the female competi-

tion in male professions would completely stop.” The conflation of *Salon* ladies, idle bourgeois singlewomen, and self-indulgent bachelors made for an elite affair. As von Hartmann put it, “in the lower classes a *Jungferfrage* does not exist.”⁶⁰

Preoccupation with the standing of the male bourgeoisie also fed anti-feminist critique of women’s legal rights. The DBBF condemned attempts to expand the property rights of wives by arguing that, “marriage will be degraded to a community of income and thus will be shaken to its core.”⁶¹ Married women needed to guard against the invasive tactics of the women’s movement: “*In order to help the unmarried gain power against their own family interests, wives should declare themselves to be in solidarity with the Jungfrauen.* Such is the main task of the unmarried, at all costs to demonstrate the communal interests between the married woman and the employed woman.”⁶² And the costs were far too high. According to the DBBF, the *Jungfrauenbewegung* threatened the intrinsic social and moral order of Germany: “The small but powerful group of employed single women in community with a few meddling *Salondamen* make the serious attempt to tear our mothers out of their natural sphere and to push for benefits for the unmarried in the political arena. *A greater assault on the cultural life of the German people is difficult to imagine.*”⁶³ The anti-feminist league was long on criticism and limited in practical responses. Relying on stereotypes and convention, they directed their rhetoric at single and *Salon* women and portrayed them as dangerous threats to the social order.

The perceived threat contained significant potency. For the DBBF, the ladies of the women’s movement were not the harmless, aimless souls of Wolff’s Berlin; these women were unnatural. If the *Jungfrauenbewegung* gained acceptance, a deviant thread would be added to the German social fabric. Another anti-feminist, a Dr. Rüge of Heidelberg, wrote in 1910: “There is no women’s movement, but only a ... raging revolution of those who cannot be women and do not want to be mothers. The women’s movement of today ... is a movement which consists of *old maids, sterile women, and Jewesses*, but those who are mothers and who fulfill the duties of the mother are not present.”⁶⁴ These activists could not—or worse—chose not to fulfill the natural calling of motherhood.

Anxiety about birth rates indeed fueled German anti-feminism. As German birth rates declined (along with those of Western Europe), eugenic advocates and nationalists blamed middle-class women for letting self-interest get in the way of marriage and (multiple, highly educated, and racially desirable) children. The existence of a women’s movement interested in expanding female opportunities outside of the home fueled eugenically driven interest in and anxiety about the health of the nation. As Ann Taylor Allen has observed in her history of German maternalism, “because family limitation was clearly most successfully practiced among the middle class, physicians, politicians, and moralists attacked middle-class women ... The feminist movement was denounced for allegedly encouraging middle-class women to refuse motherhood.”⁶⁵ Such critiques looked past the maternalist ideology of the German women’s movement in order to present a more extreme and threatening picture of female activism.

In the eyes of the DBBF and their like, something was deeply wrong with those women who stood alone, something profoundly in violation of the human order. Langemann offered a similar appraisal in his critique of female suffrage: “In a presumptuous manner ... *Fräulein* Helene Lange [has] pronounced that through female suffrage, the male culture will become a human culture.” Langemann argued instead for conserving the extant culture: “The human culture as we know it today is based on the natural division of labor, in which men contribute their responsible work in the community and the state, the women in home and family. The *Mannweiber* who demand women’s voting rights will degrade our culture to a *Suffragettenkultur*.”⁶⁶ Though the term *Mannweiber* was employed a few sentences distant from discussion of Helene Lange (the most widely published and recognized female activist of her time), the impugning of Lange’s sexual nature was more direct. Langemann craftily hinted at the contemporary discourse of sexuality and sexual deviance⁶⁷ while lauding the family as the natural female realm. Langemann lumped Lange and her compatriots into a camp of *Mannweiber*—creatures to be shunned, feared, and ridiculed in order to eviscerate their power.

Both mild and virulent anti-feminism plagued the moderate women’s movement. When the prewar women’s movement found itself under attack by groups such as the DBBF, female activists found themselves at times forced to soft-pedal the plight of unmarried women. Singles were too easily marginalized, lampooned, and vilified. As the twentieth century progressed, moderate advocates of women’s rights became increasingly cognizant of and responsive to the ways in which their opponents adeptly utilized hyperbole to incite rancor toward unmarried women. Maria Wendland, a women’s rights advocate from Bonn, put it this way: “It is a long proven, cheap and extraordinarily convincing means of condemning a thing by making its representatives ridiculous.”⁶⁸ The attacks of the DBBF and their colleagues were based on long-held animosity toward unmarried women, bolstered by contemporaneous curiosity regarding sexual deviance, and galvanized by fear of the organized women’s movement. Faced with this arsenal of opposition, mainstream activists found themselves forced into two paradoxical rhetorical tasks: first, partial acceptance of stereotypes of single women in order to soften their edges and invert their meanings; and second, denial of single women as the sole concern of the movement while simultaneously asserting the important creative role of the *Frauenüberschuß*.

The old maid, sometimes funny and sometimes sad, lives in the writings of moderate women’s rights advocates. In her autobiography, Helene Lange described “the type ‘*alte Jungfer*’” as “upright daughters or sisters full of sacrifice and goodness, but of such narrow-minded opinions and, at the same time, sentimental views of life, that healthy children always respond to them with contradiction or are provoked to peals of laughter ... probably an expression of unconscious dislike of expression to internal feelings, which went against conventional style.”⁶⁹ Though pronouncing the type extinct by 1930, Lange’s description suggests that she was familiar with and had internalized the myriad satires of *alte Jungfern*. Her

very use of the term reveals a belief that these types had authenticity—if only in an earlier time.

The old maid represented what the movement hoped to move away from and provided evidence as to the urgency of the reformist agenda. Helene Lange's apprentice and life partner, Gertrud Bäumer, saw the *alte Jungfer* as a very real inhabitant of the past. Bäumer, in 1914, described the earliest female teachers in the following manner:

In the beginning there were three forms, all more or less taken along by fate: first, the governess, who was a poor *Fräulein aus guter Familie*, and with her bit of girls' school knowledge went through strangers' homes along the path of self-denial; second, a type of institutional lady in the higher girls' schools institutions ... and finally: a coarse, harmless aunt, widow, or *ältere Jungfrau*, who often with natural maternal talents would teach small children the rudiments of reading, writing and arithmetic ... Candidates for all three posts were provided in swarms by the educated middle-class, from teachers and country parsons to the daughters of the poor nobility. All had to be filled with a feeling of thankfulness from their deepest hearts that after thwarted life's hopes, fate and noble people still had given them the privilege of making themselves useful in modest ways.⁷⁰

Bäumer evoked Gabriele Reuter's Agathe Heidling and located the old maid in the middle-class.⁷¹ By categorizing single women in well-worn stereotypes, Bäumer and Lange presented the *alte Jungfer* as someone well known to them rather than as a bogeywoman. Writing in 1914 and 1930, respectively, they confidently presented the old maid as obsolete. Yet by so freely using the archaic term, they continued to validate a perception of the single woman as silly, crude, lonely, addled, and endlessly defined by her (untapped) sexuality. In perpetuating the language, Bäumer and Lange revealed how very much representations of *Altjungfertum* informed their conceptions of womanhood, their understanding of the women's movement, and perhaps even their own self-perceptions. The old maid was the other against whom they defined their movement toward the future.

Not all moderate activists believed that the *alte Jungfrau* was extinct. Maria Wendland objected to the hostile description of the old maid, but saw her as vitally important to the women's movement: "Admitting that most advocates of female voting rights are '*alte Jungfern*' ... I nonetheless would like to speak quite decidedly against the fact that they are still supposed to be 'disgruntled and sullen.' Why in all the world? Certainly some of them might fit that description." But Wendland maintained that far more sullen women were to be found among those who "spend one half of their life waiting in vain for their desired suitor and then, without any life's purpose, aimlessly waste the other half in bitterness."⁷² Wendland took a rather strange stand in this passage by accepting the term *alte Jungfer*, but objecting to its inequitable application. And if a few disgruntled and sullen old maids existed—well, disgruntled and sullen folks were to be found everywhere, married or not. Wendland responded to the anti-feminists by disarming them. By adopting their language with only minor correctives, she undermined a broader condemnation of the unwed. Single women, even *alte Jungfern*,

predominated in the women's movement. But they were far happier than those single women who stayed outside of the women's movement and languished in romantic hopes for a life that had passed them by.

Beguiling though such a rejoinder might have been, moderates could not accept the charge that theirs was a *Jungfrauenbewegung* if they ever hoped to escape the demographic trap that Langemann had set for them. Eleven percent of women could not attempt to transform the world. The answer for most moderate advocates of women's rights by the late *Kaiserreich* was fairly straightforward: to appeal to married women by sympathetically conveying the plight of the unmarried. If successful, all women could be united under the banner of spiritual motherhood. They sought to replace marital status with maternal capacity as the dominant signifier of femaleness. In order to remove marriage from the center of the discourse, moderates convincingly had to describe why the plight of single women had the catalyzing power to transform *all* women's lives, and all of German society as well. They thus needed to explain the roots of the most pernicious stereotypes regarding single women and then account for the disproportionate presence of the bourgeois unwed in a movement that intended to serve the needs of all women.

Leading bourgeois activists embraced the stereotypes and made them their own, employing a temperate tone in their campaign for women's rights. They did not confront anti-feminists with vitriol. Instead, they conceded a shared truth, but provided a sympathetic explanation of its origins. Single women might sometimes be dilettantish or defeminized, bitter or useless. But such traits did not emerge *because* they were single, or even because they were women. Changing times had created female superficiality: "One responsibility after another was taken from [the woman's] sphere of activity and she limited herself to the work which remained within the house, until finally her life became empty and bleak and she squandered her inactive capacities in informal entertainments, artistic dilettantism, and playing at charity."⁷³ Women might seem foolish on occasion, but only because current affairs had forced them to folly; improve their economic status and the fatuous would become functional.

Helene Lange expanded this argument by warning that if women were incompletely educated, they might risk losing their femininity in an attempt to survive in the changing world. Misguided female teachers who too strenuously sought to imitate their male counterparts could be a problem: "The partially educated teacher seeks to achieve success by forcefully suppressing her nature in a helpless imitation of the male type, something which is considered by her alone to be effective. Particularly when combined with the routine of many years, the partial education produces a distorted image of the female teacher which reminds one of a sergeant." Not quite a *Mannweib*, but a deviant nonetheless. Lange continued, "Partial education leads either to materialism ... or to a dead dogmatism ... Partial education makes one conceited, one-sided, and arrogant; it lets be regarded as something suspect the set of small duties in which the lives of most women once moved and in which they still will move for a long time."⁷⁴ Lange's

sergeant echoes Wolff's adjutant. Women who sought to cast off the stereotypical attributes of weakness only emerged as a new extreme, one belittled even by those who campaigned for women's rights. But moderates like Lange made an important distinction: masculine character evolved from improper education rather than unmarried status. Once again, women's rights advocates granted verity to a damaging stereotype, but commandeered its consequences to create support for their own movement.

The women's movement maintained that any compassionate observer of German society could understand why the single woman might become embittered. Lange's 1890 book *Higher Education of Women in Europe* concluded with reference to a Cologne newspaper column that had ridiculed urban single women. The antagonistic article raised the following gloomy vision: "In Berlin, a great number of weary, gray old women of scarcely thirty years creep about in the attempt at acquiring a man's education; all vivacity of feeling, all womanly emotions, and physical health besides has left them." Physical decline again ruled the old maid. The article continued: "Truly educated and cultured men avoid them, uneducated ones flee them ... and the healthy natural women shun their society. Thus these girls stand like hermaphrodites between the two sexes." The article employed the usual tactics, neutering its subjects as it established their aberrance. In response, Lange wistfully observed that "at first reading, one is inclined to laugh over this unmitigated nonsense, especially when one lives in Berlin and looks in vain for 'creeping, weary old women of scarcely thirty.'"75

But in a masterful stroke, Lange proceeded to adapt to her own ends the language of the Cologne Gazette. Her response is worth quoting at length:

But no, not quite in vain. We see such old women; pale, hollow-chested sewing girls and factory hands, poor working women leading emaciated children by the hand, and by them we are reminded at every step of an unpaid debt of society. We also see rich women who while away their days in fancy pleasures, women whose heads are empty and whose hearts are dead. But among the intellectually hard-working woman I personally know not a single one who could be classed among the decrepit old women. It is possible that there are a few, and it would be astonishing if there were none under the *present* circumstances. And then the reply would suggest itself, why should not a woman have the right to ruin her health in pursuing intellectual studies or devoting herself to a satisfying and remunerative profession, as well as a sewing girl or a factory hand, or a woman in the whirl of society? But there is still another reply: *If* she is ruining her health, what else is the cause but the fact that she is obliged to work ten times harder than might be necessary because the assistance offered to men is denied her?

If the 'imbittered [*sic*] woman', upon whom the author looks down with the feeling of the proverbial Pharisee, becomes deeply unhappy, it is not owing to her intellectual aspirations, for her aspiration is as high and as pure as—say, as that of man; but it is owing to the fact that she is everywhere rejected with her claim upon work, useful work; not even for the education and instruction of her own sex is she taken into consideration in earnest. No wonder if she becomes imbittered. There is but one thing which does imbitter—vain aspiration for work and usefulness.⁷⁶

Lange usurped her opposition's platform both by describing the reasons for the women's movement and in establishing a call for reform. Her argument shifted the blame from the women themselves to a society that offered them no relief. The passage appropriated each component of the Cologne argument and enlisted it in favor of expanded women's rights: work, not stagnation, made women old; lack of education, rather than inherent dilettantism, led women to trifle; health decayed due to overwhelming burdens; and bitterness emerged because all hope had been quashed. The solution to this decline was clear: give these women useful and manageable work.

The female surplus served the moderate women's movement well. By employing the term *alte Jungfer* and admitting that single women sometimes exhibited characteristics of dilettantism, weakness, masculinity, or bitterness, these activists used parody to demonstrate a crisis. A more complex vision of the unmarried woman began to take hold through their rhetoric. Moderates argued that single middle-class women had been forced from the home and unless new paths were opened to them, they would likely become pitiful. The best candidates to strike such new paths were vibrant, modern, sensitive, and mostly unmarried women who stood as living counterexamples to the old maids they chastised.

Still, moderates did not want their movement to be dismissed as a *Jungfrauenbewegung*. The appropriation and inversion of the old maid paradigm was accompanied by less subtle attempts to dismiss charges that the movement itself was solely populated by single women. Even if those single women could be redefined as key reasons for social change, moderate women's advocates recognized the stringent limitations their movement would face if it could be written off as only the concern of the demographically deprived—a demographic minority, at that. With the onset of war in 1914, these concerns would come to dominate the rhetoric of the moderate women's movement and result in the surplus woman receding from the discourse.⁷⁷

In the prewar *Kaiserreich*, mainstream activists took several approaches in responding to charges of a *Jungfrauenbewegung*. Marianne Weber in 1910 attacked the stereotype directly: “The former common view, that the women's movement is a movement of *alten Jungfern* or childless women, has long been proven by the facts for that which it is: drunken gossip.”⁷⁸ Weber argued that though single women might be more visible, they did not form the majority of the movement. Assessing the composition of all of the constituent associations of the BDF and excluding “female teachers and nurses who are respectively restricted from marriage by express regulation due to the nature of their particular professional responsibilities,” she discovered that “more married women and mothers are found among the *chairwomen*, those personalities who ... have the great burden of the continuing work and therefore also have the predominant *influence on the conduct* of the women's movement in their hands, than are found in the general population statistics of married women (roughly 70%) among the age groups to which the women's movement addresses itself.”⁷⁹ Yet Weber's denial of the centrality of single women weakens upon closer inspection. By omitting from consideration

the key groups of teachers and nurses, and then limiting her examination to only the chairwomen and not to the entire membership of the BDF, Weber presented a fairly convoluted argument. Despite the thin case made, Weber's position is significant in its eagerness to disown single women in favor of the married.

The BDF itself occasionally engaged in similar repudiation of the single woman. An 1898 association pamphlet entitled, "What the Women's Movement Wants for Women," asserted that "the woman question is not simply a question of poverty and income, nor simply a question of the unmarried who could not find a 'breadwinner'... instead it is at the same time a moral and a legal question of first rank, and both in its practical and moral meaning is a *life question for all women*." Sanctification of the domestic sphere followed: "Regarding the fact that the married woman and mother has to fulfill a continually more important cultural mission than the unmarried, she still appears in greater measure than the latter to be involved in the development and solution of the woman question." The BDF did not provide evidence to back this claim. Instead, it offered a simple response to the oft-repeated claim that, "Whoever could solve the marriage question, that is to marry all women of marriageable age, would thus have solved the question of female employment for the most part."⁸⁰ The pamphlet refuted marriage as the sole solution to the woman question, even as it affirmed marriage as a most important female cultural mission: "In any case, the widespread opinion that the solution would be reached by all women marrying, rises out of the most unfortunate superficiality and lack of understanding."⁸¹ Discussion of women's rights extended beyond issues of marriage and work and shed light on the moral and cultural mission of the German nation. In making this argument, the BDF presented unmarried women as subordinate to the married and nullified charges of a *Jungfrauenbewegung*.

Moderate advocates of women's rights attempted to channel hostile visions of old maids in an attempt to create a movement for all women. One assessment of the German women's movement summarized the moderate position by explaining that "as far as it is not just a pastime of idle ladies, the women's movement of today originates from a deep state of emergency for the entire development of economic life, and in no way just the ambition of several striving *Mannweiber*."⁸² Later forms of feminism would repudiate the portrayal of both 'idle ladies' and '*Mannweiber*,' but the moderate women's movement of the *Kaiserreich* depended on precisely those types of derogatory characterizations to inspire a transformation of both the female sphere and German society. Stereotypes conveniently demonstrated prejudice against women to which moderates believed most fair-minded people would object. And by admitting to a hint of truth within the stereotypes—truths that their movement would seek to amend—the moderates also created a comfortable vision of their project. Who wanted to be surrounded by the bitter, the masculine, the foolish, and the hopeless? The public did not want old maids around and the BDF sought to make them disappear. They would do this through an expansive program of reform intended to provide opportunities for women and to infuse German society with the virtues of spiritual motherhood.

* * *

The BDF based their historical interpretation of the rise of the women's movement on a belief that capitalism had expelled a sizable cohort of women, most of them unwed, from the home. But the resulting movement was far more broadly based: once single women were forced from the domestic sphere, the world beyond would not and could not be the same. Compelled by circumstances it did not invite, the moderate women's movement sought a reconfiguration of home, family, nation, and society. The moderation that characterized the mainstream German women's movement is apparent in their approach to the discourse about single women. The unmarried could be pitied and even ridiculed, but they could not be deserted. Rather than making a radical claim of equality, moderates instead issued a simple call for the recognition of special and rather sad circumstances. The rhetoric of the moderate women's movement reflected a maternalist vision in which women were celebrated because of their difference from men. Because single women were perhaps most different of all, they most required recognition and assistance.

Anti-feminists used the notion of displaced women to charge that the leaders of the women's movement pursued a self-interested project intended only to comfort the aberrant and unwanted. Moderate activists responded to these charges by themselves employing the stereotype of the *alte Jungfer* in order to show that eradication of the old maid gave the women's movement a purpose with which everyone could agree. In this way, the *Frauenüberschuß* provided a vital springboard for the women's movement and its opponents. The female surplus had forcibly sparked the women's movement, but its advocates argued that the demographic event ultimately was not the movement's *raison d'être*. Moderate reformers instead found that purpose in spreading the gospel of spiritual motherhood.

Notes

1. The term 'moderate' is employed in this chapter to denote the organized German women's movement as represented by the BDF. For a discussion of the historiography regarding the division between moderate and radical feminism, see Jean Quataert, "Writing the History of Women and Gender in Imperial Germany," in *Society, Culture, and the State in Germany, 1870–1930*, ed. Geoff Eley (Ann Arbor, MI, 1997), 51–55.
2. Alice Salomon, "Die Zölibat der Lehrerin," in "Die Welt der Frau," *Die Gartenlaube* 16 (1910): 241; emphasis in text; Salomon (1872–1948) is the founding mother of professional social work in Germany (See chapter 5).
3. Helene Lange Archiv, Landesarchiv Berlin (hereafter HLA); Nachlass Anna Pappritz, Karton 1 Mappe 2. Anna Pappritz, *Hinaus in das Leben. Ein Geleitwort für junge Mädchen* (München, undated), 5; Pappritz's (1861–1939) activism centered on the movement to abolish state regulation of prostitution.
4. Helene Lange, *Fünfzig Jahre Frauenbewegung* (Berlin, 1915), cited in Helene Lange, *Lebenser-*

- innerungen* (Berlin, 1930), 103. Lange (1848–1930) was the most prominent moderate activist of her time (See chapter 5).
5. *Ibid.*
 6. Linda Kraus Worley, “Girls from Good Families: Tony Buddenbrook and Agathe Heidling,” *The German Quarterly* 76(2) (2003): 201; see chapter 1 on *Aus guter Familie*.
 7. See Seth Koven and Sonya Michel, eds., *Mothers of a New World* (New York, 1993); Karen Offen, *European Feminisms, 1700–1950* (Stanford, CA, 2000), 236–242. The German case is established in Ann Taylor Allen, *Feminism and Motherhood in Germany, 1800–1914* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1991), and Irene Stoehr, “‘Organisierte Mütterlichkeit’. Zur Politik der deutschen Frauenbewegung um 1900,” in *Frauen suchen ihre Geschichte*, ed. Karin Hausen (München, 1987), 254–279.
 8. Offen, *Feminisms*, 236.
 9. Lynn Abrams and Elizabeth Harvey, “Introduction,” in *Gender Relations in German History*, eds. Lynn Abrams and Elizabeth Harvey (Durham, NC, 1997), 22.
 10. Nancy Reagin, *A German Women’s Movement: Class and Gender in Hanover, 1880–1933* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1995), 3.
 11. Karen Offen, “Defining Feminism: A Comparative Historical Approach,” *Signs* 14(1) (1988): 124. For a comprehensive discussion of gender difference and gender equality as leitmotifs in the writing of women’s history, see Gisela Bock, “Challenging Dichotomies: Perspectives on Women’s History,” in *Writing Women’s History* (Bloomington, IN, 1991), 1–23; on difference-based feminism in the German context, see Karin Hausen, “Öffentlichkeit und Privatheit: Gesellschaftspolitische Konstruktionen und die *Geschichte der Geschlechterbeziehungen*,” in *Frauen Geschichte-Geschlechtergeschichte*, eds. Karin Hausen and Heide Wunder (Frankfurt a.M., 1996), 81–88.
 12. HLA-BDF, Karton 49, Mappe 221, “Grundsätze und Forderungen der Frauenbewegung,” May 1907.
 13. HLA-BDF, Karton 54, Mappe 245, “Grundsätze und Forderungen der Frauenbewegung auf dem Gebiet der Ehe und Familie,” in *Grundsätze* 1912, 1.
 14. Pappritz, *Hinaus*, 4–6; emphasis in text.
 15. Carole Elizabeth Adams, *Women Clerks in Wilhelmine Germany* (New York, 1988), 96.
 16. HLA-Nachlass Anna Pappritz, Karton 1 Mappe 2. Anna Pappritz, “Frauenarbeit und Volkssittlichkeit,” *Volksgesundung durch Erziehung* 7 (1911): 2.
 17. Pappritz, *Hinaus*, 12.
 18. On the history of this process, see Patricia Mazón, *Gender and the Modern Research University: The Admission of Women to German Higher Education, 1865–1914* (Stanford, CA, 2003).
 19. Lange, *Education*, 121.
 20. Gertrud Bäumer, *Die Frau in Volkswirtschaft und Staatleben der Gegenwart* (Berlin, 1914), 162; quoted in Lange, *Lebenserinnerungen*, 118; Bäumer (1873–1954) was Lange’s life partner and chairperson of the BDF from 1910–1919, later serving as a representative of the DDP in the Weimar Reichstag; on Bäumer’s life and work as a reformer, see Kevin Repp, *Reformers, Critics, and the Paths of German Modernity: Anti-Politics and the Search for Alternatives, 1890–1914* (Cambridge, MA, 2000), 104–147.
 21. Salomon, “Zölibat,” 242.
 22. On the bourgeois orientation of *Die Gartenlaube*, see Kirsten Belgum, *Popularizing the Nation: Audience, Representation, and the Production of Identity*, in *Die Gartenlaube, 1853–1900* (Lincoln, NE, 1998).
 23. HLA-BDF, Karton 54, Mappe 245, BDF pamphlet “Was die Frauenbewegung für die Frauen will,” 1898; emphasis in text.
 24. Salomon, “Zölibat,” 242.
 25. Helene Lange, *Die Frauenbewegung in ihrer modernen Problemen* (Leipzig, 1908), 3.
 26. HLA-BDF, Karton 77, Mappe 310, Der Bund deutscher Frauenvereine, *Offiziellen Pressbericht über den Berliner Frauenkongress*, 27 February through 2 March 1912.

27. HLA-BDF, Karton 54, Mappe 245, Der Bund deutscher Frauenvereine, *Eine Darlegung seiner Aufgaben und Ziele und seiner bisherigen Entwicklung*, vol. 5, *Schriften des Bundes Deutscher Frauenvereine* (Frankenberg, 1900), 5–6.
28. *Ibid.*, 6.
29. BDF, “Pressbericht.” Marie Stritt (1855–1928) was chair of the BDF from 1899 to 1910; from 1911, she headed the *Verbandes für Frauenstimmrecht* (Association for Women’s Voting Rights); on Stritt’s contentious term as chairwoman of the BDF and her resignation as a result of the BDF’s rejection of the *Bund für Mutterschutz*’s application for membership, see Repp, *Reformers*, 124–126; for a recent biography of Stritt, see Elke Schüller, *Marie Stritt: Eine ‘kampffrohe Streiterin in der Frauenbewegung* (Königstein im Taunus, 2005).
30. BDF, “Was die Frauenbewegung.”
31. HLA-BDF, Karton 49, Mappe 219, Anna Pappritz, “Grundsätze und Forderungen der Frauenbewegung für die Erwerbstätigkeit der Frau,” in *Grundsätze und Forderungen der Frauenbewegung*, ed. Bund Deutscher Frauenvereine, special edition of vol. 1 (Berlin, 1912).
32. Pappritz, *Hinaus*, 6; emphasis in text.
33. Lange, *Frauenbewegung*, 6.
34. *Ibid.*, 11.
35. Salomon, “Zölibat,” 241; emphasis in text.
36. BDF, “Was die Frauenbewegung”; emphasis in text.
37. Salomon, “Zölibat,” 242.
38. *Ibid.*
39. *Ibid.*; emphasis in text.
40. BDF, “Grundsätze,” 1907.
41. BDF, “Was die Frauenbewegung.”
42. *Ibid.*
43. See Ute Planert, *Antifeminismus im Kaiserreich* (Göttingen, 1998), and Roger Chickering, “Casting their Gaze More Broadly’: Women’s Patriotic Activism in Imperial Germany,” *Past and Present* 118 (1988): 156–185.
44. G. von Beaulieu [pseud. Ulla Hirschfeld Wolff], “Die Vereinsdame,” in *Die Berlinerin* (Berlin, 1897), 318–336; Wolff (1850–1924) was a Jewish novelist and playwright, best known under the alias Ulrich Frank.
45. See chapter 1.
46. *Ibid.*, 330.
47. *Ibid.*, 329–330.
48. See chapter 2 for a sexological typology of the *Mannweib*, or virago.
49. Wolff, “Vereinsdame,” 330.
50. *Ibid.*, 331–332.
51. “From such a good family,” eliciting Gabriele Reuter’s novel; see chapter 1.
52. Wolff, “Vereinsdame,” 332–333.
53. *Ibid.*, 336.
54. Michael Hau, *The Cult of Health and Beauty in Germany: A Social History, 1890–1930* (Chicago, 2003), 56.
55. Ludwig Langemann, *Auf falschem Weg. Beiträge zur Kritik der radikalen Frauenbewegung* (Berlin, 1913), 2.
56. Cited in HLA, Papers of the BDF (hereafter HLA-BDF), Karton 13, Mappe 45, Maria Wendland, “Zur Frauenemanzipation,” *Bonner General Anzeiger*, 23 June 1912.
57. On Gnauck-Kühne, see chapter 8.
58. Ludwig Langemann, *Der Deutsche Bund zur Bekämpfung der Frauenemanzipation* (Berlin, 1913), 6.
59. Langemann, *Weg*, 8.
60. Eduard von Hartmann, “Die Jungfernfrage: Schluss,” in *Die Gegenwart* 35 (1891): 133.
61. Langemann, *Bund*, 10.

62. Langemann, *Weg*, 2–3; emphasis in text.
63. Langemann, *Bund*, 12; emphasis in text.
64. HLA-BDF, Karton 13, Mappe 45; cited in Marianne Weber, “Zur Frauenbewegung,” *Heidelberger Zeitung*, 10 December 1910; emphasis in text; Rüge’s comments reflect the deep strain of anti-Semitism in anti-feminist thought; see Planert, *Antifeminismus*, 93–96.
65. Allen, *Feminism* (1991), 189.
66. Langemann, *Bund*, 12.
67. See chapter 2.
68. Wendland, “*Frauenemanzipation*.”
69. Lange, *Lebenserinnerungen*, 29–30.
70. Bäumer, *Frau*, 162; cited in Lange, *Lebenserinnerungen*, 118.
71. On Reuter’s *Aus guter Familie*, see chapter 1.
72. Wendland, “*Frauenemanzipation*.”
73. Pappritz, “Frauenarbeit,” 1–2.
74. Helene Lange, *Die höhere Mädchenschule und ihre Bestimmung* (Berlin, 1881); cited in Lange, *Lebenserinnerungen*, 150–151.
75. *Cologne Gazette*, 14 October 1888; cited in Helene Lange, *Higher Education of Women in Europe*, trans. L.R. Klemm (New York, 1890), 183.
76. *Ibid.*, 183–185; emphasis in text.
77. See Conclusion.
78. Weber, *Frauenbewegung*; Marianne Weber (1870–1954) had a varied and important career in the moderate women’s movement; she wrote several books and articles on philosophy and sociology, and played an active role in the BDF, serving as its chair from 1919 to 1923; the wife (and cousin) of Max Weber, she is best known for her 1926 biography of her husband; for a discussion of Marianne Weber’s views on marriage in the context of the sexual reform movement, see Andrew Bonnell, “Robert Michels, Max Weber, and the Sexual Question,” *The European Legacy* 3(6) (1998): 98.
79. Weber, *Frauenbewegung*, emphasis in text.
80. Max Haushofer, “Die Ehefrage im Deutschen Reich,” in *Der Existenzkampf in modernen Leben*, ed. Gustav Dahms (Berlin, 1895), 63; quoted in Amy Hackett, “The Politics of Feminism in Wilhelmine Germany, 1890–1918” (Ph.D. diss., Columbia University, 1976), 41.
81. BDF, “Was die Frauenbewegung”; emphasis in text.
82. HLA-BDF, Karton 14, Mappe 45, “Für und wider die Frauen,” *Neue Züricher Zeitung*, 27 June 1912.

PART II

Alleinstehende Frauen

WOMEN STANDING ALONE

The concept of the *Frauenüberschuß* (female surplus) cut across ideological boundaries that separated the German women's movement into moderate, radical, socialist, and religious camps. While employing different tactics and pursuing distinctive goals, advocates of women's rights had to fight against the reified status of the spinster as outcast. Part II of *The Surplus Woman* explores the ways in which the perceived plight of unwed women inspired the careers of seven female activists of Imperial Germany: Helene Lange, Alice Salomon, Helene Stöcker, Ruth Bré, Lily Braun, Clara Zetkin, and Elisabeth Gnauck-Kühne. Unable to entirely escape the prejudice of their age, these women sought to transform the category of *alte Jungfern* from a status of vulnerability into a new domain of independent women: women standing alone.

MODERATE ACTIVISM

Helene Lange and Alice Salomon



Alleinstehende Frauen—literally, women standing alone—led the moderate German women’s movement.¹ The leadership of the largest women’s associations of the *Kaiserreich* (Imperial Germany) advocated the belief that women lived in an era of pervasive and sometimes pernicious change. That change, spurred by industrial and technological innovation, had forced women from the protective environs of *Kinder, Küche, und Kirche* (children, kitchen, and church). Made redundant in their childhood household by the advances of technology, thousands of women would not be able to count on the likelihood of establishing their own homes in marriage. This understanding of the female surplus served as the primary springboard for the moderate women’s movement of Imperial Germany.²

Female activists found themselves continually assessing the meaning of woman’s *Beruf* (vocation, calling). Maternalist sensibilities hallowed the female mission as wife and mother, yet the movement predicated its pragmatic appeal for female occupation and engagement in the broader society upon an understanding that fulfillment could be realized outside of the home.³ Complicating this delicate balance of ideology and interests was the fact that the various states of Imperial Germany largely prohibited married women from professional work.⁴ Rare exceptions were occasionally granted in the cases of married teachers, but, for the most part, wedded women of the *Kaiserreich* were barred from gaining job-related credentials and from being admitted to civil professions. More than their European and North American counterparts, leaders of the German women’s movement thus had no choice but to grapple with marital status as a central component of the woman’s question. The terms of the debate were set in both law

and custom: women could work only if they were single, and many single women had no choice but to work.

Moderate activists thus argued for expanded women's rights based upon the conditions of the status quo and tended to refrain from arguments founded on the equality of the sexes. The reformers considered in this chapter set about providing what they believed to be practical solutions to a pressing problem created at the nexus of the economy, law, gender, and nature. In response, mainstream leaders of the German women's movement embraced the maternal essence of the female and sought reform on this basis.⁵ Moderates campaigned for more expansive female education and greater professional opportunities through a maternalist vision inspired by the belief in a demographic event. This chapter examines the advocacy of Helene Lange and Alice Salomon in the fields of education and social work, respectively. Both of these women consistently maintained that their advocacy was created by a demographic and economic upheaval, essentially arguing that without the *Frauenüberschuß*, there would be no *Frauenbewegung* (women's movement).

“Sharpening the Wooden Sword”: Helene Lange and Education

The moderate women's movement realized some of its greatest achievements in the educational domain. By 1914, reformers of female education had succeeded in gaining female admittance to some universities, opening access to occupational areas that required professional certification, modernizing the curriculum of girls' schools, and providing expanded career opportunities for female teachers. The most significant and recognized reformer of women's education was Helene Lange, from the publication of her critical “Yellow Brochure” in 1887 until her death in 1930. Education was the most important vessel through which spiritual motherhood could transform German society. But as the *Bund Deutscher Frauenvereine* (BDF; Federation of German Women's Associations) described the state of education in 1898: “With a wooden sword, one cannot fight, and today's women's movement is a wooden sword in a struggle for existence ... The higher girls' schools, with their accumulation of superficial knowledge, are not suitable to prepare girls for serious work in any area.”⁶ Helene Lange dedicated her career to sharpening the wooden sword by transforming middle-class female education.

Born in 1848 in Oldenburg, Lange was orphaned at the age of sixteen. Like many middle-class females of her generation who were denied the haven of their parents' home, Helene turned to teaching. Left with only a very small income, Lange recalled in her autobiography that not long after her father's death, she realized that “childhood was past, the time of independent life formation, youth, began.”⁷ Lange's memoirs reveal no yearning for marriage and recount a smooth path toward becoming a teacher.⁸ She cherished the profession, making its promotion her life's work. Her early career included four years as a governess followed by fifteen years of teaching at a Berlin school for elite young women.

Lange left fulltime teaching in 1891, thereafter devoting herself to reform movements in the realms of both education and women's rights.⁹ Over the next three decades, she became a central figure in the debates surrounding the German woman question, leading one historian to call her the "leader of the German's women's movement."¹⁰ In the last ten years of her life, Lange receded from a leadership role. Her 1930 autobiography, published in the year of her death, reveals a lifetime commitment to expanding opportunities for women and providing an educational system in which they could flourish.¹¹

Lange's activist career was enhanced by her partnership with Gertrud Bäumer, Lange's successor as the spiritual leader of the moderate German women's movement. Twenty-five years younger than Lange, Bäumer emerged to become a prominent political figure in both Imperial and Weimar Germany. Her early career followed the path of many other principal figures in the women's movement: from teacher to association member, on to writing and leadership. Bäumer and Lange's friendship began at the 1897 national meeting of the *Allgemeiner Deutscher Lehrerinnenverein* (ADL; General Association of German Female Teachers). The following year, Bäumer moved to Berlin and became Lange's assistant, a critical position due to Lange's chronic vision problems. The two formed a working partnership and were life companions until Lange's 1930 death. Both their reformist activity and the nature of Lange and Bäumer's private partnership have been the subject of significant recent scholarship in the fields of sociology, education studies, and history.¹²

Lange and Bäumer's private partnership existed in the very public domain of the associational meetings, publications, and lectures of the Berlin women's movement. They were arguably the two most prominent women's rights advocates of the *Kaiserreich* (Lange's era of activity) and Weimar Germany (when Bäumer emerged as a *Deutsche Demokratishce Partei* [DDP; German Democratic Party] representative in the *Reichstag* and a figure of great significance in the interwar women's movement). In positions of increasing leadership, the two women advocated for the rights of single women. Lange linked the origins of the women's movement directly to the onset of industrialization, which, like "a callous hand," had "brushed across the domestic hearth and directed millions of women out into the world."¹³ Empathy for the plight of the surplus woman permeates the writing of both Lange and Bäumer. The juxtaposition of their private partnership and their public activism bears no small measure of irony, for two of the best-known *alleinstehende Frauen* of the German women's movement did not stand alone in their private lives. Yet this tension between the public and private gets at the very heart of the *Frauenüberschuß* as a problematic cohort in German society. Regardless of the contours of her private life, the surplus woman stood alone in the eyes of the law, the universities, the professions, and—more broadly—in the culture of Imperial Germany. Lange and Bäumer's linkage and symmetry on key issues regarding women's rights provided both a distinct foundation to the mainstream German women's movement as well as a clear target against which opponents could aim. As to their personal lives, it is important that Lange and

Bäumer's own strict delineation between private and public be reflected in the historical approach to their biographies.

The *Lebensgemeinschaft* (life partnership) formed by Lange and Bäumer emerged first out of their common experience as teachers. The arena of education formed both the starting point and the central preoccupation of Helene Lange's reformist vision. Lange's views on female education reflected debates that were over a century old. In the late eighteenth-century, Joachim Heinrich Campe and Dorothea Leporin promoted a vision of German female education that incorporated elements of Jean-Jacques Rousseau's advocacy of gender-specific education. Campe and Leporin believed that female secondary education ought to be restricted primarily to elites and that the instruction of girls and boys would be separate (and not very equal).¹⁴ The education would prepare a young woman to meet her *Bestimmung* (designation), a term which signified the female duty toward her intended sphere of home and family.¹⁵ In the second half of the nineteenth century, female curriculum moved beyond the foundations promoted by Campe and Leporin. Increasingly, girls' schools reduced the emphasis on embroidery and the refined arts and began to offer more courses on literature, language, and science, a menu of courses which ultimately culminated in what historian James Albisetti has called a "cluttered curriculum."¹⁶

By the time Helene Lange began to teach, instruction of German girls had thus haphazardly expanded to include more academic subjects. Yet the limitations placed upon the education of bourgeois young women were myriad. While much of Lange's reform work focused on the future by addressing specific issues such as curriculum, teacher training, and the ratio of female to male instructors in girls' schools, she nonetheless offered sharp censure of the past and present systems. She argued that the nineteenth-century system sold its pupils short by training them only to be good and vapid wives. Lange powerfully made this case in an assessment of Rousseau's influence: "Nothing will change with German female education as long as the German woman is taught in correspondence with Rousseau's very questionable opinions regarding female education, as long as the intellectually dependent woman is best because ... she will meet the interests of a future husband whose way of thinking she cannot possibly foresee."¹⁷ Such an education amounted to mere obedience training.

Led by Lange in 1887, a group of female educators sent a petition to the Prussian Ministry of Education that came to be known as the "Yellow Brochure." The document demanded more extensive training for teachers in higher girls' schools as well as an expanded role for women in the management of such schools.¹⁸ Arguing that the German system suffered in comparison to other industrial nations, Lange envied the structure of girls' education in "America, England, France, Holland, in almost all of the cultured states; the intolerable conditions of young women's education remains with us alone."¹⁹ The brochure accepted the principle of separate schools and advocated an instructional program similar to that of boys' schools, including more practical curriculum and vocational training. Since the schools would continue to be separate, Lange argued that females would best

be suited to teach “ethical subjects’ such as religion, history, and literature” in girls’ schools.²⁰

The ideas presented in the 1887 petition were not new, for Lange and other female educators had previously made similar claims under the auspices of teachers’ associations. In a strictly political sense, the petition ultimately failed because both the Prussian Education Ministry and State Assembly rejected the call for change.²¹ Yet the “Yellow Brochure” touched off widespread discussion of the nature of female education and initiated a proliferation of petitions in the years to come. The extent of the reaction and its often very polemic nature compelled Lange to leave teaching in 1891 to campaign fulltime for educational reform.

Debate over female education in the late nineteenth century reflected the rising fixation on marital status as a central component of the woman question. Concern about the female surplus permeated all aspects of the discussion. Women’s rights advocates like Lange regularly noted the impact of the “unfavorable numerical conditions and unfavorable marriage possibilities” facing young German women.²² Advocates of female education utilized the *Frauenüberschuß* to advance their cause. Such advocacy was rooted in a gendered social code. Lange’s vision of female education rested upon a maternalist understanding of German society. Women were not to be educated to compete with men, but to stand beside them in creating a better world—patriarch and matriarch renewed.

Lange’s educational reform and her critique of extant practice focused on the middle-class, for bourgeois interests formed the core of the moderate women’s movement. Lange justified her focus on the middle-class through an analysis of the demography so essential to the moderate movement’s self-understanding: “According to the census of December 1, 1885, Germany had 15,181,823 adult women ... Of these 52.3% were married ... 34% were unmarried ... 13.7% had been married ... there must be [at least] five million women, unmarried or widows, who temporarily or permanently earn their own living.” She linked this rudimentary analysis to social class: “As far as the lower strata of society are concerned, a part of them find occupation quite easily ... Many of these have to toil inexpressibly, but they have at least the satisfaction that ... in these walks of life there are no arbitrarily made differences between man and woman. The woman question in the lower classes is therefore only an integral part of the great social problem.”²³ Lange expunged the impact of the demographic crisis upon working-class women by implying that such women were perpetually damaged—no marriage crisis could worsen their lot. Moreover, these women were accustomed to unskilled labor. Because the industrial economy offered little differentiation between working-class men and women, the educational and occupational opportunities of female laborers were not in arrears. Thus, for the most part, Lange excluded working-class women from her reformist platform.

Lange viewed the *Frauenüberschuß* as a middle-class affair:

In the middle and higher classes we meet an arbitrary disparity, hence, one that may easily be removed; and in these classes we meet most unmarried women. Here man has privileges;

he has not only advantages given him by nature, but also advantages bestowed upon him by society, that is, by his own sex; and thus the weight of the misery, which may be supposed if we look at the foregoing figures, is doubled. He has all the opportunities for education, and all imaginable facilities. To woman is denied the state's sanction, even to an education acquired independently of state aid, except the professional education of a teacher. To him are open all the many places in the civil service, where life-long maintenance awaits him; to women places are open to such limited extent that they almost disappear from sight.²⁴

Omitting statistical analysis, Lange claimed that more unmarried women were to be found among the bourgeoisie, tapping into the general understanding of the female surplus. The crux of the issue then was straightforward: middle-class women did not have the educational or institutional opportunities that were available to middle-class men. Yet by identifying the middle-class unmarried as her target for reform, Lange had to grapple with a deep-seated, archaic stereotype: the *alte Jungfer*, or old maid.

The inequity between the bourgeois old maid and the bachelor offended Lange's sensibility, because she believed that single men bore no small measure of responsibility for the female surplus. Lange claimed that while middle-class men waited longer to marry as they gained professional training and advancement, they remained free to engage in amorous liaisons at will. Adding injury to insult, these same men often were most vocal in opposing the expansion of middle-class female education and work opportunities: "A cry of desperation is raised among the better educated classes ... when their women make an attempt at participating in male privileges in order to acquire the knowledge made necessary for competition ... they are ever and again reminded of their 'natural calling.'"²⁵ Those men who "exercised their sex outside of marriage"²⁶ refused bourgeois women the opportunities to exercise their intellect or capacity for work. Lange condemned the double standard: "Verily, he is not to be envied for his heart or his judgment who in the face of the foregoing figures still has the courage to point out to those who cry for bread or a satisfactory sphere of activity a calling which they are unable to follow ... The fate of women is made easier by opening all the professions, and thus offering at least a limited number of them satisfactory maintenance."²⁷ Lange castigated all who hallowed a ground upon which single women could not walk.

Because so many women could not exercise their "natural calling," Lange argued that middle-class men needed to expand their understanding of the female *Bestimmung* and open professional and educational avenues for women. The ideology of spiritual motherhood provided a comforting framework from which to straddle the realms of tradition and progress. Steering clear of advocacy limited only to single women, Lange maintained that improved female education would serve all women. Among the married, lack of education would leave a wife unprepared for the consequential undertaking of motherhood. In the "Yellow Brochure," Lange asked: "Does one really then believe ... the education which the school gives to our girls is suitable preparation?" Responding to her own cue, Lange declared that a mother needed to be "educated as a person whose abilities are developed for their own sake ... who has learned to set her intellectual

and spiritual life in connection with a set of daily duties ... which through the breadth of its scope and the depth of her understanding commands her child's attention ... We want to develop a noble, mentally and morally independent personality."²⁸ To meet this goal, teachers would have to be trained in far more enlightened ways. More rigorous training would cultivate teachers who could both understand and convey values. In this way, Lange's vision emphasized the feminine by making it distinct from the superficial.

Problems with the existing system went beyond a dulling curriculum. Women also faced practical limitations because of the limited schooling options and professional opportunities available to them. Even those who emerged from the girls' schools with a modicum of independence and intelligence, even "these bearers of raised heads and firm steps were not to be allowed to stride through life. Limited to the confined space of a few occupations 'appropriate to their station,' these women could hardly gain internal security and independent pride through the modest domestic work as 'companion' or in a contested teaching position."²⁹ The education problem reflected the entire woman question. According to Lange, women faced a "real and legal sphere in which, under the conditions of modern production, their abilities have no full worth and in which they have no freedom to pursue the requirements of their happiness."³⁰ Improper education not only created dependence, but it could well lead to a rotten life. Such would be the result, Lange warned, if a girl suffered through shallow schooling while "all the paths to worthwhile and satisfying employment are obstructed by an insufficient education and she must lifelong endure one of the many monotonous and poorly paid positions of women's work."³¹

The female surplus lurked in this sad fate: "Who is bold enough to assert that *every* young lady in our wealthy families can find sufficient occupation for her internal and external life if she but look for it?" Lange did not demand that all unwed women work, arguing that "there are families in which daughters are sufficiently and satisfactorily occupied with domestic duties; there are other girls who without being really occupied are contented in beautifying the lives of their parents and friends ... until they marry; or, if they do not marry, lead a happy, peaceful existence, full of blessing for others, as the ever welcome 'aunties.'" The *alte Jungfer* lives on in this image, as the happy, if perhaps addled, aunt. But such devotion could not be guaranteed: "Blissful such an existence is only when it is chosen voluntarily. If the girl who is to beautify life fights a battle royal with the desire to be of use, to create an existence of her own, it would seem a downright sin committed upon undying reason to deny it to her, provided no real duty intercedes. It stands to reason that not all these young girls can devote themselves to university studies; the guard against modern pessimism is not university culture, but *work*—useful, practical work."³² Lange gave agency to the hackneyed image of the old maid by offering her a most crucial choice—to be an auntie, or not to be? It was the unmarried woman's question to answer. But she could not make such a choice without an education; she could not carve her existence with a wooden sword.

Poor education did not invent the elusive promise of marriage that so plagued unmarried girls and young women. Lange blamed the proliferation of false marital hopes on the illusions of middle-class families who did not know quite what to do with unwed daughters: "In very many cases, what obstructs the way to a respectable female education is simply the thoughtless habit of regarding girls as family assistance without raising concern over their future." Though some families still relied on the domestic skills of adult daughters, "even in such cases the question may not be ignored: What later becomes of them, after they have cared for little siblings and helped their mother, perhaps through their best years? Such thoughtless ... demands by the family on the time and strength of the daughters have already laid the foundation for many unfortunate, purposeless and helpless female existences."³³ The economic plight of the single woman is latent in this description. Lange assumed that 'later' would impose a demand for some form of female economic self-sufficiency. If unmarried daughters were 'unfortunate, purposeless, and helpless,' thoughtless families were unintentionally responsible. Families had to consider the future by educating their daughters and offering them preparation for the unknown. Lange again gave credence to the stereotype of the idle single woman, inverting it in order to promote her cause of more accessible and practical female education.

While the institutional domain of education was the primary target of Lange's reformist efforts, she also supported a vigorous reorientation of the domestic sphere. Bourgeois families ultimately created barriers to female happiness as great as those established by ill-designed education. Limited by their own unworthy educations, mothers failed to provide daughters with the knowledge and sense of self that could prepare them for the modern world. Lange believed that domestic education was as slipshod as that found in girls' schools and at its worse "consciously and unconsciously awoke in [daughters] the conviction that their brothers were the more important part of the family and that women would have to adjust themselves to serve and to set aside their own desires. This was done in the belief that every girl would marry and ... through the traditions of readiness to serve and sacrifice, the woman would find her natural complement in the man's equally strong traditions of chivalrous protection and tender attentions." Lange decried the link between the anticipation of marriage and a domestic training centered on subservience: "Whoever knows of life knows that this belief has deceived often enough ... and that some women would have been better raised for their fate with a little more self-esteem and independence ... This notion of female natural dependency and selflessness has in the past strengthened and trained in brutal natures everything other than the chivalrous sense of the protector."³⁴

Despite curricular and institutional reform, the existing educational system could not change until parents recognized daughters as equal to sons in their quests for knowledge and opportunity. Lange urged parents to value their children equally, for "boys must learn to see in the sister an equal companion from whom just as much is required, who therefore must be respected. The boy will take his criteria for the judgment of the woman, however, not only from his sister,

but his mother.”³⁵ Egalitarianism would require a reformation of the household. In 1912, after universities had been opened to female matriculants and significant curricular advancements had begun to make headway, Lange wrote about the work yet to be done:

What use is it that we have the best educational opportunities for girls, if in the parents' house the opinion still prevails that it does not very much matter what girls learn? If the parents themselves, who know quite well that their daughters may come into a situation in which they have to stand on their own feet, cannot decide to equip them for it? ... The development of the girl of modern times not only depends upon what she has learned and which examinations she has passed, but also upon how she is *raised*, how her character, her self-confidence, her courage to face life, her physical health and emotional strength is developed. Therefore, knowledge of the new conditions of life in which women are placed today must find its way into the customs of domestic education. All mothers must be imbued with [the knowledge] that it is not enough to train girls in the traditional style which, in different conditions, is certainly valuable and expedient, but instead they must bestow attention in the education on the new demands which are placed on women today.³⁶

In order to raise daughters well, mothers had to abandon the notion of marriage as the end goal and saving grace of the female life.

Lange believed that both mothers and female teachers played uniquely important roles in equipping girls for life. Because the female nature was configured completely differently from the male, girls needed to be educated predominately by women in single sex schools instead of attempting to compete in male schools and in imitation of their fathers and brothers. This difference between the sexes was of transcendent origin: “So far as Nature dictates a division of vocations, we all agree ... ‘At the anvil I shall always imagine a man; at the cradle, always a woman.’”³⁷ Lange asserted that the female intellect was just as sharp as that of the male, but quite differently attuned. Men had taken hold of occupations that demanded mental agility because they were “more interesting and more lucrative”—and because they had created the institutions that furthered their abilities to do such work.³⁸ But women merited a unique place in the public sphere: “*Creative* intellectual capacities are at hand in the woman as well, a spiritual productivity that rises not from the mind, but from her motherliness, which although borne out of the gender designation ... penetrates each *genuine* woman, independent of physical love and maternity.”³⁹

Spiritual motherhood proceeded from every true woman, whether she was wife and mother or not. Herein lay the solution to the female surplus. Education would enhance the ‘creative intellectual capacities’ stemming from the maternal nature of the surplus woman and these capacities would be transmitted to society through work: “This spiritual female productivity is just as necessary to the world as the purely mental male productivity. And therefore this spiritual productivity is the true educational goal for the woman.” Marital status no longer had to define womanhood: “Once this specific female power is awakened, brought to blossom, then it can never ‘wither in isolation’, it must make itself felt, whether to the good

of one's own family or in an independently chosen circle."⁴⁰ In this passage from her autobiography, Lange embraces her fellow single women and offers them a vocation.

The creative maternal capacity separated women from men and gave them purpose. In this understanding of the female role, Lange differentiated herself from prominent feminist thinkers such as John Stuart Mill and the German activist, Hedwig Dohm.⁴¹ Exposure to these authors sparked an awakening in Lange's own feminist understanding. After reading Mill and Dohm in the 1880s, Lange began to object to the notion "that women could just as well fill the sphere designated as male, sometimes perhaps even better than the average man, that the woman is liberated due to her humanity and must be admitted to the male sphere of activity, [these ideas] were to me missing what was most compelling, most primary." Female exceptionalism became the bedrock of her activist ideology: "There was much that *only* women could do, which men could not do or not as well, that equal rights then did not have to be demanded for the sake of the equality, but instead for the sake of the inequality of the sexes, that one-sided male culture must be completed by the female." Insistence upon female distinctiveness emerged into an agenda for the entire women's movement: "At that time I had not yet formulated in such a way that the goal of the women's movement is the full cultural imprint and unlimited social effect of the female personality; nevertheless it lived underground in such a way not only in my consciousness, but also in that of so many women who at all concerned themselves with these problems."⁴²

The feminine spirit had singular tasks before it. Male culture had dismissed women from the home, shattered traditional family life, and created economic uncertainty. Those who had destroyed the private domain had to be countered by their victims, but not drawn into competition with them. They would work from different capacities and in separate arenas. Lange sought "to prove that the one-sided male economy had functioned in just such a way in the world and functioned as would motherlessness in the family." Just as children suffered without a mother, so Germany labored under the ill effects of male industry. Lange's views about the ravages of modernity formed the basis for her opposition to Mill and Dohm: "I was elevated by Stuart Mill and Hedwig Dohm directly to the conviction of the fundamental difference between both sexes ... The conviction slowly formed in me that the basic construction of the sexes could not be shifted through similar education and that it is a precondition for many occupations and spheres of activity which the woman can transform and fulfill with her special characteristics."⁴³ Arguments of female exceptionalism reflected the pervasive maternalism of the era, enhanced the appeal of the women's movement, legitimated activism on behalf of single women, and provided a gesture of comfort to the unwed.

Such a view dictated that female education was instinctively women's work. Lange saw the field of education as a fulfillment of the maternal vocation and argued that the responsibility of teaching could not be left to inadequate training: "In our hands is the education of the coming humanity, the care of the noble

qualities which make humans human: morality, love, fear of God. We are to cultivate the world of the mind in the child, are to teach the child . . . to respect the godly more than the temporal, the moral more than the sensual; but we should also teach the child to think and function.”⁴⁴ This passage from the “Yellow Brochure” summarized Lange’s reformist platform: female education had to be joined with woman’s distinct nature and character; it had to inculcate social and cultural values—who could object to a curriculum seeking morality, love, and fear of God?—and it had to transcend the current offerings of the German system.

Education directed toward establishing a vocation would help women to cultivate their maternal qualities. Proper schooling would provide “the habits of dutiful work, orderliness, and independence.”⁴⁵ The teaching profession, especially, would transmit to the next generation the maternal characteristics of patience, insight, and understanding. Genuine education, both that provided by teachers in the classroom and that which they received in their own training, “shows us our responsibilities . . . in a new light and teaches us to fulfill them from another spirit . . . it even frees us thereby from all the thousands of prejudices which pull from one generation to another, and exactly which the teacher, who educates the future mothers, necessarily must eliminate.”⁴⁶ Guided by maternal instinct, learners and teachers would thrive in an atmosphere that bolstered morality, celebrated reason, extinguished prejudice, and perpetuated motherhood. The work of the teacher responded to and fulfilled the most vital interests of civilization. And those teachers would almost certainly be unmarried, for while Lange in principle supported the right of wedded women to teach, she also argued that in practice, teachers should very rarely be married—and absolutely should not be mothers.⁴⁷ As James Albisetti has put it, Lange viewed the ban on married teachers as an invasion of the private sphere: “women teachers should have the right to marry, but few should make use of it.”⁴⁸

The profession of teaching not only could help to transform German society, but it also could create community for *alleinstehende Frauen*. The ADL, founded by Lange and Auguste Schmidt in 1890, became the most prominent women’s organization involved in educational reform. It played an important role in expanding teaching opportunities for women and making more academically rigorous the curricula in girls’ schools.⁴⁹ The ADL gave its mostly unwed membership a venue in which to learn occupational solidarity and create a professional culture. But it did more: in Lange’s eyes, the ADL provided an ersatz family. Lange’s autobiography described the development of organizational solidarity: “A feeling emerged in us. Service to an idea had come out of the profession that so many had grasped on to in emergency.” Driven by urgency, unwed women found community in a circle of teachers. The ADL sought to provide a forum in which women collectively could express “what individually we had long felt: ‘We love our profession, we rejoice in it, we feel that we belong together as a class and in our job we fulfill one of the most important tasks of civilization . . . Thus we feel a belonging that means something more than that which is created from daily or material interests; thus we feel an earnestness which turns our thoughts toward the

eternal, the godly.”⁵⁰ The ADL provided in a communal structure what Lange’s own reform efforts and writing had sought to establish: affirmation of fulfilling work as a new *Bestimmung*, sanctioned in eternal and godly form.

Through such affectionate mutuality, the single female teacher could be transformed from an isolated creature into the mother of the new world. Forced into teaching out of economic duress, the unwed woman could live out her years in service to an idea and in communion with colleagues just like her—a new family. Lange held that these women together would guide the women’s movement: “We felt ... that exactly we teachers had to bring our deciding weight to bear in the women’s movement, that it must be we who fought for the female direction of girls’ development and education, so that they could unshackle in the youth their special female powers, make voices from echoes.” This new sphere of female activity not only satisfied a demographic crisis in the present, but it would anticipate and erase such trauma for the future. Lange continued: “We knew that we stood at the threshold of a development which had to initiate one of the most important periods in the history of human thought: the introduction of new productive forces to a unilaterally oriented world.”⁵¹ Such a grand vision was less utopian than essential, given the modern conditions of middle-class life. Lange believed that, more than any other professionals, female teachers understood the trauma of the modern age—for they themselves had suffered so greatly at its hands. Their suffering would propel them to the most important work of their time: the development of young women prepared to inspire the world with a transformative maternalist vision.

Serving the Family: Alice Salomon and Social Work

The developing field of social work provided an important sphere of engagement for women in Imperial Germany. This new field called for women to become a source of aid where traditional economic and familial supports were not available. Social work brought together the domestic sphere and the public domain, providing a form of motherhood recreated. The life and career of Alice Salomon offers an important case study both in the dissemination of spiritual motherhood and in the appropriation of the *Frauenüberschuß* as a justification for German female activism. Salomon’s work demonstrates a commitment to the infusion of maternalist principles into society and further illustrates the anxiety regarding life opportunities for single middle-class women.

Maternalist thought plays an important role in the evolution of social welfare practice and policy. Historians Seth Koven and Sonya Michel have shown how maternalist ideology and the welfare state developed concurrently in several different Western national contexts.⁵² Koven and Michel offer a historical framework for considering maternalism in the arena of social work. The historians define maternalism as the “ideologies and discourses that exalted women’s capacity to mother and applied to society as a whole the values they attached to that role:

care, nurturance, and morality.”⁵³ Care and nurturance stemmed from the formative traditions of bourgeois charity work, which sought to provide improved living conditions to the underprivileged through confessionally based relief organizations, groups dedicated to health, hygiene, and sanitation, or almsgiving societies.⁵⁴ Maternalist efforts at social reform sought to apply care and nurturance to a higher calling: the greater good of the human community. If motherly love could ease the burdens of poverty, it potentially could be applied to an array of issues including unemployment, sexuality, crime, rapid urbanization, and the implications of industrial development.

Imperial Germany provides a particularly apt case for evaluating the legacy of maternalism in establishing the welfare state and in considering the development of social work as a profession. Two essential elements characterized the German social state at the end of the century: a long-standing tradition of voluntary poor relief and a dynamic battery of national support programs instituted by Otto von Bismarck. Before the turn of the century, the most organized form of voluntary social work was known as the Elberfeld system.⁵⁵ Established in 1853, the Elberfeld system entailed the visitation of poor families by volunteers who evaluated the level of need. Those who were judged indolent or otherwise ill-suited for support were denied aid. This policy did not embrace a holistic concept of welfare in its format for assistance; only those who met the volunteers’ standard for aid received it. These unpaid workers were not philanthropists. Local taxes provided financial relief in cases where need was ascertained, making the Elberfeld system a quasi-municipal project. Because of their essential role in disseminating monies, the Elberfeld volunteers (though they were uncompensated) can be considered the first German social workers. The blurred line between volunteer and professional status of German social workers would remain entrenched as the vocation evolved. A final aspect of the Elberfeld system is significant: because of municipal involvement in poor relief, the program maintained that only full citizens could serve as volunteer visitors—and citizens were men. The earliest form of German social work excluded women from service.

German maternalists such as Alice Salomon favored an approach to social welfare that rejected the Elberfeld role of moral judgment and instead attempted to understand and eradicate poverty at its roots. Middle-class women’s charitable groups of the *Kaiserreich* adopted a maternalist approach to social care that focused on issues including child care, public housing, education, and health care.⁵⁶ Maternalists determined need on the basis of privation rather than merit, an evaluative process that reflected the class stratification of Imperial Germany. Class informed every aspect of social reform; while male volunteers exercised judgment about the indigent, female social reformers based their efforts on a sustaining belief that the poor required supervision and guidance as well as care and nurturance.

Indeed, class anxiety served as the primary motivating force behind the earliest social welfare programs established during Bismarck’s chancellorship of united Germany (1871–1890). Bismarck had hoped to gain the allegiance of the work-

ing-class to the young German state through a dual approach of anti-socialist policies and a broad system of national social support. Bismarck's social policy, instituted in the 1880s, included a national health insurance package, accident insurance for injured workers, and a social security program, which provided a modest pension for retired workers.⁵⁷ These programs served to solidify two central principles of German social reform. First, employing a model established by Koven and Michel, Germany emerged as a "strong state" by asserting its role as the primary protector of its populace.⁵⁸ As a result, activists like Alice Salomon would struggle to define a role for female social reformers outside of the state apparatus. Second, Bismarckian relief was afforded only to workers, barring the unemployed from coverage. This policy emulated the spirit of the Elberfeld system by demarcating those fit and unfit for state benevolence.

While Bismarck's social policy excluded female volunteers from the national welfare system, it also identified a mission for them. Those supplicants who fell beyond the state's purview became the wards of women. Voluntary female social work of the late nineteenth century evolved to especially embrace the disabled and discounted, including unemployed men, women, and children.

Alice Salomon emerged in this context as the most prominent voice calling for the development and professionalization of social work. The field of social work, and Salomon's career within it, has been the subject of a great deal of recent historical study.⁵⁹ Salomon was born in Berlin in 1872 into a moderately wealthy, nominally Jewish family that experienced a significant financial setback when Alice's father died in her early adolescence.⁶⁰ This crisis was formative in that it both greatly diminished Salomon's prospects for marriage and inspired in her empathetic responses toward the impoverished. Out of this childhood emerged a woman driven to serve. Salomon could not abide the prospect of a life of "domestic tedium"—a fear that historian Anja Schüller has noted as the "deciding motivation for taking up social work" for many middle-class German women.⁶¹ Instead of a life spent in idling uncertainty, Alice Salomon dedicated her life to improving social welfare and broadening the range of women's life choices. She believed that she and her middle-class peers were obligated by good fortune at birth to help and educate those less favored by circumstance.⁶² This worldview encouraged her in 1893 to become a founding member of the *Mädchen- und Frauengruppen für soziale Hilfsarbeit* (Girls' and Women's Group for Social Assistance), known as *die Gruppen* (the Groups).⁶³ In 1899, she took over the leadership of the organization and initiated a career that has been called the "first feminist approach to social work."⁶⁴

Under Salomon's helm, the Groups advocated the expansion of traditional charitable activities into professional work. Profession in this case denoted a calling, in the sense of *Beruf*, and not necessarily paid work. The emphasis on a vocational calling was vital to Salomon. She believed that she and her contemporaries were living in a noteworthy time in human history, one that urgently required middle-class women to soothe class antagonism and create a communal family. Salomon wrote of the ill effects of industrialization: "One need only think

of the origins of large-scale industry, of the time that the impulse for income boundlessly increased ... The division of labor severed the connection between the rich and poor ... [and] the foundation was laid for an alienation between the propertied and the property-less classes." Invoking socialist thought, Salomon asserted that class antagonism resulted from the industrial mode of production: "Societal atomization occurred ... so that today we have almost forgotten that we are members of a whole; that every time an individual member does harm, the prosperity of the whole is also undermined; [but] all—rich and poor—are inextricably connected to a greater organism."⁶⁵ For that organism to thrive, Salomon believed that middle-class women had to lead the promotion and provision of social welfare. The Groups thus sought to make more efficient and scientific the hodgepodge efforts of various charitable societies.

Salomon maintained that bourgeois female caregivers needed the fruits of social work as much as the destitute needed relief. Offering nurturance and moral guidance to those less fortunate had the potential to elevate the characters of middle-class women. Bismarckian social policy created a readily accessible group toward which to aim this maternalist fervor: the many who had been excluded from the social net. Salomon directed the exertions of the Groups toward this marginal population. She also criticized a view of social work as simple goodwill and charity, arguing that such a conception minimized the transformative capacity of the field for workers, clients, and German society alike: "If we, the propertied, use the liberation from heavy work that characterizes this age ... not to lead a life of idleness and immersion in the refined joys of life, but instead if we take from this the responsibility to become champions of a higher culture for all, it is not generosity, not charity, instead only just and fair behavior."⁶⁶ The aimless dilettante could be saved from an idle life through training in this sphere of essential activity.

Salomon's goals received a significant boost in 1908 when she established the first *Soziale Frauenschule* (Social School for Women) in Berlin. By this time, she had received special permission—"exceptions could be made for people with merit"—for university study and had earned her Ph.D. in economics under the tutelage of Max Sering, Gustav Schmoller, and Adolf Wagner.⁶⁷ The school she established after completing her dissertation would form the culmination of her intellectual and professional vision. The mission statement declared that "advanced education for young women should serve to strengthen the sense of duty to the family" and "offer training for both paid and volunteer regiments of social assistance workers."⁶⁸ By emphasizing female obligation to the family and encouraging the development of a new profession, the founders of the Berlin school built upon the efforts of the many leaders of the moderate German women's movement. The curriculum of Salomon's school echoed the aims of moderate maternalism not only by intending to bring motherly concern and loving discipline into social welfare, but also by establishing social work as a viable career path for unmarried bourgeois women while simultaneously building moral character.⁶⁹

Moved by the plight of single women seemingly left untethered and without hope of finding a spouse, Salomon sought to provide options for them. This concern for unmarried women was essential to Salomon's vision and corresponded to her maternalist leanings. In a study of German social work, historian Young Sun Hong has observed that the early schools were predominantly female in their formulation, reflecting "the intention of the leaders to make social work into an exclusively feminine realm." Salomon was the central figure in promoting female social work: "Alice Salomon argued that the sphere of women's public activities was one in which women's natural abilities and inclinations could be most fully realized ... Social work was to be a calling in which women could simultaneously realize their natural biological, and their public political roles."⁷⁰ Men could not equal female care and nurturance. Their efforts at social relief would fall ever short because the nature of social work affirmed essential gender difference. Though Salomon's writings did not articulate gender ideology in the same way as did Helene Lange's, a similar conviction about male and female difference pervaded her reformist stance.⁷¹

Salomon's program for social work engaged the concept of a female surplus. She worried about the fates of frivolous, aimless girls and linked what she believed to be their lack of depth to life in the industrial era. She wrote in 1913: "Today it is common knowledge ... that through industrial development and the advent of modern technology useful work in the household has declined, and that daughters in many cases can find no adequate sphere of activity." Commemorating her two decades of engagement with the Groups, Salomon noted that social work had begun to provide just such an adequate sphere: "Today the daughters of the middle-class ... have migrated into the professions, into gainful employment. Twenty years ago ... work still was something entirely out of the ordinary, almost something unfitting ... At that time, girls simply remained at home and remained uncultivated. One fed canaries, watered flower-pots, embroidered, played piano, and 'waited.'" Salomon evoked the spiritual and moral despair confronting middle-class girls who were left waiting: "Many became lonely or lost their belief in the meaning of life. But it was also a condition that was highly dangerous for the moral standards of young women. The absence of real work led so easily to a ... shadowy transformation of the entire existence towards superficiality and triviality ... [and] a squandering of life's energies that meant an injustice for all of society as well as for oneself."⁷² Proper training in professional social welfare offered a panacea. Social work brought mercy to the poor while also providing remedy and regeneration to the literal and figurative German mothers of the future.

The vocation of social work provided an outlet of motherly love for those young women whose idleness might otherwise pose a social threat. Salomon's 1913 text maintained that bourgeois female dilettantism was a thing of the past and that vocational engagement had channeled antiquated censure into professional admiration. Social work formed a perfect maternalist vehicle: "Just as it is the natural task of the woman to produce life, it seems to me to be her cultural

mission to preserve life.⁷³ For those women who would not (for whatever reason) become life-producers, social work provided the most consequential and meaningful form of life preservation. And for those social workers who would one day wed, Salomon affirmed marriage as a well-founded reason for leaving the vocation of social welfare. While work might be only a temporary haven, the lessons learned would inform the young wife for life.

Salomon's efforts in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries resulted in significant advancement. After the first school was established in 1908, several more followed; by the end of World War I, 27 schools offered training for social work with curricula similar to Salomon's original Berlin school.⁷⁴ The Great War helped to legitimate women's claims to a special engagement in social welfare because, as men departed for the fronts, female engagement became more vital.⁷⁵ The impoverishment of wartime and postwar Germany also made clear the tenuous nature of the Elberfeld and Bismarckian delimitation of worthy and unworthy.

Yet as the historian Christoph Sachsse has demonstrated, Salomon's vision of the great social organism ultimately receded in the postwar era. Many practical reasons brought about this shift: the much broader social net cast by the optimistic creators of the Weimar state, the mounting discontent with governmental relief efforts in the 1920s, the greater variety of supplicants after the war, and the chaos of the early Weimar economy, which weakened the German middle class. As war and inflation conflated class lines, so faded the notion that relief work was the duty of the privileged. Though women from the middle- and working-classes staffed the vast majority of positions in the expanding sphere of Weimar social work, they rarely supervised workers. Nor, for the most part, did they serve to design and direct policy. The leadership of the bureaucracy of social administration was a male affair.⁷⁶ Salomon's goal of infusing the profession and the nation with maternalist values became increasingly fleeting. Her lifelong efforts to create a purposeful role for women in the public sphere were ultimately thwarted by the advent of the National Socialist government in 1933. After a confrontation with the Gestapo in 1937, the Jewish Salomon emigrated from Germany and lived in New York until her death in 1948.

Why were Salomon's great hopes never realized? While the quelling of maternalist impulses in the interwar era was not unique to Germany, some particular aspects of the German experience and of Salomon's formulation of maternalism are especially noteworthy. In the *Kaiserreich* and as a result of the Elberfeld and Bismarckian visions, middle-class female reformers largely operated outside of the realm of policy decisions. Still, hundreds of women trained in schools like Salomon's were employed in social work before the outbreak of the war, a significant increase from the statistically insignificant numbers to be found at the turn of the century.⁷⁷ Salomon later wrote that this advance had been met with great resistance: "Government officials were inclined to be hostile towards the organization of schools for social work. They wanted to train public health workers and in addition a type of child welfare worker responsible for kindergarten or

play ground supervision independently of each other and under the control of different ministries.” Schools embracing Salomon’s program instead offered a comprehensive curriculum that entailed child care, public health training, and pedagogy. Salomon’s description of the German government’s myopic view of social work noted that, “They denied that there was a profession of social workers with manifold duties working in various fields.”⁷⁸ The failure to acknowledge the existence of the profession paralleled Elberfeld and Bismarckian relief, both of which had been predicated upon neglecting the most indigent populations in the provisioning of social welfare. Moreover, Salomon herself never articulated a fully comprehensive view of social work as a profession in the sense of a job, rather than a calling. Salomon’s limited interpretation of the vocation is most clearly revealed in her views on social work compensation.

Since social work emerged from the foundations of charitable work, its advocates had to wrestle with the concept of volunteerism. Alice Salomon never intended to upend the work of volunteers; indeed, she celebrated charitable work as long as it was done out of a sense of holistic social responsibility and not simple altruism (or, worse yet, boredom). Salomon did not insist on exclusively voluntary social work, but she did prefer the volunteer to the paid social worker. The woman least encumbered by financial concerns would be best able to demonstrate her sincerity and resolve.⁷⁹ Compensation muddied the picture; could maternal love be turned on and off based upon the availability and amount of a salary? Only the surplus woman could strike the delicate balance between paid labor and charity; because she so needed to be needed, no form of remuneration could dampen her maternal zeal. Salomon called upon unmarried women to commit to the vocation spiritually, but she also recognized that such commitment required material support. She demonstrated her concern for unmarried women by allowing for the possibility of compensated social work.

Salomon made the distinction between paid and unpaid work on the basis of need: “For certain women whose inclination lies in the direction of social work, but who are forced into paid work, it is a great happiness that our period has created the necessity of social work as a profession.” The trauma of the times created surplus women—but it also provided them with a purpose. Though accepting remuneration might seem to taint the maternal spirit, Salomon contended that the “voluntary nature of the work can never be doubted, even if they must accept a salary for it ... The volunteer is most normal, but that shall obviously remain [the case only] where and for whom it is possible.”⁸⁰ Voluntary and compensated social workers would be partners in training and labor, for “it lies in the essence of social work that the practitioner ... ‘shall earn, in order to be able to serve.’”⁸¹

By preserving the normative status of the volunteer, Salomon placed herself in the context of a much broader discussion about the nature of public relief. German social reformers at the turn of the century debated whether local volunteers mainly should provide social welfare or whether more expansive control of welfare ought to be commandeered by the state. As Hong has argued, increasing state engagement in social relief both before and during World War I raised es-

sential questions, “because the underlying discourse on social rights provided a positive rationale for expanded state activity, which contradicted the deterrent, disciplinary function and the subsidiary nature of poor relief.”⁸² Salomon’s own unwillingness to make a distinction between paid and unpaid social workers reflected more general uncertainty in Imperial Germany both about the nature of poor relief and about the delineation between state and society.

By defining social work as the fulfillment of the female calling, especially for the unmarried and childless, Alice Salomon sought to elide the potential collision of compensated and voluntary social workers. In accepting compensation on the basis of need rather than merit, Salomon attempted to create a non-threatening space in which Germans could be comfortable with the relatively new notion of unmarried bourgeois women working in the public sphere. The tensions associated with public acceptance of social welfare programs were not exclusively German, nor were they exclusively Salomon’s. Nonetheless, the balance Salomon struck between voluntary and professional status was a precarious one that did not secure a role in the evolution of German social policy for women.

Alice Salomon argued that the uniqueness of the female contribution to the public sphere rested in women’s maternal capacities, yet she also recognized that the field of social work would be led by women who personally never experienced motherhood. Salomon herself never married and never had children. Precisely those experiences allowed her to channel her maternal instinct not only toward the poor, but also toward unmarried young women embarking on a new career. In her autobiography, Salomon wrote of disappointment in love as a young woman: “In one case, where a man of unimpeachable background courted me . . . I simply was not attracted. Other suitors in whom I was deeply interested could not offer me the sort of union I wanted, in connection with my work and ideas. Disappointment in love is one of the saddest experiences, sadder than the death of a beloved being.” That disappointment lingered on: “For years, I could not see a child without feeling pangs over my lost hopes.” Still, “in looking back, I have been thankful that none of these attachments led to marriage. Passion rarely lasts a lifetime.”⁸³ Work and service to her students replaced romantic passion: “During my marriageable years I had wanted a dozen daughters. Somehow I had never thought of children in terms of boys. Now I got the girls, hundreds and hundreds, and I looked upon them all as my adopted daughters.”⁸⁴ Social work offered unmarried women such as Salomon the opportunity to experience the maternal life that the vagaries of romance and the marriage market had denied them. Alice Salomon’s work aimed to recast motherhood as a subject to teach, as a calling, and as the essence of a distinctly female view of social policy.

* * *

Leaders of the moderate women’s movement pursued a variety of reformist paths. Spiritual motherhood and the *Frauenüberschuß* are intertwined as the central tenets of moderate advocacy in the arenas of education and social work. Helene Lange and Alice Salomon shared a belief in the economic advent of the female

surplus and a conviction about the basic importance of work in establishing new, worthwhile pursuits for surfeit women. Both women also embraced the family as the most fundamental sphere of female activity. Yet examination of the careers of Lange and Salomon also shows that moderates differed in their strategies and in the extent to which they linked reformist programs to an understanding of gender roles. Lange was a political creature who evinced self-consciousness about her place in the women's movement and who appealed to politicians in support of her ideas. Lange's autobiography linked her personal history to the evolution of the German women's movement and positioned herself as a historical figure.⁸⁵ She was an activist for educational reform, a founder of the German women's movement, and a theoretical thinker who articulated a very pronounced vision of spiritual motherhood as the foundation of male and female roles. In each of those concerns, she held firm to the conviction that demographic necessity—embodied in the surplus female—created the crisis to which her life's work responded.

Salomon's career was neither as ideologically driven nor as self-aware as that of Lange. Salomon's agenda was more focused and thus in many ways more concretely conflicted. Her ambivalence about the status of voluntary workers attests to a reformer faced with practical dilemmas as well as someone rather mired in her own bourgeois background. But Salomon's articulation of social work as a practical field of single women's activity was also less heady than Lange's educational program and less constrained by ideological ruminations. It is important to keep in mind that Salomon was over twenty years younger than Lange and inherited the legacy of Lange's organizational headway. Both women served as officers in the BDF and worked together on the organization's journal, *Die Frau*. No doubt Lange influenced Salomon's views on both the plight of the surplus woman and on the transformative power of the spiritual mother. Salomon's less ideological approach was bolstered by the precedence of earlier maternalists like Lange.

By embracing a maternalism based on notions of gender difference, moderate activists constructed a movement that offered as its product a palatable notion of the modern woman. Unlike more radical voices in the German women's movement, these moderates crafted a vision that sought to affirm rather than displace the traditional family.⁸⁶ Helene Lange once assured those who might be alarmed by extensive changes to female education that, "as in the past, the majority of women will live for their families and endeavor to make home happy and comfortable"—a cozy picture, capped off with an innate promise—"Nature guarantees that."⁸⁷ Working women would always be the minority: "As long as the world will exist the great majority of women will find ample occupation in the care of their families and the education of their children. Their professional engagement will be at best a temporary one, but as such it may prove of the highest usefulness."⁸⁸

But this comforting depiction of the women's movement held at its core a transformative vision of the future. As articulated by its most prominent spokespersons, the goal of moderate activism was to "create a new impact on the total

culture by the entrance of the woman into those areas which have been closed to her so far and which nevertheless need her.”⁸⁹ The woman simultaneously best positioned and most desperate for admission to those areas was the unmarried bourgeois woman who would “create out of the world of the man a world which reflects the character of *both* sexes; she must carry into the world her own values and thus help to create the view of the whole in which her standards have the same validity as those of the man.” The resulting society would be built upon a foundation of the family through “the delicate, human consideration for others [and] the loving value placed on the life of the individual overall.”⁹⁰ Lofty tasks indeed. The maternalist perspective articulated by women like Lange and Salomon sought to offer this transformative power precisely to those individuals whom they believed had been most wounded by the modern age: single middle-class women. With proper education and significant work, these women in theory could revive for Germany what had been taken from them in fact: an environment in which the maternal instinct could serve and nurture, and in which it would be welcomed and treasured.

Notes

1. Some married women played formative roles in the women’s movement, including Minna Cauer (1841–1922), Luise Otto-Peters (1819–1895), Marie Stritt (1855–1928), and Marianne Weber (1870–1954). But most of the visible activists and professional leaders were unmarried. These include Helene Lange (1848–1930), Alice Salomon (1872–1948), Anita Augspurg (1857–1943), Otilie Baader (1847–1925), Gertrud Bäumer (1873–1954), Lida Gustava Heymann (1868–1943), Mathilde Lammers (1837–1905), Marie-Elisabeth Lüders (1878–1966), Marianne Menzzer (1814–1895), Bertha Pappenheim (1859–1936), Anna Pappritz (1861–1939), Auguste Schmidt (1833–1902), and Franziska Tiburtius (1843–1927).
2. On the division between moderate and radical feminism, see Jean Quataert, “Writing the History of Women and Gender in Imperial Germany,” in *Society, Culture, and the State in Germany, 1870–1930*, ed. Geoff Eley (Ann Arbor, MI, 1997), 51–55.
3. See chapter 4.
4. James Albisetti, *Schooling German Girls and Women, Secondary Education in the Nineteenth Century* (Princeton, 1988), 70.
5. See chapter 4.
6. HLA-BDF, Karton 54, Mappe 245, BDF pamphlet “Was die Frauenbewegung für die Frauen will,” 1898.
7. Helene Lange, *Lebenserinnerungen* (Berlin, 1930), 68.
8. *Ibid.*, 93–95.
9. On Lange’s early career, see Dorothea Frandsen, *Helene Lange* (Breisgau, 1980), 15–26.
10. Ute Gerhard, *Unerhört. Die Geschichte der deutsche Frauenbewegung* (Reinbek bei Hamburg, 1992), 146. Highlights of Lange’s activism include the 1890 co-founding of the General Association of German Female Teachers, the 1893 establishment of the journal *Die Frau*, and membership on the Executive Committee of the BDF (1894–1906).
11. Lange, *Lebenserinnerungen*.

12. Sociologist Margit Göttert's, *Macht und Eros: Frauenbeziehungen und weibliche Kultur um 1900—eine neue Perspektive auf Helene Lange und Gertrud Bäumer* (Königstein, 2000), employs the partnership of Lange and Bäumer to establish a typology by which to assess female relationships and female culture at the turn of the century. Regarding education, see Caroline Hopf and Eva Matthes, eds., *Helene Lange und Gertrud Bäumer*, vol. 1, *Ihr Engagement für Frauen- und Mädchenbildung* (Bad Heilbrunn, 2001), vol. 2, *Ihr Beitrag zum Erziehungs- und Bildungsdiskurs vom Wilhelminischen Kaiserreich bis in die NS-Zeit* (Bad Heilbrunn, 2003); these volumes contain primary texts and assess Lange and Bäumer's contributions to the field of education. Angelika Schaser, *Helene Lange und Gertrud Bäumer: Eine politische Lebensgemeinschaft* (Köln, 2000), situates the pair in the history of political debates surrounding women's rights in the changing Germanies of the twentieth century.

Both Göttert and Schaser have investigated Lange and Bäumer's relationship based on the available primary sources. Göttert argues against those who might conjecture about the nature of the partnership by stating that their "relationship not only occurred in private, but also was lived and commemorated in the setting of the publicity of the movement of the time. To classify these and other women's relationships in the current categories of homo- and heterosexuality therefore seems to no small degree to be unreasonable because neither these women nor other contemporaries labeled themselves in this sense" (2000, 10). Schaser notes that both women were very aware of their public personae and "in their efforts toward social recognition, to a great degree [they] adapted themselves to the rituals of male self-portrayal. In their autobiographies, they strictly separated public and private life and gave to the latter only marginal significance in that they largely excluded it. The subjective and emotional were largely omitted, the rational was accentuated." (2000, 88) I share Göttert and Schaser's approach to Lange and Bäumer's partnership.
13. Helene Lange, "Was wir wollen," *Die Frau* 1(1) (October 1893): 1; see Introduction.
14. Peter Petschauer, "Eighteenth-Century German Opinions about Education for Women," *Central European History* 19 (3) (1986): 289.
15. Albisetti, *Schooling*, 10–22; Albisetti offers an extensive discussion of the nuances of 'Bestimmung.'
16. *Ibid.*, 46; Albisetti's book provides the most thorough history of curriculum and the debates surrounding German female education in the nineteenth century.
17. Helene Lange, "Die höhere Mädchenschule und ihre Bestimmung," October 1887; cited in Helene Lange, *Kampfzeiten* (Berlin, 1928), 19.
18. Albisetti, *Schooling*, 136, 151–159.
19. Helene Lange, "Höhere Mädchenschule," 58.
20. Albisetti, *Schooling*, 152.
21. *Ibid.*, 136, 155.
22. Helene Lange, *Die Frauenbewegung in ihrer modernen Problemen* (Leipzig, 1908), 3.
23. Helene Lange, *Higher Education of Women in Europe*, trans. L.R. Klemm (New York, 1890), 128–129.
24. *Ibid.*, 130–131.
25. Lange, *Higher Education*, 131.
26. Lange, *Frauenbewegung*, 3.
27. Lange, *Higher Education*, 131.
28. Lange, "Höhere Mädchenschule," 20.
29. Lange, *Funfzig Jahre*; cited in *Lebenserinnerungen*, 103.
30. Lange, *Frauenbewegung*, 3.
31. HLA-BDF, Karton 54, Mappe 245, Helene Lange, "Grundsätze und Forderungen der Frauenbewegung auf dem Gebiet der Erziehung und Bildung," in *Grundsätze und Forderungen der Frauenbewegung*, ed. BDF (Berlin, 1912), 13.
32. Lange, *Higher Education*, 126; emphasis in text.
33. Lange, "Grundsätze," 14.

34. *Ibid.*, 12.
35. *Ibid.*, 13.
36. *Ibid.*, 11–12.
37. Lange, *Higher Education*, 138; Lange cites Mathilde Lammers (1837–1905), a teacher, writer, and editor of the Bremen monthly magazine *Nordwest*.
38. Lange, *Higher Education*, 138.
39. Lange, *Lebenserinnerungen*, 158; emphasis in text.
40. *Ibid.*, 159.
41. Hedwig Dohm (1833–1919) was an early prominent female activist and wrote a number of influential essays, articles, and books on women's rights; see Cornelia Pechota Vuilleumier, "O Vater, lass uns ziehn!": *literarische Vater–Töchter um 1900*; Gabriele Reuter, *Hedwig Dohm, Lou Andreas-Salomé* (Hildesheim, 2005), and Ute Speck, *Ein mögliches Ich, Selbstreflexion in der Schreiberfabrik: zur Autobiographik der Politikerinnen Lily Braun, Hedwig Dohm, und Rosa Luxemburg* (Frankfurt a.M., 1997).
42. Lange, *Lebenserinnerungen*, 111–112; emphasis in text.
43. *Ibid.*, 113–114.
44. Lange, "Höhere Mädchenschule," 20.
45. Lange, "Grundsätze," 1912.
46. Lange, "Höhere Mädchenschule," 50.
47. Ann Taylor Allen, *Feminism and Motherhood in Imperial Germany, 1800–1914* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1991), 167.
48. Albisetti, *Schooling*, 178.
49. *Ibid.*, 250–273.
50. Lange, *Lebenserinnerungen*, 191.
51. *Ibid.*, 192.
52. Seth Koven and Sonya Michel, "Introduction: 'Mother Worlds'" in *Mothers of a New World*, eds. Koven and Michel (New York, 1993), 2.
53. *Ibid.*, 4.
54. Christoph Sachsse, *Mütterlichkeit als Beruf* (Frankfurt a.M., 1986), 36–50.
55. Eve Rosenhaft, "The Historical Development of German Social Policy," in Jochen Clasen and Richard Freeman, eds., *Social Policy in Germany* (New York, 1994), 26.
56. Christoph Sachsse, "Social Mothers: The Bourgeois Women's Movement and German Welfare-State Formation, 1890–1929," in Koven and Michel, eds., *Mothers*, 147.
57. Rosenhaft, "Social Policy," 28–29.
58. Koven and Michel, "Mother Worlds," 24–25.
59. The history of social work in Imperial Germany has experienced a boom in recent years. The works on Salomon have assessed her life and career in a comparative vein and in the context of social and gender history. See Manfred Berger, *Pionierin der sozialen Arbeit und der Frauenbewegung* (Frankfurt a.M., 1998); Young Sun Hong, *Welfare, Modernity, and the Weimar State* (Princeton, NJ, 1998); Carola Kuhlmann, "Gender and Theory in the History of German Social Work—Alice Salomon, Herman Nohl and Christian Klumker," in *History of Social Work in Europe (1900–1960)*, eds. Sabine Hering and Berteke Waaldijk (Opladen, 2003), 95–104; Andrew Lees, *Cities, Sin, and Social Reform in Imperial Germany* (Ann Arbor, 2002); Rosenhaft, "Social Policy"; Sachsse, "Mothers"; Sachsse, *Mütterlichkeit*; Anja Schüler, *Frauenbewegung und soziale Reform: Jane Addams und Alice Salomon im transatlantischen Dialog, 1889–1933* (Stuttgart, 2004); Kathryn Kish Sklar, Anja Schüler, and Susan Strasser, eds., *Social Justice Feminists in the United States and Germany* (Ithaca, NY, 1998). Lees has also edited a new edition of Salomon's autobiography; see Alice Salomon, *Character is Destiny: The Autobiography of Alice Salomon* (Ann Arbor, MI, 2004).
60. Salomon, *Character*, 13, 21–23.
61. Schüler, *Frauenbewegung*, 195–196.
62. Alice Salomon, *Soziale Frauenbildung* (Berlin, 1907), 11.

63. On the work of the Groups, see Lees, *Cities*, 298–301.
64. Kuhlmann, “Gender,” 99.
65. Salomon, *Frauenbildung*, 5.
66. *Ibid.*, 10.
67. Salomon, *Character*, 44; see pp. 44–47 for a discussion of her time at the university; Salomon’s dissertation examined pay inequity between men and women.
68. Alice Salomon, “Moderne Bildung,” *Centralblatt des Bundes deutscher Frauenvereine* (15 June 1908): 41.
69. Schüler, *Frauenbewegung*, 220.
70. Hong, “Professionalization,” 236.
71. On Salomon’s views of gender difference, see Lees, *Cities*, 296–298.
72. Alice Salomon, *Zwanzig Jahre Soziale Hilfsarbeit* (Karlsruhe i.B, 1913), 2–4.
73. Alice Salomon, “Die Bedeutung der Frauenbewegung für das soziale Leben,” in Alice Salomon, *Was wir uns und anderen schuldig sind* (Leipzig, 1912), 130–131; quoted in Lees, *Cities*, 298.
74. Sachsse, “Social Mothers,” 153.
75. Sachsse, *Mütterlichkeit*, 151–173.
76. Sachsse, “Social Mothers,” 152.
77. *Ibid.*, 148.
78. Alice Salomon, *Education for Social Work* (Zürich, 1937), 21.
79. Salomon, *Zwanzig Jahre*, 82.
80. *Ibid.*, 82–83.
81. *Ibid.*, 86.
82. Hong, *Welfare*, 29–30.
83. Salomon, *Character*, 35.
84. *Ibid.*, 74.
85. And so she is—the papers of the *Bund Deutscher Frauenvereine*, the largest women’s organization in the *Kaiserreich*, are housed in the *Helene Lange Archiv*.
86. See chapter 6.
87. Lange, *Higher Education*, 179.
88. *Ibid.*, 21.
89. HLA-BDF, Karton 77, Mappe 310, Der Bund deutscher Frauenvereine, *Offiziellen Pressbericht über den Berliner Frauenkongress*, 27 February through 2 March 1912.
90. Lange, *Lebenserinnerungen*, 159; emphasis in text.

RADICAL REFORM

Helene Stöcker, Ruth Bré, and Lily Braun



The female surplus had radical potential. If spouses were scarce, might marriage itself be diminished? If unwed women atrophied, might it mean that they should pursue a sexual life outside of marriage? Moderate activists did not ask such questions. But other figures in the reformist milieu of Imperial Germany seized onto the *Frauenüberschuß* (female surplus) as an issue that supported radical, sometimes even subversive, calls for a different society. In critiques of the social and economic structure, the female surplus was utilized as one of a series of indicators of much broader decrepitude. This chapter explores the ways in which three female activists, Helene Stöcker, Ruth Bré, and Lily Braun, argued that the foundations of German society needed to be transformed if the female surplus were to be ameliorated. The perceived oversupply of bourgeois females plainly was not the springboard from which radical social critique emerged. But among women's rights advocates who stood outside of the moderate mold of the *Bund Deutscher Frauenvereine* (BDF), the female surplus served as a fitting vessel by which to demonstrate the infirmity of traditional institutions.

The moderate women's movement employed the female surplus as a reason for change within the confines of the world in which they lived.¹ While maternalism offered a way to transform the public sphere, it did not emerge from a subversive agenda. Moderates such as Helene Lange and Alice Salomon objected to the damage wrought by the male freedom to choose when and whom they married, but they never suggested that traditional patriarchal patterns ought to be overthrown. Maternalist activists offered practical responses to a series of circumstances with which they believed they had to live. But not everyone was willing to accept the

terms of the extant social order. As historian Richard Evans has argued, “moderate feminism in Germany was unusually moderate, radical feminism exceptionally radical.”² This chapter considers how radicals expanded upon and challenged moderate views of female redundancy. The conceptualized surplus woman was enlisted as a malleable entity in support of widespread reform, though it would be an exaggeration to say that the *alleinstehende Frau* (woman standing alone) stood at the foundation of radical social critique. Rather, subversive activists employed the *Frauenüberschuß* as one of many issues that demonstrated a society in crisis and that served as proof of the need for expansive social reform. The perceived presence of an abundance of “old maids” among the middle-class provided evidence of the ill effects of sexual abstinence for those who wanted to reform the rules of sexual morality and the binding commitments of marriage.

The chapter focuses on Helene Stöcker, the key proponent of the *Neue Ethik* (New Ethic) that advocated a new approach to sexuality and social policy; Ruth Bré, who believed only single motherhood could relieve the stigma and loneliness of female singlehood; and Lily Braun, a critic of marital and moral strictures who sought to liberate women from confinement. The writings and activism of these women did not reach an audience nearly as large as did the moderate and religious organizations of women.³ Nonetheless, radical feminism had significant impact on the evolution of the discourse surrounding women’s rights in Germany. Stöcker’s focused advocacy of new thinking in the women’s movement created bitter debate within the BDF and ultimately led, in 1910, to the ouster of those who favored the legalization of abortion and the advancement of the New Ethic. While a less known figure, Bré’s passion led to the founding of the *Bund für Mutterschutz* (BfM; Federation for the Protection of Mothers), an organization that ultimately was taken over by Stöcker. And Braun’s prolific commentary on gender roles and rights provided a singular touchstone, albeit often extreme, in the women’s movement of the *Kaiserreich* (Imperial Germany). By establishing a vocal, unyielding, and organized branch of female activism, radical voices informed the discursive stream surrounding women’s rights and the positions of both anti-feminists and moderate organizations such as the BDF.⁴ In the pursuit of starkly different paths toward women’s rights, moderates and radicals shared the conviction that the surplus of unwed women demonstrated a problem in need of solving.

Helene Stöcker and the *Neue Ethik*

Helene Stöcker (1869–1943) led the movement for a *Neue Ethik*. Stöcker was born in Elberfeld, trained as a teacher, and was one of the first women in Germany to receive a doctoral degree. She lived in Berlin in the 1890s and became active in the women’s movement. Over time and influenced by her study of Friedrich Nietzsche, Stöcker came to believe that the German women’s movement was too focused on specific objectives to achieve anything of broader cultural significance.

Stöcker yearned for a movement that would “create a synthesis between the free, spiritually independent female personality who could also be a loving woman and mother.”⁵ While she supported the goals of educational expansion and professional development, Stöcker maintained that reformers needed to push further; the modern age required a new vision of woman and man. The developing field of sexology provided the catapult from which to advance such a vision. Institutionally, Stöcker proclaimed her point of view through an organization that bore her imprint for much of its existence: the BfM was established in 1904 and came under Stöcker’s leadership in 1905.⁶ During these same years, Stöcker met Berlin attorney Bruno Springer; the two entered into a lifelong partnership that they viewed as a ‘free marriage’ and that lasted until Springer’s death in 1931.⁷

In its simplest manifestation, Stöcker’s *Neue Ethik* called for the “right to free intellectual development and the right to love.”⁸ The nuances and perceived consequences of the second claim made the *Neue Ethik* controversial. Stöcker and her peers in the BfM had been influenced by sexology; like Iwan Bloch, Sigmund Freud, August Forel, and Magnus Hirschfeld, they believed that sex was healthy and natural. Yet this basic premise had subversive potential in the culture of Imperial Germany. If sexuality was natural, did it not follow that female sexuality was good, even beautiful? Such a view of sex decried the prudish view that female sexuality existed only as an instrument of procreation and male pleasure. In the inaugural editorial of the BfM’s publication, *Mutterschutz*, Stöcker defined her life’s work as the “critical examination, renewal, and expansion of ethics overall ... The old conventional moral views come from a cultural epoch otherwise vanquished and therefore burden us with such great weight today under completely changed conditions. We all suffer under them, whether we realize it or not.”⁹ The consequences of economic and demographic change underlay Stöcker’s description of ‘completely changed conditions.’ Her movement sought a new morality that would transform male/female relations in the same way that industrialization had remade family life.

Stöcker envisioned a world in which all people embraced their sexual selves. Such an awakening would require a thoroughgoing reassessment of the human condition. Stöcker’s studies of Nietzsche made clear to her the need for new ethical categories that rejected the restrictions of conventional bourgeois morality. Under the *Neue Ethik*, “we could construct our lives as happy or unhappy, worthy or unworthy. If humans no longer consider themselves bad, as the old morality forced upon us!—[Then] it stops being so.” Living solely for material gain and egocentric self-advancement thwarted human potential. Stöcker argued that modern society had to “modify our old concept of morality so that it is [intended] for happiness ... for the elevation and refinement of humankind. Strong, happily healthy humans of body, of elevated convictions, of intellectual maturity, of affluent souls, this indeed seems to us the highest goal.”¹⁰

The movement for a *Neue Ethik* drew upon the findings of sexology for its view of sexuality. Iwan Bloch and Hermann Rohleder, members of the BfM, provided a bridge between the *Neue Ethik* and *scientia sexualis*. Yet for the most part, the

two movements, borne out of a shared understanding of the primacy of human sexuality, remained estranged. The historian Edward Ross Dickinson has argued that this distance emerged out of the fact that “‘sexologists’ generally espoused a much more conservative conception of men’s and women’s ‘natural’ social and biological roles; the New Ethic, and feminism more broadly, appeared to them altogether too individualist to be eugenically sound.”¹¹ Certainly, the caution with which sexologists viewed female sexual hyperaesthesia suggests the conservative strain within sexual science.¹² Sexologists also evinced skepticism regarding the philosophical and spiritual nature of the *Neue Ethik*. The clinical eye set forth in the late-nineteenth century case histories of Richard Krafft-Ebing became the predominant mode by which sexologists described the sexual landscape of the early twentieth century. Helene Stöcker, however, considered sexuality to be a repository of human potentiality rather than as a category of psycho-medical analysis.

Before Stöcker and the BfM came along, *Kaiserreich* social reformers had been concerned with aspects of the “sexual problem.” Indeed, the BDF in the 1890s had expressed commitment to some of the issues that the BfM later would take on as their own.¹³ The abolition movement, directed toward eliminating state-sanctioned prostitution, had long been an important agenda item for the moderate women’s movement.¹⁴ An early BDF pamphlet addressed another concern dear to Stöcker and her colleagues: the protection of unwed mothers. The BDF decried the fact that “the rights of unmarried mothers and children are entirely insufficiently protected” by law.¹⁵ But the moderates characterized prostitution and unwed motherhood as symptoms of a culture in need of maternal care, rather than as a component of the discourse surrounding sexuality.

The discussion took a very different turn when the BfM addressed these same issues. Instead of calling for reform within the given social constraints, Helene Stöcker and the BfM advocated a redefinition of what constituted moral behavior: “In this way we can hope to gain gradually the foundation for a new ethics, how it comes out of our changed understanding of human development, into the connections between intellectual and economic factors.” Such an understanding had political implications: “It is perfectly clear to us that we today still do not know any universal remedy, an infallible solution of the sexual problem. We do not claim that ‘if the regulation of prostitution stops, or sexual diseases are exterminated, or illegitimate mothers and children are provided for, or all excessive consumption of alcohol is renounced, or capitalism is destroyed, then the sexual problem is solved,’ as one might well hear said. We know only that redressing all of these grievances belongs to that which initiates a solution.”¹⁶ Policy changes would mark the path to a new understanding of human development, an understanding that was essential to fully actualized human existence.

Stöcker’s visionary appeal eschewed the temperate tone of the moderates, yet her calls for social change shared with them a belief in the vindicating potential of motherhood. Maternalism served as the foundation of Stöcker’s understanding of the female. In refuting charges that educated women renounced their maternal instinct, Stöcker wrote that, “today we know that motherliness lives as the deep-

est, most fundamental drive of the female even in intellectually and artistically distinguished women.”¹⁷ Examination of the rhetoric of the BfM and the BDF demonstrates the extent to which spiritual motherhood extended beyond the organizational chasms in the German women’s movement.¹⁸

The importance of motherhood to Stöcker and her associates is revealed in the name and work of the *Bund für Mutterschutz*, the organization that developed into the most important sex reform organization of Wilhelmine Germany.¹⁹ An association for the protection of mothers necessarily championed maternal rights. The BfM took this much further than did the moderates of the BDF, asserting that the rights of unwed mothers were fundamental to women’s rights. In its expansive agenda, the BfM sought to establish homes for unwed mothers and their children, campaigned for maternity insurance, disseminated information regarding birth control, called on mothers to nurse their children, and combated infant mortality through discussions of hygiene, child care, and maternal health during pregnancy.

Recent work on the BfM by Edward Ross Dickinson has identified a “double-edged” tone to the work of the organization, which attempted “to develop an explicitly feminist and democratic vision of the relationship between the sexes, and of the human condition, centered on the dominant scientific dogma of the day: the theory of evolution.”²⁰ By both condemning the repression of bourgeois sexual morality and extolling reproduction as the apex of human nature, Stöcker advocated a position that stood on precarious intellectual grounds when viewed by the modern eye. Stöcker celebrated reproduction as the ultimate expression of human sexuality. Her writings linked female freedom with eugenic creation through the pursuit of human perfection via the free choice of partners to form new life.²¹ This understanding of womanhood as so firmly embedded in the reproductive capacity had downsides that later in the century would be incorporated into the family politics of National Socialism.²² The BfM operated in an ideological sphere that asserted Nietzschean visions of human potentiality while simultaneously promoting a practical agenda of reform that advocated birth control (arguing that reproductive glory could only be achieved if it were chosen), sexual education, and legal protections for single mothers and their children. A recognition of men and women as equally sexual creatures stood at the forefront of this work. In flowery prose, Stöcker described her greatest ambition as to “plant the love of life in all its forms—to stamp the image of the eternal on our lives—to live as if one were to live forever. Thus ... the strongest expression of the love of life, sexuality, can no longer be considered sinful in the new age.”²³

Stöcker’s emphasis on the ‘love of life’ was too sybaritic for many. Initially a supporter of the BfM, Max Weber wrote in 1907 to his friend Robert Michels that “the specific *Mutterschutz* gang is an utterly confused bunch. After the babble of Stöcker, Borgius, etc., I withdrew my support. Crass hedonism and an ethics that would benefit only men and the goal of women ... that is simply nonsense.”²⁴ The historian Kevin Repp uses the case of Gertrud Bäumer to demonstrate the views of the moderate BDF regarding the BfM. Bäumer “scorned the fashionable

'hyper-modern decadents' of Berlin's salons, where supposed radicals wistfully indulged in fantasies of 'a world order that gives 'flowers and sunshine to every existence' while spending 'hours of their lives remote from any meaningful social activism' ... True radicalism was certainly not to be found in 'free love.'²⁵

Though they differed on their views of female sexuality, the BDF and Helene Stöcker both employed the sad image of the *alte Jungfer* (old maid) to help demonstrate the dire need for a new morality.²⁶ Stöcker used Frank Wedekind's 1903 play, *Hidalla*, to show how the old maid represented the "deep barbarity that still reigns in the area of love."²⁷ *Hidalla*'s Karl Hetmann (a character that has been described as the Wedekind role "most identifiable with the author"),²⁸ described German womanhood as a typology of "three barbarian life forms ... The prostitute run out of the human community like a wild animal; the betrayed old maid, condemned to physical and intellectual debilitation for her entire love life; and the untouchable young woman protected for the purpose of as favorable a marriage as possible."²⁹ Each of these female forms fell into a category of sexual misuse. Stöcker argued that Wedekind's trio of the whore, the *alte Jungfer*, and the pristine virgin made transparent the ways in which contemporary morality could warp female sexuality. She lamented that those images also lived outside of theatrical invention: "Just as drama articulates an awareness of the enormous sacrifice that marriage based on paternal rights demands, so this view today emerges not only in other fiction, but also is expressed in numerous cases by the academy."³⁰ The culprit institution of marriage produced these debased forms of womanhood, each alternatively waiting for or spurned—but also completely defined—by wedlock. Stöcker attacked each of the archetypes, arguing against the stultified frigidity of the girl awaiting marriage and vilifying a society that accepted prostitution as an acceptable outlet for sex.

Attacks against the *alte Jungfer* formed an important component of the *Neue Ethik*. Stöcker accused the German state of participating in the marginalization of unwed women through regulations requiring female teachers to remain unmarried.³¹ By forcing women to choose between profession and marriage (should it be an option), Stöcker charged that "even the most professionally competent women ... would have the possibility of establishing a family [but] they are condemned to celibacy by the state." Coerced celibacy was abnormal as well as unfair: "There is absolutely no abstinence among normally predisposed people, but forced asceticism leads ... to an unnatural satisfaction of natural needs." Enter the spook of the aberrant *alte Jungfer*! Stöcker attempted to lobby support for her cause by calling forth the reliable image of the unpleasant old maid, made deviant by the revelation of her repressed sexual drive. She tied this discussion of the *alte Jungfer* to the fact that marriage often "is not possible for economic reasons." If she could not marry, and ought not to behave unnaturally, what was left to her? Sex without marriage. But this prescription only worked if the New Ethic took hold and society moved toward "enhancing comradely interaction between man and woman."³² In asserting the necessity of the *Neue Ethik*, Stöcker made vivid the *alte Jungfer* as a symptom of a decrepit society in need of change.

The old maid not only provided fuel for the cause. She also stood as the most prominent symbol of the damage caused by bourgeois ethics. Robert Michels described the middle-class *alte Jungfer* as the prostitute's alter ego: "The old maids of the higher classes correspond to the prostitutes of the proletariat. Only the causes and effect of both occurrences are different." As physical embodiments of sexuality gone awry, the old maid and the prostitute were the sour fruits of a hypocritical age: "It is one of the cruelest ironies of our current social order that while the unmarried bourgeois girl is forced to silence her love and suffer from an unsatisfied sexual drive, the unmarried proletariat girl sees herself compelled in exactly the reverse, to satisfy sexual overstimulation and love's lust for sale."³³ Capitalism was responsible for these lives of sexual disuse and abuse. The market economy callously had left unwed females without domestic sanctuary, enabling middle-class men to exploit the prostitute and lampoon the old maids. Michels saw the *alte Jungfer* as a bourgeois entity who simply did not exist among the lower classes. Working-class men needed wives to manage the household and supplement male income. But the middle-class man took longer to get established; a wife and family only drained his income. Moreover, the unwed female proletariat (primarily prostitutes, according to Michels) could be relied upon to satisfy the sexual needs of the bourgeois bachelor. The prostitute thus literally replaced the middle-class wife. Both female categories resulted from the same phenomenon of economic displacement from the home, and each suffered in tandem with the other.

In depicting the dismal duo of the *alte Jungfer* and the prostitute, Michels demonstrated the cruelty of the existing ethical system. The pathos of his analysis could be understood only if one accepted the importance of sexuality to the human condition; the BfM sought to foster this understanding. Prostitutes and old maids might be considered unfortunate under most circumstances, but their reciprocally created lots were all the more despairing because of their mutually debased sexuality. Michels stirringly described the "thousands upon thousands of good old *Fräuleins* in the good or better-situated classes remaining aunts and older sisters, who forego marriage and, as things now stand, and which still means very much more—completely forego sexual pleasure their life long."³⁴ The image of 'the good old *Fräuleins*' relied on the conventional iconography of the old maid³⁵ well-known to his readers, perhaps through the fiction of Gabriele Reuter, Thomas Mann, or Frank Wedekind. The insights of sexology had further given dysfunctional depth to representations of the *alte Jungfer*.³⁶ The sexual pleasure—which naturally should have been hers—could never be experienced because of an antiquated moral code that denied an essential part of the old maid's identity and burdened the prostitute with it. "Our current social order refuses girls of the bourgeoisie the *right* to sexual love, while at the same time it refuses the girls of the proletariat the right to *renounce* this sexual love, a new proof . . . that the system of capitalism oppresses not only the proletariat of both sexes, but also large fractions of the female bourgeoisie."³⁷ The repressed *alte Jungfer*, alongside the prostitute, demonstrated the need for a *Neue Ethik*.

Michels, Stöcker, and the BfM called for the German nation to undergo ‘a changed understanding’ of the human condition in order to redress the barbarities of the modern age. Through New Ethics that considered sexuality to be healthy and natural, women and men of both classes would be able to approach marriage differently. Ultimately, Stöcker’s movement aimed for a partnership in which each independent individual would attain “a richer, more intimate interaction ... [with] a finer ability to discriminate all the nuances of camaraderie, friendship, and love.”³⁸ Stöcker believed that woman and man, mother and father (though not necessarily wife and husband) were essential to establishing the family. And she believed that the family was the most important pillar of the future and the most appropriate vessel through which to disseminate her philosophy.³⁹

Even so, some women would remain alone; demography assured as much. But Stöcker believed that the *Neue Ethik* would release such a woman from the repression of *Altjungferntum*. The awareness that she need not live her life as a restrained and renounced individual would change her forever. The old maid would instead become, “an independent person and at the same time continually develop in her female nature ... conscious of her individual humanity—her feeling for the future, because she is something special, *Alleinstehendes*, who no longer fits into any category.”⁴⁰ The single woman as seen through the lens of a fresh ethical system truly could stand alone, unique and blossoming with potentiality. The old maid would be eliminated by the *Neue Ethik*. But until that illusory time, the *alte Jungfer* remained an opportune figure to pity, chastise, or ridicule in calls for a new social and moral order.

Ruth Bré and the Anguish of the Childless

Many bourgeois women of the *Kaiserreich* believed that marriage would provide them with security and the fulfillment of their natural callings as mothers and wives. It also would give them the only route to socially sanctioned sex. Yet marriage as the ticket to sex became increasingly debated in the early twentieth century. The BfM asserted that such an understanding of marriage prohibited the formation of truly human relationships. In the reformist milieu of the *Kaiserreich*, women’s rights advocate Ruth Bré offered a unique challenge to the institution of marriage. Bré was a utopian thinker who championed ‘free love’ and the establishment of communal households for unmarried mothers and their children. In her extensive critique of bourgeois marriage, Bré imagined communities as a response to the female surplus.

An obituary for Ruth Bré, a pseudonym for Elisabeth Bounness, described her as “an unsuccessful and impecunious poetess.”⁴¹ Not a great deal is known about Bré. Her own experience as an illegitimate child led her to become active in the campaign for rights for unmarried mothers. Bré was a socialist who wrote prolifically on the subject of maternal protection and was an original founder of the BfM in 1904. One of Bré’s most central preoccupations was the establishment

of state-supported enclaves for single mothers and their children.⁴² Her stridency regarding these plans ultimately resulted in her dismissal from the organization she had originated.⁴³ Shrillness characterized Bré's writing as well. Throughout her texts on motherhood, the tone is uncompromising, challenging, and emotional.⁴⁴ Bré's personal life informed her advocacy. A 1903 publication expressed her deep desire for children: "My yearning for a child comes from such depths,—from the depth of my *unhappy*, foregone life that it can only be understood by those who have struggled and renounced like I have, and who are of the warm maternal nature as I am, with desire for personal and maternal happiness."⁴⁵ In this passionate declaration, Bré reflected an era suffused by the ideology of spiritual motherhood. But her appropriation of the female surplus would ultimately condemn maternalist ideology. Indeed, Bré believed that rhetorical attempts to provide a replacement for physical motherhood amounted to apostasy. Bré combined the maternal spirit with an insurgent faith in the *Neue Ethik* in order to form her own interpretation of the *Frauenüberschuß*.

Unlike moderate activists, and far more than her peers in the BfM, Bré attacked marriage as the root of society's ills. Bré's pursuit of legal and institutional protection of unwed mothers and children was accompanied by an assault on the institution of marriage in the hopes of unseating it from its commanding presence in Imperial German culture and society. She formulated her offensive against marriage by describing the trauma inflicted upon those who had been excluded from society's prescribed arrangement of the family. Bré argued that of all of the creatures on the planet, only the human female had been forcibly prevented by custom from meeting her calling: "The female alone is shut out. She may not follow the laws and requirements of nature freely. She may not by her own will and selection arrive at maternity, the highest completion of her nature, but only through a certain condition. This condition is called marriage." Should a woman pursue or arrive at "maternity without marriage [it would be] called dishonor. The law which prescribes this in our current civilized states is called the law of custom."⁴⁶ Bré viewed the female essence as innately sexual and maternal; tradition, law, and false morality had combined in a pernicious mix to suppress the female nature.

Ruth Bré shared Helene Stöcker's belief in the transformative power of a new morality to conquer the abuses of custom. But she disagreed with Stöcker about the male role in this fresh ethical order. Beyond his indispensable seed, Bré considered the man to be inessential both to her utopian visions of community and to her definition of the family: "Who made this law of custom that contradicts all of nature? The man."⁴⁷ But if men had created the archaic tradition of marriage, both sexes inertially had perpetuated it into the modern age until the custom of marriage no longer had meaning, and, in fact, had created great harm.

That damage was best demonstrated by the perils of the female surplus. Bré's account of the *Frauenüberschuß* reflected the demographic discourse established by moderate women's rights advocates: "A marriage is absolutely not possible for every woman, because the women are in the greater numbers. Consequently, already

solely through their abundance, women are excluded from motherhood.”⁴⁸ The surplus woman thus was destined to languish in an unnatural state, fearing the disgrace of unwed motherhood and unable to fulfill her natural destiny.

Unwillingness to wed had worsened the female surfeit. Bré described three categories of men hesitant or unable to marry: very young men without enough wealth to establish a home; wealthy men who wanted to squander their fortunes while still in their prime; and mid-level male professionals who needed to negotiate a marriage very carefully due to limited resources—if they could do so at all. To these she added a female cohort: those who simply did not want to marry.⁴⁹ These conditions had combined to create a profusion of artificially repressed women, most of whom harbored intense maternal desires. Having once experienced romantic love only made the pain that much more acute: “Sadness for the woman, if she . . . cannot possess lifelong love and may not possess at least one child out of her love.”⁵⁰

What was to be done? Bré offered a unique and startling response by assessing her own experience: “I am today of the age in which I may quietly speak about these things. I do not fight for me, but for those ‘who come after.’ Today I can go without a man, but with a look at a one of the sweet little ones around his mother, the tears come. I deeply lament that I did not have the courage to salvage out of the time of my happiness a child, a future. But I belong to the caste of educated women, ‘that were left hungering for a child.’”⁵¹ Spiritual motherhood could not assuage the anguish that emerged from renouncing children. Unlike Elisabeth Gnauck-Kühne’s nightingale,⁵² Bré’s pain evoked nothing beautiful. In a discussion of adopting orphans, she wrote:

You think one should practice ‘spiritual’ motherhood, in which one takes in a strange child. Why, if *I can have my own*? I do not borrow and panhandle an object that I can rightfully possess. You think one can love a strange child as much as one’s own—I call on all mothers (that is, the physical ones) to manifest whether that is possible for them. Moreover, it is one’s *own* child who would be the continuation of myself and its father. In my *own* children I live on. Not through strange ones . . . Is there anything more simple than the question: Why should we not become mothers *ourselves*? Why should we not have our own children?⁵³

Bré challenged the dominant feminist sensibility of her age by labeling maternalism as artifice and rejecting the notion that the maternal instinct could be fulfilled via teaching, social work, or nursing. She argued instead that whether left single due to their own volition or to the unwillingness of prospective mates, women should be able to take charge of their futures and their bodies by bearing children; only in this way could they meet the female calling.

Bré’s defiant stance alienated her from both moderates and radicals. She was forced out of the BfM not long after she published this call to reproduction without marriage. Helene Stöcker had no patience for impractical calls that might create factions and with which she personally disagreed. Stöcker defended the content of the family, if not its legal form. She wrote that the *Neue Ethik* did

not entail “the dissolution of the marriage, the partnership, the family. It would be an insult to human nature and all happy marriages, if one stated that it was only obligation that held them together.” Stöcker believed that family life represented the apex of human existence: “The permanent living together of people personally drawn to one another, the trinity of father, mother, and children will always remain the highest ideal. In that, I must contradict the opinion that, for instance, the woman with a child already represents a totally complete family.”⁵⁴ Even amongst her nearest ideological counterparts, Ruth Bré stood as a peculiar outsider. Her views about the artificiality of spiritual motherhood held little resonance in her own era. Yet in her radical appeal for the rights of *alleinstehende* women to reproduce, Bré foreshadowed the feminist agenda of later generations. Ruth Bré’s writing represents one of the *Kaiserreich’s* most subversive views of female emancipation. In order to make her case for single motherhood, Bré declared as unjust the marital order that prevented too many good women from motherhood. Bré’s appropriation of the female surplus demonstrates the elasticity of the *Frauenüberschuß* in supporting calls for change and forming the rhetoric of women’s rights.

Lily Braun and the Case for Social Renewal

Another reformer who defies easy categorization is the socialist gadfly, Lily Braun (1865–1916). Born an aristocrat, Braun never seemed able to shed her elevated aura, despite her leftist politics. An anonymous obituary in 1916 captured the enigma that enveloped Braun: “When I think of her, I see a tall woman striding with her head raised high, in a rustling black silk robe, a lush red rose on her breast ... Lily Braun had no intention whatever of evoking bad feelings among her comrades. But she was, as it were, born with a black silk robe on; it would have rustled around her even if it had been made of cheap cotton.”⁵⁵ Braun, born Lily von Kretschmann in 1865, inherited her style from her maternal grandmother, Jenny von Gustedt, an illegitimate daughter of Jerome Bonaparte and an important figure in the culture of nineteenth-century Weimar. Von Gustedt was a close associate of the Goethe family until her death in 1889.⁵⁶ That same year, Lily moved from an aristocratic household near Magdeburg to Weimar in order to compile her grandmother’s papers. In the city of Goethe and Schiller, Lily honed her enthusiasm for all things literary and artistic. In 1893, she moved to Berlin where she resided until her death in 1916.

The move to Berlin marked the beginning of Lily’s political shift to the left; there, she associated with like-minded individuals, including economists, theologians, and political exiles. In 1893, she married one of these intellectuals: Georg von Gizycki, a philosopher and publisher of the journal *Ethische Kultur* (Ethical Culture). The marriage, which lasted until Gizycki’s 1895 death, introduced Lily to the fields of philosophy, economics, and statistics. While her family accepted the marriage, they did not condone Lily’s writing. Her articles and pamphlets

began to espouse a radical approach to the women's movement while also criticizing Christianity, exploring questions of sexuality, and toying with socialist ideology.⁵⁷

Such topics did not intrigue the average aristocrat. But Lily von Gizycki had throughout her youth exhibited concern for the working-class in response to her contempt for the frivolous lifestyle she had witnessed in her childhood. Her 1896 marriage to Heinrich Braun punctuated the break from her past. Raised in a middle-class Jewish household in Bohemia, Braun was a Marxist and member of the *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (SPD; Social Democratic Party of Germany).⁵⁸ Though well connected, Heinrich Braun never became a major party leader. His personal history no doubt had something to do with his failure to rise to an authoritative position in the SPD.

The Braun marriage was sensational. Heinrich was twice-divorced and his union with Lily had occurred under outrageous circumstances. After protracted divorce negotiations with his first wife, Heinrich received custody of his two sons in January 1895. Soon thereafter he married the housekeeper who had been hired to look after the children. By late 1895, Heinrich had fallen in love with the widow von Gizycki. The housekeeper-wife was divorced, allowing Lily and Heinrich to marry in June, 1896. Members of the SPD viewed the affair as scandalous.⁵⁹ Yet the marriage gained them both notice. As a widely published writer, the 'other woman' in a shocking love story, and the wife of a prominent, if problematic, party member, Lily Braun quickly became a recognizable figure in the SPD.

Though both husbands influenced her political development, Braun's social agenda was distinctly her own. She was a prolific writer of essays, fiction, and biography. Her most significant work, *Die Frauenfrage* (1901), provides a theoretical analysis of women's lives at the turn of the century.⁶⁰ The book investigates the nature of female labor in the industrial epoch, relying on economic models to explain the social problems that emerged under capitalism. The publication of *Die Frauenfrage* marked Braun's entrance into the debate over women's issues. She played a unique role in the discussion of women's rights by espousing socialist ideals without fully committing to Marxist politics; participating in discussions of the *Neue Ethik* and joining the BfM, but ultimately distancing herself from the organization in the midst of internal disputes; and attempting to create a bridge between the radical and moderate women's movements.

Braun viewed the German women's movement as being split into "two camps; on one side, the 'class-conscious proletarian women' stand in closed ranks, on the other side, the female representatives of bourgeois society in separate little detachments." She admired the goals and camaraderie of the proletariat movement and criticized the bourgeois women: "On one side, many thousands of women fight, shoulder to shoulder with their male comrades, a joint fight for equal rights, on the other side, hundreds of females, accompanied by a few men, fight for equal education, often against the men." Identifying a split between the two camps suited her intellectual peculiarity as well as her ego, for it allowed her to carve out a unique niche for herself: "Since I am neither a man nor a millionaire, I will have to do

without the dueling privilege. At this time I am somewhat like a war reporter trying to arrive at an objective judgment about the battle tactics of both armies.”⁶¹

A mixture of moderate and radical advocacy formed Braun’s agenda. Causes dear to Braun included the welfare of prostitutes, expansion of work opportunities, fair compensation for actresses, curricular reform in girls’ schools, greater sexual freedom, and the establishment of communal households for single women.⁶² She pursued legislative reforms in the areas of family law, maternity insurance, and female labor. The wide scope of Braun’s reformist activities dismayed some of her fellow socialists, most notably Clara Zetkin, who accused her of embracing an agenda too expansive to be effective.⁶³

Braun’s views on marriage especially demonstrated a desire to blur ideological divides. Her critique of the marital institution combined *Neue Ethik* philosophy with both a socialist interpretation of economic evolution and a moderate maternalist vision. Braun believed that marriage in its traditional form would become obsolete as women gained experience in the world: “The old form of marriage, its peace and its duration, depended first, on the support it provided for the woman and, second, on the subordination of the wife to the husband.”⁶⁴ Capitalism had only made disparities between men and women more conspicuous. Braun contended that “once the female has turned into a human being, that is, an individual personality, with views, judgments and life goals of her own, then she has been spoiled for the average marriage. And the conflict between the traditional economic dependence on the man and her new intellectual independence is inevitable.”⁶⁵ Capitalism exposed the problems within marriage and made women wary of wedding. Braun believed that women of all social levels would feel the constraints of marriage as they became increasingly engaged in the world beyond their doorsteps. Essential to Braun’s analysis was the belief that economic change had left women with no choice but to step outside of those doors.

The capitalist marketplace had pushed women beyond the private sphere. Braun described the consequences of capitalism and industrialization in terms similar to moderate maternalists, though her description encompassed both working-class and bourgeois women. A 1901 essay focusing on the emergence of consumer textiles demonstrates the ways in which Braun’s socialism combined with an awareness of the displaced female: “Next to the cooking ladle it was the sewing needle which according to the old traditions was the mainstay of the household. It was replaced by the sewing machine ... This too, however, is coming to an end.” Consumer culture depended upon the buying power of both men and women, for “even the better situated worker, male or female, today can clothe him/herself more cheaply by buying ready-made clothing.” The erosion of domestic clothing production in the wake of the garment industry brought about a demand for abundant pools of female labor: “The precondition of this, of course, is the availability of a sufficiently large labor force, preferably female. Nor is there any dearth of them: Unemployed domestics and redundant daughters, the children and wives or workers, provide more recruits than this call to service can use.”⁶⁶ While the essay emphasized working-class experience (wage labor in the homes

of the poor as well as the work of domestic servants and day workers), Braun included “redundant daughters” in her consideration of those women dislodged and forced into the workplace.

Along with socialists August Bebel and Clara Zetkin,⁶⁷ Braun argued that capitalism had created the women’s movement: “The driving force behind the women’s movement was essentially economic necessity, which drove women into seeking gainful employment, forcing them into a competitive struggle with men.” In the process, females had been obliged to realize their estrangement from men: “Only gradually, as women . . . grew in experience and knowledge and began to analyze their own intellectual and emotional lives, did they realize increasingly that gender differences are not limited to the purely physiological aspects but that they also exert a most profound influence on women’s emotional life and intellectual development.”⁶⁸ Female and male estrangement preceded industrialization, but it had been forced into the open by the changes wrought during the capitalist epoch. Independent women confronting their own choices compelled the women’s movement into life and provided harbingers of a marital institution doomed to failure.

Braun privileged sex over class in this argument and struck a path different from that of more orthodox socialists. Braun could not shed the worldview gleaned from a life of privilege, nor did she desire to do so. While Braun wrote with passion about working-class subjugation, she also recognized the despair that characterized elite idleness and the constricting confines of bourgeois morality. Her intellectual concerns as well as what historian Stanley Pierson has described as an “imperious nature and . . . egoism” kept her well outside of the mainstream of female activism in the SPD.⁶⁹

In assessing bourgeois society, Braun suggested that financial impediments to marriage forced expectant brides either to hope for an inheritance or to actively pursue professional development so that they would be more attractive as wives: “Middle-class incomes have not kept pace with growing demands; marriage, still today seen in bourgeois circles essentially as an institution to provide support, has become more and more unattainable for the growing number of girls without independent means.” Unable to find husbands, surplus women had been forced to gain independent sensibilities: “Add to this fact that a justified striving toward freedom and autonomy has developed in them, and that its fulfillment became possible when universities and many new professions opened up for women.” Braun’s casual citation of marital scarcity makes clear that she accepted the *Frauenüberschuß* as a reality. Braun also believed that the obstacles to marriage would be eased if a woman had a job: “Once these wage-earning girls enter marriage, their labor power today is often their most valuable dowry, just as in the case of the woman worker.”⁷⁰ Earning potential made for a fine dowry, but it also made clear that the essence of marriage was contractual and financial. Work not only enhanced a woman’s candidacy for marriage, but it also provided her with a vital sense of “freedom and autonomy.” That psychological development played a significant role in Braun’s broader critique of marriage as an institution.

Female lives had been made more difficult by the double burden of work and family, an affliction that affected both classes: “The conflict between domestic and professional duties which is very evident in the female proletariat exists also in the world of the bourgeois woman.” In fact, only work could reform the misguided elite female who had spent her youth amidst vanities while awaiting marriage: “A painter cannot spend her time in the kitchen, a writer cannot jump up every moment to see whether the soup is boiling over; not a single woman who is seriously devoted to her science or her art and who wants to eradicate dilettantism, that most dangerous enemy of her sex, has the understanding, the time, or the interest which would be required if she wanted to be a really good housewife.”⁷¹ Braun’s aristocratic background shades this passage, for the work of a female intellectual or artist evokes a rather different aura than that of a social worker or teacher. Braun wanted women to maintain a professional identity alongside the traditional occupations of wife and mother. She thus considered mainstream maternalist advocacy to be shortsighted in its assertion of marriage and family as the best and most natural female calling.

Braun championed motherhood and aimed many of her reformist appeals toward improving the lot of all mothers. She believed that the double burden of work and family ought to be alleviated by those social reforms that would allow households to share responsibilities and limit the demands of the workday.⁷² Indeed, Braun faulted the moderate women’s movement for a narrow focus: “The bourgeois women’s movement, forcefully and skillfully fighting for the right to work, had no better defense against its enemies than the constantly repeated argument that professional work would not in the least threaten the ‘sole profession’ of women.” The agenda of the mainstream women’s movement was woefully limited: “It was right in so far as, in the world of bourgeois women, wage work in most cases is no more than a substitute for the ‘sole profession’ and is abandoned as soon as the girl gets married.” But in settling for a notion of work as substitute, Braun charged that the moderate women’s movement had missed the boat: “As long as women’s work, like that of men, is not regarded as a lifetime career, it is condemned to get stuck in dilettantism; if that is to be prevented, the bourgeois woman, too, must be freed from the excess burden of her double duties.”⁷³ Once again, the surplus woman kept vigil as a prospective dilettante. To guard against this fate, Braun called for married women to work alongside single women. She argued that moderate maternalists had denied both the exigencies of many married women’s lives as well as the spiritual passions that might compel certain women (especially artists and poets) to work: “The German bourgeois women’s movement from its very beginning has been very timid and has not had the courage to demand full equal rights for the female sex.”⁷⁴

In emphasizing the double burden, Braun’s feminism adopted a wider lens than those moderate activists focused upon the experiences of single women. One of her more interesting ideas for broad scale social change was the proposal of *Einküchenhäuser* (one-kitchen households or cooperatives). These imagined quarters primarily were intended to ease the double burden by pooling resources,

distributing responsibilities, and consolidating housekeeping.⁷⁵ Braun did not intend these houses to be sanctuaries for single women displaced from the bosom of the family. The structures instead would relieve the hardships faced by mothers in a reconfiguration of family life. The *Einküchenhäuser* responded to both socialist and moderate feminist articulations of the ruptured domestic sphere, since neither the bourgeois nor the proletariat home guaranteed security to women, whether single or married.

Braun saw the surplus woman as one of many figures sharing in the dilemmas facing women at the turn of the century. Her socialist interpretation of economic change included the conviction that bourgeois institutions inevitably decayed in the capitalist age. The anxious, unmarried woman displaced from the home offered evidence of that decay. Braun also went beyond Marxist ideology and joined with Helene Stöcker in connecting bourgeois degeneration to human sexuality. Braun believed that the right to love freely was just as important as political and economic equality. “The right to work, the right to [participation in] public activity mean little for the liberation of woman and for the full flourishing of her personality as long as she has not fought for, and won, the right to love.” Braun echoed Iwan Bloch and August Forel by claiming that “the healthy woman needs love no less than the man. After all, for her, her sex life is of far more trenchant importance, for, as the precondition of motherhood, it constitutes not only the most important physical but also the chief emotional contents of her life.”⁷⁶ Braun’s amended maternalist line held that the importance of sex has more to do with reproduction than freedom. Extant morality, reinforced by legal marriage, prevented women from full freedom. In this way, Braun used the surplus woman to demonstrate the despair of a life led without love.

In a 1905 article, Braun conveyed the afflictions experienced by the female middle-class unwed. Economic redundancy served as a backdrop to this depiction of the surplus woman ailing as a result of her physical solitude: “All too often today we see respectable bourgeois daughters in full consciousness envy the poor servant girl or seamstress who at least has experienced a bit of love in an hour’s ecstasy. Some of them, idle at home, wait in vain for a man; others seek to smother their yearning in professional work.” The contrast between Braun’s own notorious romantic history and the straitlaced lives of the former schoolteachers populating the moderate women’s movement pervaded her estimation of old maidenhood: “All of them are branded with the stigma of the crime against nature: hysteria, melancholy, neuroses, masturbation, and finally that sorry surrogate of lesbian love which is spreading so terribly among the lonely and which in the vast majority of cases is not likely to have sprung from an innate contrary sexuality.” Normativity and homophobia energized her evaluation of such contrariness. Still, all of these disorders could be chalked up to the brutality of the capitalist epoch: “Countless women have had to repress their young strong love because they lack a dowry for a household fit for their social class, or else a lengthy engagement with all its secret excitement and its much-admired celibate faithfulfulness eats at her strength and cheats her and her man of the best in life.”⁷⁷

Braun's account of the bourgeois single woman echoes a familiar iconography, detailing the idle *Mädchen* (girl) at home, destined for a life of stagnation. Inertia and the lack of a dowry ascertained the ultimate status of *alte Jungfer*, as did the exaggerated physical symptoms of atrophy. Braun also provided a turn-of-the-century homophobic note (evocative of the sexology of Richard Krafft-Ebing and Otto Weininger),⁷⁸ by claiming that sexual disuse led to sexual dysfunction. Repressed sexuality demonstrated the moral bankruptcy of bourgeois marriage. Braun believed that because marriage was primarily an economic contract, the institution necessarily damned some women to psychological and physical isolation.

Like her moderate contemporaries, Braun's appeals for change did not shy away from presenting unwed women as pariahs: "Without doubt there is profound meaning in that ridicule-cum-contempt to which popular wisdom subjects the 'old maids:' the instinctive recognition that a woman who cannot follow her sexual destiny must become crippled in an important part of her being." Though sympathetic, Braun nonetheless granted verity to the stereotype: "People here are as unjust as kids who jeer at a hunchback. They should bemoan a tragic fate instead of mocking it."⁷⁹ She might have condemned the ridicule, but Braun offered the *alte Jungfer* no possibility of relief. The old maid's fate would be tragic. By utilizing the much lampooned cultural icon, Braun registered her familiarity with the surplus woman as a signifier of social and economic upheaval. At the same time, Braun, like Ruth Bré, contributed another layer to the discourse of the *Frauenüberschuß* by showing how the plight of excessive women provided tinder for a very expansive critique of marriage.

Braun believed that subservience lay at the root of the marital institution. She argued that most married women were quick to find "that matrimonial peace—and within a marriage peace is a blessing even if it has nothing at all to do with genuine happiness—depends on the subordination of one partner to the other, hence, according to tradition, of the woman to the man."⁸⁰ Braun unleashed some of her most scathing rhetoric for those who celebrated marriage as a vessel of true love: "What often is the fate of those who marry out of love? It almost seems as if they are punished for thus violating the general rule!" Mundanities would kill romance between husband and wife: "the difficult struggle for daily bread, the breathless wrestling with that gray ogress, worry, extinguish everything in them that was pure, great, and strong. Concern for the family makes them into climbers, cowards, and ass kissers." Braun's conclusion was severe: "Marriage flaws their character as it flaws their lives."⁸¹

Such a cynical view raises questions about the nature of Braun's own marriage. Unable to escape the taint of scandal that surrounded their union, the bond between Heinrich and Lily eroded through the years. The Brauns seldom lived together and the object of Lily's affection became their son, Otto, born in 1897.⁸² Motherhood fulfilled where love had failed. Braun incorporated her personal history into a view of marriage as an antiquated economic arrangement that would one day be supplanted by cohabitation of the sexes and communal households.

Ultimately, the departure of women from home to work would sound the death knell for the institution of marriage.

Lily Braun's writings portray a new woman transformed by the economy and no longer willing to accept subordination in marriage. Braun believed that marriage had lost its value in the modern era; *alleinstehende Frauen* need no longer marry once they recognized their worth outside of the domestic sphere. Not quite as radical as Bré's advocacy of truly single motherhood, Braun's utilization of contemporary anxiety about women's roles advanced an agenda that questioned the very foundations of the social fabric. Abandoned by wedlock, the surplus woman emerged as a forceful and important challenger to the institution of marriage itself.

* * *

This chapter has addressed the use of the female surplus among three social reformers, each of whom articulated calls for radical change. Helene Stöcker, Ruth Bré, and Lily Braun engaged in subversive rhetoric, though their ultimate goals differed. As was the case among more moderate advocates of social reform, these women agreed that economic upheaval had brought about the women's movement. They saw the *Frauenüberschuß* as a deeply meaningful element of the dynamic social fabric that had emerged during the era of industrialization. The constructed surplus woman offered a lens into multifaceted interpretations of the nature of change. She also served a catalyst for disparate visions of social reconfiguration.

In embracing the female surfeit as such an important component of the women's movement, moderate maternalists had described the plight of single women so well that they opened up inevitable questions about the very legitimacy of the society and culture that created such an imbalance. Ideologies that preceded discussion of the female surplus found in this new concept evidence of a society in decline. Moreover, they found a useful figure to employ in arguing for radical change: the old maid. The repressed *alte Jungfer* offered a compelling image in calls for transforming the moral vision of German society. The malleable surplus woman transcended the boundaries of the bourgeois women's movement and became an insurgent presence in the struggle for pervasive ethical, cultural, and social change.

Notes

1. See chapter 5.
2. Richard Evans, *The Feminists* (Totowa, NJ, 1977), 112.
3. Helene Stöcker's *Bund für Mutterschutz* had a membership of approximately 3,800 in 1907. BDF membership numbered 70,000 in 1901 and increased to 500,000 by the late 1920s, by which time the largest religious women's associations of German women stood at approxi-

- mately 200,000 (Protestant) and 250,000 (Catholic). See Ann Taylor Allen, *Feminism and Motherhood in Germany, 1800–1914* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1991), 175; Evans, *Feminists*, 106; and Ute Frevert, *Women in German History*, trans. Stuart McKinnon–Evans (New York, 1989), 173.
4. Richard Evans, *The Feminist Movement in Germany* (Beverly Hills, CA, 1976), 138; on anti-feminism, see chapter 5.
 5. Helene Stöcker, “Lebensabriss,” 5, Peace Collection, Swarthmore College, Swarthmore, PA.
 6. Stöcker also edited the BfM’s magazine, *Mutterschutz*, initiated in 1905. Andrew Bonnell, “Robert Michels, Max Weber, and the Sexual Question,” *The European Legacy* 3(6) (1998): 98, lists the diverse group of reformers who supported the establishment of the BfM, including Max Weber, Werner Sombart, “prominent liberals such as Friedrich Naumann and Anton Erkelenz, doctors such as Alfred Blaschko, Iwan Bloch, and Max Marcuse, along with well-known feminists such as Hedwig Dohm, Minna Cauer, Lily Braun, and Marie Stritt”; Weber’s support for the group would wane as its focus on sexual reform increased.
 7. Stöcker and Springer’s relationship was criticized by some in the BfM; see Leila Rupp, “Sexuality and Politics in the Early Twentieth Century: The Case of the International Women’s Movement,” *Feminist Studies* 23(3) (1997): 593–594; on Stöcker, see Amy Hackett, “Helene Stöcker: Left-Wing Intellectual and Sex Reformer,” in *When Biology became Destiny*, eds. Renate Bridenthal, Atina Grossman, and Marion Kaplan (New York, 1984), 109–130; Gudrun Hammelmann, *Helene Stöcker, der “Bund für Mutterschutz” und “Die Neue Generation”* (Frankfurt a.M., 1992), and Christl Wückert, *Helene Stöcker, 1869–1943: Frauenrechtlerin, Sexualreformerin, und Pazifistin: Eine Biographie* (Bonn, 1991).
 8. Helene Stöcker, *Die Liebe und die Frauen* (Minden in Westf., 1905), vi.
 9. Helene Stöcker, “Zur Reform der sexuellen Ethik,” in *Mutterschutz* 1(1) (1905): 3.
 10. *Ibid.*, 3–4.
 11. Edward Ross Dickinson, “Reflections on Feminism and Monism in the *Kaiserreich*, 1900–1913,” *Central European History* 34(2) (2001): 196.
 12. See chapter 2.
 13. On the opposition between advocates of Stöcker’s *Neue Ethik* and the BDF see Kevin Repp, *Reformers, Critics, and the Paths of German Modernity* (Cambridge, MA, 2000), 119–128, and Dickinson, “Reflections,” 196–199.
 14. Nancy Reagin, “‘A True Woman Can Take Care of Herself’: The Debate over Prostitution in Hanover, 1906,” *Central European History* 24(4) (1991): 348–353.
 15. Helene Lange Archiv, Nachlass Bund deutscher Frauenvereine. Karton 54, Mapped 245. “Was die Frauenbewegung für die Frauen will,” 1898.
 16. Stöcker, “Reform,” 5.
 17. Stöcker, *Liebe*, 85.
 18. See Allen, *Feminism* (1991), 173–187.
 19. Dickinson, “Reflections,” 191.
 20. *Ibid.*
 21. *Ibid.*, 216.
 22. Dickinson, “Reflections,” 199–206, summarizes the extensive historical debate on the extent to which the radical feminist milieu of the *Neue Ethik* forms the “prehistory” (2001, 200) of Nazi racial and gender policy; I share his view that the BfM and Stöcker need to be viewed from a historical perspective in which eugenics, the celebration of female reproductive capacity, sexual freedom, and female autonomy, came together in a monistic vision of human potentiality and not solely as a *post facto* precursor to fascist politics.
 23. Helene Stöcker, “Von neuer Ethik,” in *Mutterschutz* 2(1) (1906): 4.
 24. Max Weber to Michels, 11 January 1907, quoted in Bonnell, “Michels,” 99. For Weber’s (1864–1920) views on the women’s movement, see Lawrence A. Scaff, “The ‘Cool Objectivity of Sociation’: Max Weber and Marianne Weber in America,” *History of the Human Sciences* 11(2) (1998): 61–82. Michels (1876–1936) was a member of the BfM and a leading figure in

- German social science; see Bonnell, "Michels," and Terry R. Kandal, "Robert Michels' *Sexual Ethics*," *Society* 38(3) (2001): 60–66, for an assessment of Michels' views on gender.
25. Repp, *Reformers*, 123, citing Gertrud Bäumer, "Der moderne Individualismus und die Erziehung," *Die Frau* 9(6) (1902): 323, and Gertrud Bäumer, "Die psychischen Probleme der Gegenwart," *Die Frau* 7(7) (1900): 391; on Bäumer, see chapter 5.
 26. On moderate appropriations of the *alte Jungfer*, see chapter 4.
 27. Stöcker, *Liebe*, 179.
 28. Sol Gittleman, *Frank Wedekind* (New York, 1969), 93; Ward B. Lewis, in *The Ironic Dissident: Frank Wedekind in the View of his Critics* (Columbia, SC, 1997), 83, challenges this judgment by arguing that the similarity between author and character is limited to the ways in which they "reject the woman's movement and oppose the feudalism of love."
 29. Frank Wedekind, "Karl Hetmann, der Zwergriese (Hidalla)" (1903), in *Gesammelte Werke*, vol. 8 (Munich, 1924), 237–238.
 30. Stöcker, *Liebe*, 179.
 31. On marriage restrictions, see chapter 5.
 32. Stöcker, "Reform," 6–7.
 33. Robert Michels, "Die Dirne als die 'alte Jungfer' des Proletariats und die Prostitution," *Mutter-schutz* 1(2)(1905): 59.
 34. *Ibid.*, 58.
 35. See chapter 1.
 36. See chapter 2.
 37. Michels, "Dirne," 59–60; emphasis in text.
 38. Stöcker, "Reform," 6.
 39. *Ibid.*, 10.
 40. Stöcker, *Liebe*, 20.
 41. Cited in Evans, *Feminist Movement*, 120.
 42. *Ibid.*, 121.
 43. Allen, *Feminism* (1991), 175.
 44. Ruth Bré, *Das Recht auf die Mutterschaft* (Leipzig: Verlag der Frauen-Rundschau, 1903); *Nochmals das Recht auf die Mutterschaft* (Leipzig, 1903); *Staatskinder oder Mutterrecht* (Leipzig, 1904).
 45. Bré, *Nochmals*, 10; emphasis in text.
 46. Bré, *Recht*, 4.
 47. *Ibid.*
 48. *Ibid.*, 4–5.
 49. Bré, *Recht*, 5–6.
 50. Bré, *Nochmals*, 8.
 51. *Ibid.*
 52. See Introduction.
 53. Bré, *Nochmals*, 8–9; emphasis in text.
 54. Helene Stöcker, "Reform," 10.
 55. Obituary for Lily Braun, *Neue Freie Presse* (Vienna: August 30, 1916); cited in Alfred Meyer, *The Feminism and Socialism of Lily Braun* (Bloomington, IN, 1985), 187; Meyer's biography was the first English-language treatment of Braun; on Braun see also Ute Lischke, *Lily Braun, 1865–1916: German Writer, Feminist, Socialist* (Rochester, NY, 2000), and Ute Speck, *Ein mögliches Ich, Selbstreflexion in der Schreiberfabrik: zur Autobiographik der Politikerinnen Lily Braun, Hedwig Dohm, und Rosa Luxemburg* (Frankfurt a.M., 1997).
 56. On von Gustedt, see Braun's biography of her grandmother: Lily Braun, *Im schatten der Tanten; ein Erinnerungsbuch an Baronin Jenny v. Gustedt* (Braunschweig, 1909).
 57. Meyer, *Feminism*, 18.
 58. On Heinrich Braun, see the biography written by his fourth wife, art historian Julie Braun-Vogelstein, *Ein Menschenleben: Heinrich Braun und sein Schicksal* (Tübingen, 1932); on his

- role in the SPD, see Stanley Pierson, *Marxist Intellectuals and the Working-Class Mentality in Germany, 1887–1912* (Cambridge, MA, 1993), 69–78.
59. Meyer, *Feminism*, 23.
 60. Lily Braun, *Die Frauenfrage: Ihre geschichtliche Entwicklung und wirtschaftliche Seite* (Leipzig, 1901).
 61. Lily Braun, “Nach links und rechts,” *Die Frauenbewegung* 1 (5,7) 1895; in Lily Braun, *Selected Writings on Feminism and Socialism: Lily Braun*, ed. and trans. Alfred Meyer (Bloomington, IN, 1987), 43.
 62. Lily Braun, “Frauenarbeit und Hauswirtschaft” (1901), in Braun, *Writings*, 17–23.
 63. On the tensions between Braun and Zetkin, see Jean Quataert, *Reluctant Feminism in German Social Democracy, 1855–1917* (Princeton, NJ, 1979), 107–133; on Zetkin, see chapter 7.
 64. Lily Braun, “Einführung,” in *Mutterschaft*, ed. Adele Schreiber, in Braun, *Writings*, 113.
 65. Lily Braun, “Das Problem der Ehe,” *Neue Gesellschaft* 1 (10) (1905), in Braun, *Writings*, 125.
 66. Braun, “Frauenarbeit,” 6–7.
 67. See chapter 7.
 68. Lily Braun, “Das geistige Leben des Weibes,” in Braun, *Writings*, 141.
 69. Pierson, *Marxist Intellectuals*, 138.
 70. Braun, “Frauenarbeit,” 11–12.
 71. *Ibid.*, 12.
 72. Lily Braun, “Die Frauen und die Politik,” in Braun, *Writings*, 85–87.
 73. Braun, “Frauenarbeit,” 17.
 74. Braun, “Nach links,” 53.
 75. Braun, “Frauenarbeit,” 17–23.
 76. Lily Braun, “Die Entthronung der Liebe,” *Neue Gesellschaft* 1(22) (1905), in Braun, *Writings*, 120; on Bloch and Forel, see chapter 2.
 77. *Ibid.*, 120–121.
 78. See chapter 2.
 79. Braun, “Entthronung,” 121.
 80. Braun, “Problem,” 126.
 81. Braun, “Entthronung,” 123.
 82. Meyer, *Feminism*, 168–170; Otto Braun (1897–1918) was killed in action in World War I, two years after his mother’s death.

SOCIALISM AND SINGLENESS

Clara Zetkin



The Frauenüberschuß (female surplus) is a concept that simultaneously describes a predicament and calls for a response. Advocates of women's rights used the notion of the female surplus to demonstrate the impact of the economic and social changes that they believed had left many women with no choice but to take on new roles. Capitalism's advance explained and defended the rise of female activism and gave moderate reformers a mechanism by which to eschew polemics in favor of maternalist advocacy. The mainstream women's movement led by Helene Lange, Gertrud Bäumer, and Alice Salomon demonstrated the displacement of bourgeois women from the home, but the movement did not challenge the capitalist epoch at the source of that domestic rupture.¹ Most moderates accepted the prevailing economic, social, and political system as immutable reality. Maternalist ideology reified the importance of marriage and the family while questioning neither the dominance of capitalism nor the implications of class stratification.

The agenda pursued by the *Bund für Mutterschutz* (BfM) also identified economic causality as the catalyst for the women's movement.² But Helene Stöcker's new ethical system sought moral change based upon a philosophical justification. Capitalism played a key role in creating what the BfM saw as the corrupt moral standards of modernity, but the BfM's agenda nonetheless could have been realized under the existing political order. The work of reformers Ruth Bré and Lily Braun addressed how economic change had wreaked havoc upon marriage and the family. But Bré's social criticism lamented the state of the economy without pointing a way out; her focus on single motherhood did not allow for broader social analysis. On the other hand, the socialist Lily Braun wrote fervently about

the exploitation of the proletariat. But “Braun’s purview was the present”³ and her gifts lay in describing the pathos of contemporary life and conveying the urgency of change. Though she wrote about a broad array of targets, Braun’s advocacy was too widespread and at times too whimsical to be consistently political.

Yet as both moderates and radicals assessed and sought to change female single life (be it through opening professional avenues, redefining motherhood, or subverting marriage), they inevitably raised questions about the viability of the extant culture. Was capitalism not indicted by the despair of bourgeois women who had been forced outside of the comforts of home by the industrial mode of production? Taken to its furthest extreme, might the existence of a surplus of unprotected and aimless women provide evidence of capitalism’s inevitable fall? The rhetoric surrounding the female surfeit also exposed a malaise that plagued bourgeois marriage: its perceived ties to cash.

In 1905, sociologist Robert Michels (a socialist and SPD member until 1907) wrote about the impact that capitalism had had on the view of marriage held by the average middle-class man: “In the struggle for existence which he must go through, a whole number of years generally elapse before he can come to a high enough salary or earnings in order to support wife and child, be it as a civil servant, businessman or member of a free profession.”⁴ Delayed marriage and a lack of nuptial enthusiasm among bourgeois men had created a female surplus. Old maidenhood thus ran rampant: “That army of aging girls who the cruel vernacular loves to define as ‘*alte Jungfer*’ [old maid] belongs to the flags of our bourgeoisie in all of whose strata and substrata we find them, closed off from almost every meaningful pleasure in life. But this phenomenon is limited to the bourgeoisie.”⁵ Social class dictated the terms of the *Frauenüberschuß* and the contours of the old maid.

Maria Lischnewska, an executive board member of the BfM, employed the dialectic in her description of a historical process resulting in the debasement of marriage. After the domestic economy had been transformed by the arrival of consumer goods, “the woman lost the ground under her feet that connected her firmly to the national economy. She became in the eyes of the man a luxury article.” Like so many commentators of her era, Lischnewska eschewed investigation of statistical realities in favor of a simple assertion of the reality of delayed and scarce marriages:

From this arise the late marriages ... The male dread of marriage and above all the immoral institution of the bought marriage are based on these economically-altered foundations of marriage. “What has she?” That is the question, i.e.: How much economic value does she bring with her into communal life? If one regards the situation with a real sober sensibility, then one cannot reproach the man. Whether judge or policeman, officer or corporal, teacher or physician or tradesmen—the man sees the most difficult deprivation before himself if the woman is without means. It is just an economic fact of the modern time: *one* person cannot support four or five other people. Thus marriage becomes in thousands of cases an act of lowly calculation, and the question of the inner harmony of souls, which alone should be crucial, grows silent.⁶

None of the cited professions characterized the working-class, for Lischnewska interpreted the marriage problem as a strictly middle-class event. Bourgeois marriage was the mean product of “lowly calculation.” Lischnewska and her peers in the BfM believed that it was time to recalculate the value of the institution itself.

Marx and Engels had contended that the bourgeois family was based upon capital and private gain. The single woman’s expulsion from that sphere served as an important example of the middle-class family’s eventual dissolution. What better evidence of the family’s degeneration than the ease with which it dismissed the capitally useless unwed woman? The *Frauenüberschuß* was one of the steps in the process by which “the bourgeois family will vanish as a matter of course.”⁷ This chapter addresses the role of the female surplus as articulated by two of the most prominent figures in the history of Imperial German socialism: August Bebel (1840–1913) and Clara Zetkin (1857–1933). Zetkin was the leading female voice in the socialist movement of the *Kaiserreich* (Imperial Germany); her vision expanded upon the foundation provided by Bebel. Both believed that the surplus woman signified the bankruptcy of bourgeois culture and society.

August Bebel and Capitalist Decay

A woodworker turned politician, August Bebel led the German socialist movement of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Bebel in 1869 was a cofounder of the *Sozialdemokratische Arbeiterpartei* (SDAP; Social Democratic Worker’s Party) and served as a member of Germany’s Reichstag from 1871 until his death in 1913. The SDAP in 1875 merged into the newly established *Sozialdemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (SPD). Bebel would emerge as the most important figure in that party throughout the Bismarckian and Wilhelmine eras. Bebel became chair of the SPD in 1892 (after the lifting of anti-socialist legislation), the same year in which the party began to pursue a national profile. The SPD sought to achieve socialism through action in a national context, and by the final years of the *Kaiserreich*, it proved to be very successful in gaining an electoral constituency.⁸

Bebel’s most influential work, *Woman and Socialism* (1879), provides the seminal intellectual and political framework for the role of women in the German socialist movement. In their study of *Men’s Feminism*, Anne Lopes and Gary Roth have argued that Bebel’s book “sets the tone, scope, and particulars for the debate on gender equality” in the *Kaiserreich*, though in its immersion in well-worn roles and stereotypes, it is also “a throwback to the period from which [Bebel] had evolved.”⁹ In his conception of conventional gender roles, Bebel strengthened the staying power of the old maid. *Women under Socialism* identifies the *Frauenüberschuß* as a pervasive problem of the modern era. Bebel’s account of the surplus woman later would be adopted by Clara Zetkin in her critiques of the bourgeois women’s movement. Bebel explained the female surplus in four stages: a description of bourgeois marriage as an economic institution; an accounting of the demographic origins of the female surplus; an argument that a surfeit of unwed women

offered evidence of greater social decay; and a declaration that only through a complete reordering of society could the female surplus be ameliorated. Marxism clearly governed Bebel's interpretation of the *Frauenüberschuß*. His description of the overabundance of unmarried women also went beyond ideological assertions of the bourgeois family "vanishing as a matter of course" to identify particular aspects of the Imperial German context that served as proof of the decline of both the bourgeois family and bourgeois marriage.

The economic basis of marriage served as the first component of Bebel's version of the female surplus. Bebel asserted that "modern marriage is an institution that is closely connected with the existing social condition, and stands or falls with it. But this marriage is in the course of dissolution and decay, exactly as capitalist society itself."¹⁰ The potential bride was a pawn in a property transaction: "To man, woman is, first of all, an object of enjoyment. Economically and socially unfree, she is bound to see in marriage her means of support; accordingly, she depends upon man and becomes a piece of property to him. As a rule, her position is rendered still more unfavorable through the general excess of women over men."¹¹ All of her education, both practical and cultural, limited the bourgeois woman to the status of possession: "The woman who does not reach the development of her faculties, who is crippled in her powers, who is held imprisoned in the narrowest circle of thought, and who comes into contact with hardly any but her own female relatives,—such a woman can not possibly raise herself above the routine of daily life and habits."¹² Class status played a key role in her evolution, for the leisure of a secure income created her dependence upon the social structure into which she had been born and in which her only anticipated occupation was marriage.

Second, Bebel's discussion of the *Frauenüberschuß* offered a description of why a "general excess of women over men" existed. Several circumstances played into what Bebel asserted was a demographic reality, demonstrated through a broad international comparison of overall population statistics as well as an examination of population by age cohort within Germany.¹³ He identified both the predominance of male migration and the male mortality rate as factors contributing to a European female surplus. Bebel also described the inherent character of bourgeois capitalism as a primary cause of the female surplus. Particularly important to his argument was the number of men who delayed marriage because of military service: "A considerable number of men are kept from marriage by the State itself. People pucker up their brows at the celibacy imposed upon Roman Catholic clergymen; but these same people have not a word of condemnation for the much larger number of soldiers who also are condemned thereto." Bebel argued that military regulations inhibited marriage, for "the officers not only require the consent of their superiors, they are also limited in the choice of a wife: the regulation prescribes that she shall have property to a certain, and not insignificant, amount."¹⁴ Bebel's unique emphasis on military service implicated the state in broader social decay and condemned the military structure upon which that bourgeois state depended.

Another contributing factor to the *Frauenüberschuß* was less political but just as critical of the bourgeois milieu. The inequity of the bourgeois power structure allowed men to make a choice while women sat passively by: “Many women do not marry, simply because they cannot. Everybody knows that usage forbids woman to offer herself. She must allow herself to be wooed, i.e., chosen.”¹⁵ And some men simply elected not to woo. Their justification might be economic: “many men do not marry because they think they cannot support a wife, and the children that may come, according to their station.”¹⁶ But in electing such a path, these men emphasized the importance of “their station” well beyond any notions of love, spiritual commitment, or family ideal. Other men might decide not to marry for more libidinous reasons: “Due to his position as master, and in so far as social barriers do not hinder him, there is on the side of man the free choice of love.”¹⁷ The cultural and economic reality of male autonomy combined with the social conditions of emigration, military service, and greater male mortality to create the female surplus.

Vivid descriptions of the consequences of an abundance of unwed woman form the third element of Bebel’s construction of the *Frauenüberschuß*. Familiar figures adorn *Woman under Socialism*. Bebel describes the anxiously waiting bride who “seizes gladly the opportunity, soon as offered, to reach the hand to the man who redeems her from the social ostracism and neglect, that is the lot of that poor waif, the ‘old maid.’” Competition between women for the few men available reflected the competitive spirit intrinsic to capitalist society. Some brave women might choose to remain single, even while facing the derision of the lucky wife, who “looks down with contempt upon those of her sisters who have yet preserved their self-respect, and have not sold themselves into mental prostitution to the first comer, preferring to tread single the thorny path of life.”¹⁸

Still, Bebel considered most unwed women to be more victims than vanguards. In this regard, Bebel reflected the growing scholarship on sexuality in his description of the *alleinstehende Frau*. Standing alone “produces a number of diseases into whose nature we will go no further, but that affect mainly the female sex ... her organism depends, in much higher degree than that of man, upon her sexual mission, and is influenced thereby as is shown by the regular recurrence of her periods.”¹⁹ This unsophisticated assessment of sexuality and the female reproductive system cast the unwed woman into a category of abnormality and ill health. Elite class status worsened the lot of single women due to “the idle, voluptuous life of many women in the property classes; their refined measures of nervous stimulants; their overfeeding with a certain kind of artificial sensation”—all of these factors created the excitable, perhaps even neurotic, bourgeois surplus woman.²⁰

But the most important consequence of the female surfeit was not to be found among the pathetic experiences of its victims; rather, it lay in the impact of the *Frauenüberschuß* upon production. Unsurprisingly, Bebel identified clear economic consequences of the demographic and cultural phenomenon he described. With a note of measured sympathy for uneducated middle-class daughters without means, Bebel noted: “The deficit of candidates for marriage affects strongest

those female strata that, through education and social position, make greater pretensions, and yet, outside of their persons, have nothing to offer the man who is looking for wealth.” Daughters on fixed salaries faced a most urgent crisis: “The life of the female being in this stratum of society is, comparatively speaking, the saddest of all those of her fellow-sufferers. It is out of these strata that is mainly recruited the most dangerous competition for the working women in embroidery, sewing, flower-making, millinery, glove and straw hat making; in short, all the branches of industry that the employer prefers to have carried on in the homes of the working women.” Occupying the bourgeois surfeit in cottage industry rendered harmful effects: “These ladies work for the lowest wages ... not to earn a full livelihood, but only [for] something over and above that, or to earn the outlay for a better wardrobe and for luxury.” The vanity of idle bourgeois women impoverished the female proletariat, because “employers have a predilection for the competition of these ladies, so as to lower the earnings of the poor working woman and squeeze the last drop of blood from her veins: it drives her to exert herself to the point of exhaustion.”²¹

Displaced from the only vocation she had ever imagined, the excessive woman in turn disrupted the productive capacity of others. Oppressed herself, the surplus woman became the inadvertent oppressor of her working-class sisters—while also slipping ever closer toward the ranks of the proletariat. Bebel used the surplus woman to link bourgeois oppression with a vision of capitalism’s inevitable decay. Bebel’s application of the *Frauenüberschuß* clearly did not validate the moderate women’s movement’s emphasis on creating new and special professions for surplus bourgeois women. Such women had already entered the marketplace, taking quiet steps that made evident both the perils and the oppression of the capitalist mode of production.

The final component of Bebel’s discussion of the female surplus set forth a solution to the problem. Bebel contended that the *Frauenüberschuß* offered evidence of “the irrationableness and unhealthiness of modern conditions.”²² Radical reconfiguration of society could be the only solution to the female surplus and the more general malaise created by the industrial mode of production. Bebel offered a revisionist Marxist notion of broad social reform. The female surplus was but one of many “evils deeply rooted in our social state of things, and removable neither by the moral sermonizings nor the palliatives that religious quacks of the male and female sexes have so readily at hand.” One might add to this list of “quacks” the leadership of the bourgeois women’s movement, whom Bebel considered to be pursuing “a Sisyphus work ... with as much noise as possible, to the end of deceiving oneself and others on the score of the necessity for radical change.”²³

Bebel argued that only very practical reform of education and social institutions could solve the female surplus: “The question is to bring about a natural system of education, together with healthy conditions of life and work, and to do this in amplest manner, to the end that the normal gratification of natural and healthy instincts be made possible for all.”²⁴ This goal could only be realized

through dismantling the bourgeois order. He concluded his discussion of the female surplus with a radical call for change: "Seeing that all these unnatural conditions, harmful to woman in particular, are grounded in the nature of capitalist society, and grow worse as this social system continues, the same proves itself unable to end the evil and emancipate woman. Another social order is, accordingly, requested thereto."²⁵

Bebel's views on women and socialism greatly influenced Karl Marx's youngest daughter, Eleanor Marx-Aveling. In an 1886 essay, Marx-Aveling and her partner, Edward Aveling, reflected and expanded upon the judgment of Bebel regarding bourgeois single women: "We can, in a moment, tell the unmarried women, if they are beyond a certain age ... But we cannot tell a man that is unmarried from one that is wedded."²⁶ The burdensome wait for a husband transformed the female physique and laid bare the inherent unfairness of the fact that "our marriages, like our morals, are based upon commercialism ... Whether we consider women as a whole, or only that sad sisterhood wearing upon its melancholy brows the stamp of eternal virginity, we find alike a want of ideas and ideals. The reason of this is again the economic position of dependency upon a man."²⁷ The Marx-Avelings cited "the masculine woman" and "that morbid virginity" as markers of modern capitalism's "unnatural dealing with the sex relations," and maintained that "chastity is a crime."²⁸ Marxist doctrine merges here with the sexological reading of the physically malformed old maid; economic dependency and victimization through the commercial marriage market rot the body of the unwed woman. As interpreted by Karl Marx's daughter, Bebel's influential reading of the *Frauenüberschuß* provided a link between the crises of sex and the economy.

August Bebel was a politician as well as a Marxist theoretician. As the leading figure in the SPD and in the German socialist movement throughout most of the imperial era, Bebel's views on women and socialism had a pronounced impact on that movement by the turn of the century.²⁹ The viability of the SPD, the cohesiveness of the worker's movement, and the infusion of working-class concerns into the politics of the *Kaiserreich* formed Bebel's life work. In part because women were not permitted to join German political parties until 1908, he did not actively involve himself either in the activities of organized socialist women or in their ideological battles with the bourgeois women's movement. The lines of women's participation in German socialism were drawn by August Bebel, but it was Clara Zetkin who led socialist women and who most clearly articulated the difference between the socialist and bourgeois women's movements.

Clara Zetkin and the Subordination of Gender

The historian Werner Thönessen has observed that, "in the writings of Clara Zetkin, the socialist theory of female emancipation was completed."³⁰ Zetkin, born Clara Eissner in Saxony in 1857, provided one of the most powerful female voices

of late nineteenth and early twentieth century German socialism. While her views were frequently challenged, it is nonetheless fair to say that Zetkin's beliefs, combined with Bebel's authoritative text, essentially defined the view of the SPD on the position of women from 1896 until Zetkin left the party in the midst of the 1917 schism over support for World War I. Much of Zetkin's work addressed the most significant dilemma faced by female socialists: the relationship of the *Frauenfrage* (woman question) to the *Sozialefrage* (social question). Zetkin maintained that while women of all classes experienced subjugation, true female emancipation could only be achieved through a proletarian revolution. This Marxist perspective required the subordination of feminist pursuits, such as expanded education and marriage rights, to class and party goals. Women's issues as such would not and could not be addressed in the socialist discourse. Zetkin held in contempt the moderate women's movement as well as the radical feminism as embodied by women such as Helene Stöcker and Lily Braun, because in their pursuit of particular objectives, these female leaders were blind to the greater causes of social inequality.

Clara Eissner began her career as a teacher and was introduced to the bourgeois women's movement through her mother's activism. While attending a teacher's course in Leipzig, she became acquainted with early female activists Luise Otto and Auguste Schmidt. But as Clara became involved with the vibrant worker's movement situated in Leipzig during the 1870s and 1880s, her political sentiments moved toward socialism. Through her activism, she met the Russian socialist Ossip Zetkin, and ultimately became his common-law spouse. Because of her gifts as a writer and orator, Clara rose to prominence among European socialists by the time she was thirty. In light of the hostile political climate that arose during the years of German anti-socialist legislation (1878–1890), the Zetkins emigrated to Paris and lived in exile together until Ossip's death in 1889. In July of that year, Clara spoke "For the Liberation of Women" at the Second International Worker's Congress in Paris. This speech contained the core ideas that would inform Zetkin's belief system throughout her career: the necessity of bringing working women into the proletariat struggle and pursuing female equality in the course of socialist reform. Zetkin found a forum for these ideas when, in 1891, she was appointed the editor of the *Die Gleichheit* (Equality), the SPD's journal for women. Zetkin held this position until her resignation from the party in 1917. Her position as *Gleichheit* editor and her prominence as an advocate of socialist education, gleaned from her years spent as a schoolteacher, raised her profile higher than any other German female socialist, excepting perhaps Rosa Luxemburg.³¹ Zetkin used her editorship and her renown in the party to elucidate further her goal of integrating working women into the socialist cause.

Zetkin articulated a much more orthodox understanding of socialism than did her contemporary Lily Braun.³² Braun's aristocratic background and radical views brought her into frequent conflict with Zetkin's view of class superseding gender. Zetkin objected to Braun's promotion of specifically female issues, such as women's cooperatives and female reproductive rights. Because Braun's reform-

ist agenda consistently placed the needs of the female sex before those of the working class as a whole, Zetkin found Braun's conception of womanhood to be antithetical to the socialist cause. In order to combat the reformist urges and class-unconscious leanings of rivals like Braun, Zetkin employed an arsenal of socialist doctrine augmented by consideration of the modern female condition. The existence of the *Frauenüberschuß* among the middle-class provided just such ammunition.

Clara Zetkin spent her life attempting to define and establish a place for women in German socialism; in doing so, she inherited the legacy of August Bebel. Bebel's *Woman under Socialism* had described the female surplus and even offered a limited demographic examination of the subject. Zetkin's work continued the socialist reckoning with the bourgeois surplus woman and added a maternalist touch. Zetkin brought to the socialist reading of women's rights "a new synthesis of ideas about gender in which women's equality once again complements domesticity."³³

Zetkin's understanding of the woman's question conformed well to a model of economic determinism. She believed that the question of women's rights existed because of the *Frauenüberschuß*, a demographic event that resulted from the mode of production. In a speech given at the 1896 party congress, Zetkin argued that the surplus of women increasingly became a problem as capitalism developed. The question of women's rights stemmed from the female displacement wrought by the economic epoch: "For millions of women the question arose: Where do we now find our livelihood? Where do we find a meaningful life as well as a job that gives us mental satisfaction? Millions were now forced to find their livelihood and their meaningful lives outside of their families and within society as a whole. At that moment they became aware of the fact that their social illegality stood in opposition to their most basic interests. It was from this moment on that there existed a [*Frauenfrage*]."³⁴

Zetkin expanded upon Bebel's depiction of the surplus woman by attributing greater agency to uprooted females. Bebel had viewed surplus women mainly as victims who, for the most part, had inadvertently subjugated working-class women. Zetkin retained Bebel's vision of victimization in her description of women as 'forced' to find new, meaningful lives. But upon becoming aware of their basic inequality, these victims of the female surplus formed a movement in response. The *Frauenüberschuß* served as the linchpin of Zetkin's argument regarding the origin of the women's movement. The same cohort of women who had been insulated from questions about their social and legal status while subjected to the domestic mode of production began to question the broader social ordering of society once capitalism and the industrial mode of production gained sway.

Zetkin believed that the most critical symptom of the impending ruin of the bourgeoisie was the decreasing number of marriages, leading to a more comprehensive erosion of the family unit. Absent any demographic support, she argued that marriages decreased among the bourgeoisie because economic factors

did not compel men to wed: “Although on the one hand the material basis is worsening, on the other hand the individual’s expectations of life are increasing, so that a man of that background will think twice or even thrice before he enters into a marriage.” The moral laxity of the capitalist age furthered marital aversion: “A man is under no pressure to marry since there exist in our time enough societal institutions which offer to an old bachelor a comfortable life without a legitimate wife ... Thus within bourgeois circles, the number of unmarried women increases all the time.”³⁵

The question of women’s rights simply did not emerge among working-class women. Industrialization had created two interdependent yet quite different outcomes for the female proletariat. First, she was on par with the working-class man: “She became the equal of the man as a worker; the machine rendered muscular force superfluous and everywhere women’s work showed the same results in production as men’s work.” Oppression formed the second consequence of industrialization. Working women’s economic dependency merely shifted from husbands to employers, so that in the industrial age, “the proletarian woman fights hand in hand with the man of her class against capitalist society.”³⁶ The greater *Sozialefrage* thus subsumed the *Frauenfrage*.

Zetkin emulated Bebel, Marx, and Engels by declaring that the modern mode of production had created the dominance of the bourgeoisie while simultaneously hurtling them toward destruction. But she went much further than her socialist forefathers in celebrating the dismantled domestic sphere. Zetkin’s personal belief in the importance of family departed from the outlines of the question drawn by Bebel. Her reading of the symbiotic twosome of the prostitute and the *alte Jungfer* clarifies the distinctiveness of her position. Like Robert Michels, she argued that the bourgeois bachelor found fulfillment at the expense of the unwed working-class woman—while the middle-class old maid waited in vain.³⁷ Middle-class single men studied in universities, fraternized in clubs, and socialized in brothels. Unmarried middle-class women honed their domestic skills, mended in sewing circles, and pined away in solitude. Zetkin lamented the ways in which the traditional avenues of marriage and domestic occupation had been closed to unwed women of the middle-class. Because of such restrictions, these women had been forced to recognize their ‘social illegality’; the bourgeois women’s movement had emerged from this recognition.

The *Frauenüberschuß* served a dual purpose for Clara Zetkin: it proved that the bourgeois women’s movement had emerged from economic displacement and it demonstrated the limited middle-class worldview of that movement. Proletarian women simply could not share in the goals of the surplus women who pursued job opportunities and professional training.³⁸ The organized women’s movement sought to enable bourgeois women to compete with bourgeois men, providing further evidence of the women’s movement as entwined with social class. Because the cause for women’s rights was rooted in the bourgeois capitalist epoch, it could not transcend the historical potentiality of the socialist movement.

* * *

August Bebel and Clara Zetkin articulated an understanding of the *Frauenüberschuß* that both laid bare the damaging consequences of capitalism and provided a means to condemn the bourgeois women's movement. These augmentations to the portrayal of the female surplus were easier to assert in theory—the domain of Bebel's *Woman under Socialism*—than they were for Zetkin to consistently reconcile in practice. Simply asserting that excess bourgeois women demonstrated bourgeois decrepitude and enhanced class conflict did not provide relief. Neither Zetkin nor Bebel grappled comprehensively with how a proletarian revolution might affect the central tie between female identity and marital status. Yet the female surfeit signified anxiety about broader social, cultural, and economic change; in this way it also provided fuel for socialist ideology. The works of Bebel and Zetkin on the *Frauenüberschuß* reveal a concept that cut across political and class borders. The surplus woman provided socialists with proof of the unsettled, antagonistic, and rotting nature of bourgeois society.

Notes

1. See chapter 5.
2. See chapter 6.
3. Jean Quataert, *Reluctant Feminism in German Social Democracy, 1855–1917* (Princeton, NJ, 1979), 129.
4. Robert Michels, “Die Dirne als die ‘alte Jungfer’ des Proletariats und die Prostitution,” *Mutterschutz* 1(2)(1905): 60.
5. *Ibid.*, 58.
6. Maria Lischnewska, “Die wirtschaftliche Reform der Ehe,” *Mutterschutz* 2(6) (1906): 219–220; emphasis in text. Lischnewska was an active member of the BfM and wrote frequently on the topic of sex education.
7. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *The Communist Manifesto*, trans. Samuel Moore (New York, 1985), 100.
8. In the 1912 Reichstag elections, the SPD received 26 percent (and a plurality) of the vote.
9. Anne Lopes and Gary Roth, *Men's Feminism: August Bebel and the German Socialist Movement* (Amherst, NY, 2000), 38.
10. August Bebel, *Woman under Socialism*, trans. Daniel DeLeon from 33rd German ed. (New York, 1904; reprint, New York, 1970), 144.
11. *Ibid.*, 120.
12. *Ibid.*
13. *Ibid.*, 128–131, 133–134.
14. *Ibid.*, 136.
15. *Ibid.*, 126.
16. *Ibid.*, 127.
17. *Ibid.*, 140.
18. *Ibid.*
19. *Ibid.*, 139; see chapter 2 on sexology and single women.

20. Ibid.
21. Ibid., 142.
22. Ibid., 140.
23. Ibid., 142.
24. Ibid., 140.
25. Ibid., 145.
26. Eleanor Marx-Aveling and Edward Aveling, *Thoughts on Women and Society* [1886], eds. Joachim Müller and Edith Schotte (New York, 1987), 16.
27. Ibid., 17.
28. Ibid., 23, 24.
29. Quataert, *Reluctant Feminism*, 7.
30. Werner Thönnessen, *Frauenemanzipation: Politik und Literatur der Deutschen Sozialdemokratie zur Frauenbewegung, 1863–1933* (Frankfurt, 1969), 47–48.
31. Stanley Pierson, *Marxist Intellectuals and the Working-Class Mentality in Germany, 1887–1912* (Cambridge, MA, 1993), 196; on Zetkin see also Dorothea Reetz, *Clara Zetkin as a Socialist Speaker* (New York, 1987).
32. On Braun, see chapter 6; on the tensions between Braun and Zetkin, see Quataert, *Reluctant Feminism*, 107–133.
33. Lopes and Roth, *Men's Feminism*, 200.
34. Clara Zetkin, “Only in Conjunction with the Proletarian Woman will Socialism be Victorious,” speech at the Party Congress of the SPD, 16 October 1896, in *Clara Zetkin, Selected Writings*, ed. Philip S. Foner (New York, 1984), 73.
35. Ibid., 75.
36. Ibid., 77.
37. See chapter 6 on Michels.
38. Ibid., 76.

SPIRITUAL SALVATION

Elisabeth Gnauck-Kühne



In June 1995, the Third Ecumenical Congress of Christian Women of Germany celebrated the life of Elisabeth Gnauck-Kühne (1850–1917). Afterward, the leadership of both the *Deutsch-Evangelischer Frauenbund* (DEF; German Protestant Women’s Association) and the *Katholischer Deutscher Frauenbund* (KDF; Catholic German Women’s Association) called for scholars to elevate Gnauck-Kühne “to her deserved place in German historiography.”¹ Gnauck-Kühne has been called the “Catholic Zetkin,”² and Clara Zetkin herself asserted that “I have read her [work] with greater pleasure than any other writing by a bourgeois advocate of women’s rights.”³ No other individual played a greater role in the discussion of the *Frauenüberschuß* (female surplus). One of the first women given permission to study economics at a German university, Gnauck-Kühne used her quantitative training to provide a statistical background to the woman question. Her 1895 speech to the *Evangelisch-Soziale Kongress* (ESK; Evangelical Social Congress) in Erfurt was a landmark event in female activism, marking the Congress’ first treatment of the *Frauenfrage* (woman question) and garnering national attention.⁴ In 1899, Gnauck-Kühne helped to establish the DEF; after converting to Catholicism, in 1903 she founded the KDF. Elisabeth Gnauck-Kühne’s reformist agenda explored the arenas of worker’s rights, female education, vocational training, spiritual motherhood, and—foremost—religious faith.

This key figure has escaped the attention of most historians. The predominant approach to the history of the Imperial German women’s movement has focused on the moderate and radical wings of German female activism.⁵ Indeed, at the turn of the century, leading advocates of women’s rights on both sides of the

divide were quite aware of such a split and consciously played off of one another in order to craft independent identities and platforms. But the moderate/radical division has come to signify more than ideological separation; it has also become the dominant paradigm for research in the field.⁶ As historians have focused on a dichotomous movement, the religious sphere of German female activism has been marginalized. Yet the main Christian associations of women enjoyed memberships far greater than organized radical groups and on a par with the umbrella organization of the moderate movement, the *Bund Deutscher Frauenvereine* (BDF).⁷ While numbers alone do not demonstrate the vitality of the religious women's movement, they do indicate female willingness to identify and organize on the basis of confession.⁸

While German women's religious history remains incomplete, the history of Catholicism in the *Kaiserreich* (Imperial Germany) has enjoyed a boom in recent years. These works offer an increasingly rich sense of how Catholic political behavior evolved during the course of the *Kaiserreich* and also provide some important insights into the nature of Catholic society and religious expression.⁹ Gender history and modern German Catholic history rarely have been integrated,¹⁰ though Michael B. Gross's *War Against Catholicism* (2004) examines the ways in which the period of the *Kulturkampf*¹¹ brought together "the liberal-bourgeois ideology of public and private, the revival of the women's movement, and the increasingly prominent and conspicuous role of women in the Catholic Church and Catholic life."¹² Gross identifies a misogynistic strain in early *Kaiserreich* liberalism through its criticism of the prominence and engagement of women in Catholicism: "For liberal men, [Catholic women] were women who did not know their place."¹³ Elisabeth Gnauck-Kühne was just the sort of uppity woman who found in Catholicism a faith that valorized the female vocation and thus blurred the lines between public and private spheres.

In both her statistical and organizational work, Gnauck-Kühne provided a framework for consideration of the single woman question that would be utilized by all branches of the women's movement: moderate, radical, *and* religious. This chapter examines career of Elisabeth Gnauck-Kühne by describing the key tenets of her reformist platform and assessing how her religious beliefs led to a unique understanding of the female surplus.¹⁴

Suffering and Social Change

Like so many leaders of the German women's movement, Elisabeth Kühne began her career as a teacher. Born in 1850, she lived most of her life in Blankenburg am Harz, a small town outside of Braunschweig. She was the third and youngest child of Protestant, middle-class parents. Since the education of the oldest son had absorbed much of the family resources, money for a dowry was scarce and Elisabeth's parents decided she ought to pursue teacher training. Elisabeth later thanked her parents for their foresight in preparing her for a life of work; she

maintained that such a choice in the 1860s was “highly unusual and judged by many not to be completely respectable.”¹⁵ After passing her exams in 1867, Elisabeth took a position as a private tutor to children of a wealthy German-American family, a job that took her to Paris and London for several years.

Kühne returned to Blankenburg in 1875 and opened an “Educational Institution for Daughters of the Higher Classes.” The school’s curriculum emphasized nature walks and swimming lessons along with a more traditional program of language, literature, history, religion, music, handicrafts, science, and mathematics. Kühne believed that education should include an institutional commitment to the student’s personal development: “The limited number [25] of pupils makes it possible for the director to come to know the disposition and character of each individual pupil and to take care to instill [a sense of] community and good conduct, to pay strict attention to orderliness and cleanliness, and to preserve in the school the beneficial character of family life.”¹⁶ Populated by pupils from prestigious families,¹⁷ the institute prospered and provided Kühne with a secure income that, along with a small inheritance, would support her until her 1917 death. Kühne announced in August 1888 that she planned to leave the school in order to marry. Her departing speech asked her students to “look around with me at this point that we have reached today, a point which marks for you only a change, for me a summit, for all of us a crossroads.”¹⁸ The summit Kühne enjoyed that August soon would be followed by a descent that brought her to despair.

The 1888 farewell speech reveals a conception of education that cultivated diligence and guarded against dilettantism: “[Education] is a protection against petty gossip, disruptive nonsense, and the lure of boredom ... Allow work to become a habit ... Idleness is cursed; it lowers the human being to the level of animal ... Be active! Use your time in devoted discharge of your duties, and if you have a house with few duties to discharge, then learn, enrich your knowledge with worthy books, broaden your abilities.”¹⁹ Too much book-learning could be problematic, for “shortsighted people will then say: such is the result when girls learn more than adding and knitting, they become spoiled for the home.”²⁰ Character was more important than cleverness: “As highly as I value intellectual accomplishment, so have I ... endeavored to encourage you toward an achievement I place ahead of it: the peace of a reconciled conscience.”²¹ Kühne’s school was neither a vocational training ground nor a stopping place for young women to tarry while waiting to marry. In its idealized form, the school sought to awaken curious minds, connect intellectual awakening to the value of work, and instill female natures with the psychic contentment that would enable them to serve their families well.²²

Elisabeth undoubtedly believed that she would bring these characteristics to her own marriage. She had proven herself to be competent, industrious, and learned. With her own nuptials only one month away, one cannot help but read a veiled self-assessment in her parting words about the value of a “reconciled conscience” and the gentle influence of love. But no measure of calm disposition could have prepared her for the abuse and contempt that followed her September

1888 marriage. Gnauck-Kühne's biographer, Helene Simon, interviewed many friends of the couple after Elisabeth's death in 1917. Simon's notes portray a sad tale of greed, deceit, and savage cruelty. A marriage that would have been catastrophic under any circumstances is rendered more tragic when one considers the public nature of Gnauck-Kühne's humiliation (Elisabeth was the town's most prominent businesswoman), her fairly advanced age at the time of first marriage (38), and her departure from the beloved school in which she enjoyed affection and respect.

Elisabeth's groom was Dr. Rudolf Gnauck, a specialist of the nervous system who ran a sanatorium in Pankow. The announcement of the engagement shocked those who knew them. When friends questioned the wisdom of the decision, Elisabeth responded simply, "But we love each other."²³ She made arrangements to sell the school and prepared for a new life. One friend of Elisabeth's, Agnes Hänichen, recalled that Dr. Gnauck had futilely tried to woo her years earlier. Gnauck had even asked Hänichen to marry him.²⁴ Gnauck confided to Agnes that he had a lien on his sanatorium due in 1888, the hardly coincidental year of his marriage to Kühne. Elisabeth did not know of Rudolf's deep indebtedness. It seems that Gnauck craved Elisabeth's money more than her love. On the *Polterabend* (a wedding-eve celebration), Gnauck told Hänichen that he was "deeply unhappy about the imminent step. But because he had to have the money, he could not withdraw. Fräulein Hänichen could only with great effort get him to attend the *Polterabend*."²⁵ The marriage nonetheless took place on 17 September; witnesses recalled it as a gloomy affair. Simon's notes continue: "Instead of taking it to the bank as his wife had desired, Dr. Gnauck used the down payment of 40,000M from the [sale of the] institute for payment of his most urgent debts. Six weeks after the wedding, Frau Gnauck spent a few weeks with her sister in Blankenburg ... hoping through the temporary separation to possibly bring about an improvement."²⁶

The divorce decree details the next episode. As grounds, Elisabeth cited a violent encounter occurring on 26 December. When she returned to the marital home on that date in hopes of initiating a reunion, "the defendant ordered her to leave ... otherwise he would take his life."²⁷ Simon's notes reveal a moment of operatic despair: Gnauck "went up to [his wife] with a loaded pistol and demanded that she leave the house immediately or else he would put a bullet through his head before her eyes. She departed at once."²⁸ The marriage had been a wretched failure. Hänichen offered Simon her own assessment of why the marriage failed so quickly: "Dr. Gnauck was a man for whom there was no sixth commandment. He engaged in dalliances whenever the opportunity offered itself." Hänichen recounted that years later, "Frau Gnauck showed me one Sunday in the pews [of church] an old female who had had a child out of wedlock from Dr. Gnauck. She said that several of his extramarital children were running around Blankenburg. She had not known of his drives. No one had enlightened her."²⁹

Gnauck-Kühne's papers contain corroborating assessments of Rudolf Gnauck's character. The record of the union might best be summarized as follows: Rudolf

married for money; Elisabeth married out of some mix of romantic affection, the desire to begin a new phase of life, and the hope for children; the weeks they lived together were tumultuous; and the attempt at reconciliation was dramatic and violent. The failed marriage forever altered Elisabeth's view of the world and the place of women within it. Women spurned by marriage, either never married or divorced, became the special object of her feminist vision.

Elisabeth traveled for almost a year after the marital debacle. She moved to Berlin in 1891 and by 1893, she had begun to study economics and statistics privately with Gustav Schmoller.³⁰ Her pathbreaking speech at the ESK occurred in the spring of 1895, by which time her life had begun the reformist path it would follow until her death. The first forty years of Gnauck-Kühne's life indelibly framed the agenda that distinguished her activism. Three guiding principles had bolstered her prenuptial worldview: the transformative power of education, the importance of the family, and the beneficence of a gentle disposition. Yet these beliefs had failed her during the brief and tragic marriage. As Elisabeth moved into the next phase of her life, she amended the first two tenets and discarded the third.

Her commitment to education never wavered, though she continued to reform the content and intent of her educational program. Gnauck-Kühne also would maintain the importance of female commitment to the family sphere, though her definition of "family" became increasingly broad. But her calamitous personal failure forced her to renounce her advocacy of the tranquil disposition that she had held forth as a beacon to her students in 1888. After her own ordeal, Gnauck-Kühne came to believe that women needed to forego feminine gentility in favor of the stark virtues of resilience and tenacity that emerged from suffering—and suffering most likely befell the unwed. Yet, while pain might be the inevitable initial lot of unmarried women, it need not make them victims. Properly channeled suffering could be transformative.

Perhaps the best demonstration of Gnauck-Kühne's view of the ennobling quality of pain is found in her fairy tale "The Nightingale."³¹ In a letter to her friend and spiritual advisor, Father Augustin Rösler, Elisabeth wrote in 1900:

The nightingale suffers under the loneliness of a rich nature; as she sees it, loneliness is her lot, it will severely break her heart, 'it would be broken if she did not sing. And she sang.' Her pain is the source of her song; she sings as long as she suffers. When she finds what she yearns for, it fills her up. The desire is quieted, the pain healed, the song silenced. Then she recognizes for the first time that her pain was her greatest gift, because it was the source of her song, and then she flees her fulfillment and searches for her pain and—her song. For a fulfilled nightingale is no longer a nightingale, only a gluttonous bird. Is this celibacy glorified? Yes, certainly indirectly. A nightingale's nature must be lonely.³²

Loneliness created her song; the nightingale's mistake had been made in trying to quench that loneliness. Personal pain could lead to exaltation and delivered the moment of greatest achievement. In one stroke, pain becomes glory, *Leid wird Lied* (Suffering becomes song).³³ Elisabeth Gnauck-Kühne's song sang forth in the first 38 years of her life, but she had not listened to its melody. The silence

that ensued after the disastrous marriage was deafening. From her divorce until the end of her life, Elisabeth sought to recapture her song. The pain of single women was the source of her *Lied* and also formed her intended audience.

In a series of works published between 1891 and 1917, Gnauck-Kühne shared the approach of moderate, radical, and socialist advocates of women's rights by exploring the impact of the onset of industrialization upon women.³⁴ Gnauck-Kühne was particularly interested in the experience of women in the marriage market. Her body of work linked the *Frauenüberschuß* to social class, demonstrated the impact of female displacement from the family, and offered solutions to the crisis of the surplus woman.

In the introduction to 1891's *The University Study of Women*, Gnauck-Kühne summarized the origins of the woman question: "In slow but steadfast development, the social and economic relations of the present have brought about a shift in the relative numerical proportions of the sexes and moreover have made marriages more difficult to attain, an occurrence which does not correspond to the conditions desired by nature." Though Gnauck-Kühne did not spell out just how she knew nature's desires, she did offer a basic demographic analysis: "While for every 100 female births, there are 106 male births, the statistics count 104 women for every 100 men. This difference results in a substantial surplus of female population and in so doing brings forth a crisis that has created a reforming movement in the world of women." Gnauck-Kühne directly tied these facts of population to the question of women's rights: "The woman demands . . . new work and professional arenas, so that she will be able to maintain herself as economically independent, a condition which was necessitated by her involuntary unmarried state. These facts are united in the slogan, 'The Woman Question.'"³⁵ Gnauck-Kühne earned the moniker the "Catholic Zetkin" through the quasi-Marxist perspective she employed in linking the current social crisis to the conditions wrought by the mode of production. Like Clara Zetkin, Gnauck-Kühne believed that the *Frauenüberschuß* created the *Frauenfrage*.³⁶

Gnauck-Kühne elucidated this simple line of causality in a response to opponents of female education, who charged that "the woman is not meant for academic study, but for marriage, child development, and managing the home."³⁷ Her reply combined humor with earnest distress about the plight of unmarried women: "In its naiveté, this challenge reminds one of the story of the princess who, upon hearing reports that starving people were crying for bread, responded, 'Then why do they not eat cake?'" Like Marie Antoinette's apocryphal tumbril remark, critics of the female unwed expected the impossible: "Not until the friends of this suggestion of marriage balance the numerical ratios of the sexes to one another by producing a million marriage-able and marriage-willing men out of thin air—not until then will their opposition be taken seriously, because only then will every woman be given the possibility to eat the cake of marital protection instead of the bread of her own work." Gnauck-Kühne demanded social reform in order to answer the question, "What will become of the surplus of women? How pleasant it would be if the wise man who wants to compensate the single

woman with the recommendation of home and marriage could make possible for each the attainment of a happy marriage ... The woman question, as a question of maintenance at least, would be with one stroke eliminated from the world and with that the main nerve of the [women's] movement would be severed."³⁸ Given her own life experience, Gnauck-Kühne harbored no illusions that each marriage could be happy, but before her religious conversion, she still held the family sphere to be the designated female realm.

Marriage both provided women with purpose and ideally led them to motherhood. Gnauck-Kühne herself had longed to be a mother. She wrote in 1902 in a letter, "It must be quite unparalleled to have children. I believe it makes the entire difference between living and living out [one's days]."³⁹ Motherhood became an increasingly important theme in Gnauck-Kühne's post-religious conversion writings as she came to believe that "the maternal instinct is the originating point of the female psyche."⁴⁰ Marriage then had to privilege the parental relationship over the spousal. Gnauck-Kühne adopted a position similar to that of Ruth Bré: "The man wants the woman, but the woman wants the child."⁴¹ Unlike Bré, Gnauck-Kühne refrained from advocating motherhood outside of marriage, for a true communal experience could only be experienced within the family.

Gnauck-Kühne's celebration of motherhood contributed to the ideology of spiritual motherhood permeating the women's movement of the *Kaiserreich*.⁴² She told her audience at Erfurt: "We are without question of the same opinion as to the natural work of the female: it is motherhood ... motherliness calls forth the essential element of all that is female. The division of labor between the sexes must be tied to motherhood."⁴³ Female vocational education thus needed to focus on maternal arenas, such as teaching, domestic education, child care, and nursing.⁴⁴ Gnauck-Kühne condemned the fact that unmarried women in many cases were prevented from pursuing their own living: "Only regarding the single woman is the right separated from the responsibility for care! Provide for the woman—or set her free! ... Five million women must maintain themselves, just like men ... If five million women must fight in the struggle for their existence, it is then cruel and unjust to keep the weapons from them."⁴⁵ What began as a demographic consequence of economic development was transformed into an issue of self-maintenance, raising the question of social and legal rights in the changing world.

Gnauck-Kühne included the working-class among her claim of "five million" female unwed. But those single women nonetheless remained outside of her conception of the woman question: "The women of the daily-wage working class do not come into consideration here; they already have the same right to work and education as the man; they learn the same as the man, they dig, hoe, weave, push coal carts, work in the factory just like the man ... Only when we go up the stepladder of society do we see struggle for equal rights begin, a struggle in which all women should come together."⁴⁶ Elitism colored her view of male and female equity among the working-class. But Gnauck-Kühne's approach to the woman question also validated Clara Zetkin's critique of the bourgeois women's

movement. Because of the working-class female's willingness to work for lower wages and her suitability for unskilled labor, Gnauck-Kühne maintained that the industrial era had delivered a paradox: working-class women became ever more burdened while middle-class women increasingly shed their responsibilities. Non-elite women continued to marry and work in the home, while many labored in factories and domestic service as well. Their lives took on too many demands, while those of their privileged sisters became increasingly aimless.

Though never a socialist, Gnauck-Kühne nonetheless employed Marxist understandings of history and wage labor in order to explain the transformative nature of suffering. Gnauck-Kühne argued that women had been economically essential in early modern Europe: "Every family economy was a small world ... The woman created this world and maintained it and impressed upon it the stamp of her personality ... The woman was the indispensable producer ... and there was rich nourishment for the head and the heart."⁴⁷ Gnauck-Kühne shared Lily Braun's view that the capitalist epoch had issued a double blow by replacing women's work in the home and weakening them through a newfound ease of life:⁴⁸ "We disinherited women are only too inclined to abstract from the machine and accept handicrafts as pure mechanical accomplishments, we can only imagine appreciating the work and the meaning of crafts for the mind and spirit of the woman before the machine era. We do not know what we have lost."⁴⁹ The purpose of the women's movement was to transform such loss into a renewed contribution to society. Gnauck-Kühne set about doing just that by becoming an advocate on behalf of those unwed elite and bourgeois women most familiar with loss.

Paternalism and maternalism merged in Gnauck-Kühne's claim that middle-class single women could seek to ameliorate some of the most damaging effects of modernity by helping the working-class at the same time: "Before the machine era, the social situation of the female sex of the propertied class was healthy ... At present, under changing relations of production, the economic significance of the educated woman has been lessened, her social situation detrimentally affected. But what the work contribution has lost in breadth shall gain in refinement and depth by means of intensive education." Like Alice Salomon, Gnauck-Kühne believed that the work of social welfare could nourish: "Through devotion to this goal, the single woman can also become economically and ethically worthy, and be bound to the whole through love."⁵⁰ Social work literally and figuratively might compensate bourgeois single women for their losses while refining the natures of working-class women.

Regarding affluent women, Gnauck-Kühne echoed Mary Wollstonecraft's belief that the wealthy were too far gone to be helped by a social movement. Wollstonecraft had written in the late eighteenth century that the very rich were impervious to reform: "Weak, artificial beings, raised above the common wants and affections of their race, in a premature unnatural manner, undermine the very foundation of virtue, and spread corruption through the whole mass of society!"⁵¹ Gnauck-Kühne concurred: "The wealthy woman is distant from the material urgency and

the principles of the women's movement, any intellectual or spiritual needs she can satisfy more easily than the woman of the middle class. Quenched herself, she thinks little of the hunger of others."⁵² Only middle-class women could not sate their hunger, for alternative vocations had been closed to them. Idleness was the key: aristocratic women did not care about their lack of utility, while working-class women had too much to do. Only middle-class women had been forced to become idle. The solution? Occupy middle-class women and in so doing, attempt to ease the burdens of working women.

Capitalizing on women's innate maternal instinct would prevent the unmarried from becoming dilettantes or vicious old maids: "Motherhood and motherliness are not necessarily reciprocal ... Being female means to be like a mother, or more concisely: Being female means to be maternal. This formulation encompasses those who combine motherhood and motherliness as well as those who without motherhood *in natura* still possess the characteristic elements of motherliness (at times in abundant measure)."⁵³ Any solution to the *Frauenüberschuß* had to emerge from the presence of motherliness among the childless. Single women ought to occupy themselves in the professional areas that suited them and promoted use of the maternal instinct. Like moderates Helene Lange and Alice Salomon, Gnauck-Kühne warned against training bourgeois daughters for a marriage that might not happen.⁵⁴ Enhancing maternal characteristics would protect single women from the perils of inertia.

The type of education advocated by Gnauck-Kühne in her later years expanded upon the curriculum of her Blankenburg school by emphasizing vocational training. She favored the "pure and natural girl with pride over ... the daughter who through inactivity is morally broken and has no pride ... because she has never had to stand on her feet."⁵⁵ Gnauck-Kühne advocated requiring bourgeois girls to work. Home economics also played an important role in Gnauck-Kühne's program of study, which sought to establish vocational training that would blur the lines between the private and public spheres.

The curriculum she proposed sought to rid Germany of useless women. Gnauck-Kühne rivaled any enemy of the *alte Jungfer* (old maid) in her disdain for the lazy. Her 1895 Erfurt speech condemned the indolence of purposeless girls who pursued "various dilettantish artistic exercises or even more detrimental substitutes such as flirtation, finery, and mainly the hunt for distraction."⁵⁶ The mostly male ESK may well have been moved by the contrast between such vain lazabouts and industrious female pupils. Those unfortunate girls who did not know the value of hard work, who did not "know what they had lost," were vessels ready and waiting to be destroyed by sloth—or possibly by more dire evils. Gnauck-Kühne offered a clear remedy to the specter of directionless women turning to depravity or, more benignly, perhaps simply toward *Aljüngfertum*: "Who does not know this aging *Fräulein* out of a good family, who spends her life without any responsible work in consuming idleness? A truly cruel social order has condemned her to inactivity, to a doll's life; she has no satisfying, self-chosen occupation ... and so as the years go by her existence lacks any measure of depth."⁵⁷ This

pitiful creature had not emerged not out of her own deficient nature, but instead had been formed by a culture that offered her no alternatives. Given the choice of a bourgeois world occupied by dolls and madams, or one populated with diligent, educated, purposeful women seeking to infuse the world with motherliness—how difficult could the choice be?

Like other *Kaiserreich*-era advocates of women's rights, Gnauck-Kühne used the old maid as an ideal foil. She could claim with obvious justification that women left unchosen did not deserve to be fated as ridiculed, despised figures: "Hundreds of thousands of girls ... are raised for marriage, believe that marriage is their calling, their happiness. Without marriage they will become emotionally crippled, miserable *alte Jungfern*, second-class people who invite ridicule due to coarse dispositions and clumsy intellects, who despite fine natures are nonetheless inferior individuals who do not count as whole people."⁵⁸ Gnauck-Kühne called instead for the surplus woman to learn about her inherent worth, a worth that emanated from maternal instinct.

Gnauck-Kühne was unique among *Kaiserreich* female activists in her attempt to provide a demographic description of the *Frauenüberschuß*.⁵⁹ While her analysis included consideration of population increases and birth and mortality rates, her argument focused on marriage rates: "In Germany on average only 75% of the population marries. Being supported through marriage thus remains questionable, for many impossible."⁶⁰ Because of the increasing dispensability of the middle-class female in the home, a projected 25 percent of unmarried women was especially problematic. Gnauck-Kühne's figures did not indicate that girls of premarital age formed a sizable proportion of that 25 percent. Instead, she emphasized that the rising population only exacerbated the deterioration of the bourgeois female state by multiplying "the supply of female hands without correspondingly enlarging the amount of work ... the number of those without means grows steadily with the population increase and with the technical advance of the division of labor, which encroaches upon individual production."⁶¹ She maintained that while the labor produced by unwed bourgeois females became ever superfluous, the number of women continued to increase.

Gnauck-Kühne also emphasized a decrease in the willingness to marry: "The mode of production quickly increases the wealth; with it the demands of the educated classes grow; the heightened standard of life makes marriage more difficult."⁶² Bourgeois disinclination marked a sharp divergence from the working-class nuptial experience: "From 1875 to 1882 the number of male industrial workers increased by 6.4%, that of female workers by 35%." The income of laboring women made them more advantageous marital prospects, creating "a new contrast to the situation of the socially higher standing women. The female proletariat can become co-providers, a circumstance which makes marriage more likely, while the economic superfluity of the cultivated woman in her circle makes marriage a question of the man's income."⁶³

Gnauck-Kühne's account of the female surplus rested upon three key factors: a high proportion of unmarried women, exacerbated by increasing population,

and further intensified by bourgeois unwillingness to marry. These circumstances weighed most heavily upon those middle-class women whose family circle less frequently could offer them a sphere of engagement and whose prospective economic contributions had become outmoded (while working-class women took on additional responsibilities).

As chapter 3 has demonstrated, demographic study does not support the case of an increasing *Frauenüberschuß* in Imperial Germany. Gnauck-Kühne's demography relied as much upon class-based generalizations as it did upon numbers, but her work nonetheless often was cited by contemporaries noting the plight of surplus women.⁶⁴ Gnauck-Kühne's statistical analysis emphasized the increasing *absolute* numbers of single women, suggesting that her argument of a surplus was based upon the increasing visibility and sheer abundance of unmarried women in the urban context. As much as any other individual, Elisabeth Gnauck-Kühne was responsible for imagining the demography that created the surplus woman.

The Religious Haven

Elisabeth Gnauck-Kühne primarily has been recognized by history as a religious activist.⁶⁵ This view undoubtedly is due to the fact that she served as a founder of both the Protestant and Catholic national German women's associations, each the first organization of their kind. Her stunning 1900 conversion to Catholicism sealed her legacy as a religious figure. The conversion of any prominent figure assuredly would have shocked contemporaries, given the long-held demarcations between Protestant and Catholic society in Imperial Germany. The state-initiated *Kulturkampf* had ended and the mid-century Catholic piety revival had faded by 1900, yet the distinctive cultural spheres of the major Christian denominations in Germany continued into the twentieth century.⁶⁶ Gnauck-Kühne's conversion, noteworthy for any public figure, astounded because she had gained national recognition as the most important female leader of the Protestant ESK. Many leading Protestants viewed her religious turn as a betrayal and it led to the dissolution of the women's organization of the ESK.⁶⁷

The conversion emerged out of years of emotional and spiritual turmoil after her 1888 marriage. She later wrote to a friend, "In the last years much has been agitating at the deepest level of my soul. It was as if I were paralyzed internally, you know. I could not go forwards, not backwards, neither right nor left. Alive, I was dead—dead in a living body."⁶⁸ Elisabeth's spiritual malaise was deeply affected by an 1899 visit to the Austrian convent in Mautern. There, she met with Augustin Rösler, a Catholic priest who had written about the role of women in the Church.⁶⁹ After further correspondence with Rösler and instruction by a priest in Berlin, Gnauck-Kühne converted to Catholicism in April 1900. Rösler's notes on the event report that things progressed "unexpectedly quickly ... The conversion gained great notice in Germany; almost all newspapers reported it; even the Protestant [papers] spoke of it almost exclusively with attention given to

the one converting ... The main motivations for the conversion were the Catholic instructions on virginity and on authority.”⁷⁰

Another priest present at the Gnauck-Kühne’s confirmation recalled that “this act was unforgettable for me due to the spiritual uncertainty that the supplicant had to fight through ... In my 48 years as a priest I have experienced and observed many spiritual conflicts, but such a struggle I had never seen.”⁷¹ Gnauck-Kühne anguished especially over use of the word *verflucht* (to curse or damn) in reference to her former faith: “This word, this word I cannot bring over my lips. My mother ... was so pious—how can I curse her? How can I curse and damn her?” Father [Rösler] reassured her that the word did not correspond to the person, but to the false teachings.” But faith overcame sentiment: “With a strong firm voice she stated the confession of faith; as she came to [that] sentence, she was taken over by an internal agitation; her head and hands sank, a stream of tears poured from her eyes ... finally she straightened up, the strong soul emerged victorious, and she prayed the named word with all decisiveness. This struggle moved me like hardly anything else in life.”⁷² The drama of the conversion conformed to Gnauck-Kühne’s passionate nature.⁷³ While impulse might have played a role in her decision, Elisabeth’s papers reveal no regrets about the conversion. They reflect instead the emergence of a Catholic partisanship that would change the direction of her life’s work.

Religion had played a relatively minor role in Gnauck-Kühne’s activism prior to her conversion.⁷⁴ As the years progressed, Gnauck-Kühne’s religious faith would join with her feminist engagement in a committed focus on the plight of single women. The 1895 Erfurt speech had grappled with the *Frauenüberschuss* and had prompted her to explore the connection between female suffering and faith. Single women might experience torment, but such anguish could bring spiritual freedom. Gnauck-Kühne found herself in a spiritual quandary after Erfurt, wondering whether immersion in the public sphere truly could ease the pain of the unwed. Or would that simply channel female distress in another direction? She reflected in 1900, “The day in Erfurt, which was such a thoroughgoing success in entirely different ways than one could expect, was a turning point for me. Everyone was pleased—only I was not ... I had not felt any sort of satisfaction for a single moment. Just the opposite.” Her own life story may have informed what happened next: “A question suddenly struck me that, so it seemed to me, led me into an abyss, the question regarding the idea of what lies at the basis of the female creature, the question of the real calling of the female ... Marriage is *the* true calling of the female; if she does not marry, she does not meet her calling—I had endlessly heard that from everyone, spoke it, believed it.”⁷⁵ So began the process by which Gnauck-Kühne would come to envision female vocation as embodied in the maternal spirit rather than in the marital contract.⁷⁶

Given her own tumultuous marriage, it is not surprising that Gnauck-Kühne would have had a confusing mix of feelings on the subject. Before her religious change, she shared the view of the BDF moderates that “the family is undoubtedly the world of the woman” and that “as spouse, mother, and housewife, the

married woman has a field of activity that could not be richer.”⁷⁷ Yet an apologia written at the time of her conversion described how concerns about marriage and anxiety about the plight of *alte Jungfern* drove Gnauck-Kühne away from Lutheranism. Of her half-century spent in the Protestant milieu, she asked: “How could it be that I never, neither in writing nor in conversation, heard of another view than that of the woman being destined for marriage? This was Luther’s view, as is evident from his writings. But one only now realizes what bitterness must accumulate in the female nature that is indiscriminately pushed down the path which is supposed to lead to marriage—but does not reach its destination.” Protestantism was complicit in the woman’s resulting anguish: “What can she do then? Her life becomes worthless; her best years are passed by in waiting and hoping ... She was kind and industrious, loyal and domestic—but she had not pleased any man, and thus she withered into a lonely age, a burden to herself and others, without love, without joy.” The contrast between domestic industry and desolate grief led the unwed bourgeois woman to “justifiably ask: What have I done to deserve such a failed life? If marriage is the exclusive calling of the female, as Luther taught and demonstrated when he dissolved the convents, then it is unjust of God that He does not provide all girls the possibility of establishing a family but instead imposes on these fine, completely guiltless stepchildren the bitterness of a failed life.”⁷⁸

Martin Luther’s 1523 marriage to Katharina von Bora symbolized the Lutheran view of marriage as the ultimate female vocation. Von Bora had been one of nine nuns who had fled their convent to the sanctuary of the protesting theologian.⁷⁹ She chose marriage to Luther over her bond with the Church, inaugurating the Protestant sanctification of marriage over the single life. But Gnauck-Kühne read that sanctification as an inescapable conundrum, for the reality of temporal life did not permit all women to marry: “One would from the beginning have to establish the following: The marriage is not *the* calling of the female, but instead only *one* calling among others. But Lutherans cannot make this claim, because according to the Lutheran view, the female is made for the man, created for marriage.” She came to view the Protestant faith as phallogocentric: “Everything depends on the pleasure of the man ... The female is absolutely surrendered to the man. If you please no man—poor you—then you have missed your calling—what purpose do you serve in the world?”⁸⁰ At this intellectual juncture, Elisabeth Gnauck-Kühne’s life took its most unusual turn. Instead of distancing herself from religion in apathy (as had many activists in the women’s movement) or abandoning the notion of God in atheism (as had scores of radical and socialist contemporaries), Gnauck-Kühne embraced the age-old institution of Catholicism as her harbor against the tides of modernity.

Augustin Rösler had identified two Catholic principles as momentous in Gnauck-Kühne’s religious transformation: the celebration of virginity and the doctrine of spiritual authority. Informed by her experiences as teacher, scholar, and divorced wife, these tenets increasingly influenced her views on the woman question. The merit of virginity clearly contributed to her understanding of the

female surplus and the Catholic doctrinal emphasis on Church authority supplied a theological basis to her support of religious communities

Catholicism offered an alternative response to the plight of single women by elevating the status of virginity. Austrian women's rights activist Rosa Mayreder observed that virginity and motherhood were "fused into a single mystery" in "the world of Christianity," and that the Church offered myriad examples in which "a vast number of most excellent women devoted to the spiritual Christian life have preferred virginity to motherhood."⁸¹ Gnauck-Kühne similarly believed that the veneration of Mary and the sanctity of the convent demonstrated the single woman's special status. A tale from Gnauck-Kühne's childhood offered a romanticized version of her first acquaintance with Catholicism. Coming across a small rural Catholic chapel while on a walk "made a strong impression on childish fantasies, because I remember the exact words and circumstances today ... I sat on a large stone and watched the closed shutters and wished that they would open so that I could one time see inside. I thought it would be wonderful to kneel, hold a rosary in the hand and sing: Hail to you Maria!"⁸² Even when the zeal of a recent convert is taken into account, the potency of Marian devotion for Gnauck-Kühne is clear.

Historian David Blackbourn has written about the vibrant strain of religious fervor surrounding the Virgin Mary in nineteenth-century Germany. Blackbourn described the Saar village of Marpingen in the 1870s as "an atmosphere suffused with piety."⁸³ While Blankenburg and Berlin did not offer quite such an ambience, Gnauck-Kühne certainly was informed by the infusion of Marian iconography and doctrine in the Catholicism of her time. In an early work, Gnauck-Kühne responded to an argument posed by opponents of the women's movement, who cited the biblical Eve as proof that women inherently did not have the skills of critical reasoning. She rejoined, "Eve's guilt stands opposite Mary's purity. If the female sex fell in Eve, it elevated itself with Mary. *Without Mary there would be no human-born Savior*. The entire male sex owes to the *female* the realization of the God's ways and the possibility of salvation. 'The eternal female moves us heavenward!'"⁸⁴ Gnauck-Kühne emphasized that the female sex elevated itself and merited its high status rather than having received it arbitrarily.⁸⁵

The Catholic convent also inspired Gnauck-Kühne. Luther's abolition of cloister life formed a central component of her critique of Protestantism. Gnauck-Kühne wrote prior to her conversion about the historical importance of religious institutions in absorbing the female surplus: "Many single women found acceptance in convents, cloisters, and Beguine houses."⁸⁶ The convent had provided an important arena of activity as well as a place of refuge for unmarried women. But the modern, industrial, and (by implication) Protestant world offered no such alternative.⁸⁷ For single women seeking refuge from the uncertainties of life without marriage, religious sisterhoods provided shelter and a form of feminist activism that did not exist in the Protestant milieu.

Protestant subjugation of single women was made explicit by Gnauck-Kühne in an article written just before her conversion: "On voluntary virginal status

(that which is consecrated by God), Lutheran instruction places virtually no value, much less a promise, and for compulsory virginal status no comfort or advice other than that of resignation.” But Rome offered a different vision: “On the other hand, the subjugation of ‘godly virginity to love’ is foreign to the Catholic Church [where] the married state is a holy state, but lifelong virginity consecrated by God has dignity and worth equal to marriage.” In a version of incipient feminist liberation theology, Gnauck-Kühne saw Catholicism as emancipatory: “In this way the Catholic woman in fact possesses an active choice that frees her from the man and his proposal of marriage and places her life formation under her own resolution.”⁸⁸ The shrewish fusspot, the hopeless romantic, and the suffocating aunt—all could be released and redeemed by marriage to Christ.⁸⁹

In 1888, on the occasion of her own marriage, Gnauck-Kühne bid students goodbye with the following words: “God bless you! I have reaped much love, and that is my most beautiful payment, but may I also say that I have sown love. Dear students, in work and rest you have been the heart of my thoughts and emotions; I have loved you dearly.”⁹⁰ Yet leaving the ‘heart of her thoughts and emotions’ had brought her only private pain and public disgrace. During her travels after the marital denouement, Gnauck-Kühne searched for religious comfort and spiritual support, but found none: “In Cannes I went to the evangelical services regularly. I visited the pastor, but was only met by his sister. I attended Communion and took it with such hot tears that a stone would have taken pity on me.” When a friend of Gnauck-Kühne’s went to the minister to ask if he would offer comfort to the jilted woman, the minister refused: “Do you think he came to me or said to me: Come to me? *Oh, that is asking too much.* He gave the sermon and—that’s that. This is ten years ago, but I have not forgotten it. Quite the opposite, the older I become, the more irresponsible I find this lovelessness of the clergy.”⁹¹ Fueled by bitterness, the pain conveyed in this letter also informed subsequent writings addressing the anguish of ridiculed old maids. The suffering is palpable of a woman whose life had collided with a humiliating tragedy that she could not have foreseen and for which she was ill-equipped.

Gnauck-Kühne believed that, had she had better spiritual defenses, she might have been able to conquer the stigma and pain that were the remnants of her marriage: “As a result of a marriage that was a frivolous exploitation of my ignorance of life and inexperience, when unhappiness forced me to fight, I had no weapons. I was driven to despair ... The end of the first chapter of my life was complete religious bankruptcy [and] upon stepping out into the world, a total breakdown at the first gust of wind.”⁹² Gnauck-Kühne’s later reflections about those surplus “female treasures who wither through a lonely life [that] is for me one of the saddest accompaniments of the modern time” sounded a very autobiographical note.⁹³

In converting to Roman Catholicism, Gnauck-Kühne sought shelter for herself and all solitary women. A letter announcing her resignation from the ESK summarized the reasons for her religious conversion: “As a woman’s advocate, the Catholic view of virginity has become a revelation that for me removes a tor-

menting epistemological conundrum. A further meaningful discovery has been my acquaintance with the Catholic principal of authority, the Catholic response to the question: Do we approach the chaos with subjective opinions ... or is there a firmly established objective power?" Doctrinal traditions influenced her distinctive feminist voice. At the same time, religious faith satisfied her personal longings: "Finally, I happily confess, that as a single woman I find new courage to confront life and an unknown joy for living in belonging to a secure, dependable community, one which admittedly demands, but in exchange also holds, elevates, carries, and cares."⁹⁴

The ideal of religious community became the main Catholic banner under which she directed her discussion of the *Frauenüberschuß* after 1900: "The attraction in Catholicism for the internally lonesome was above all the great, tightly organized community that offered protection and support ... How I envied the Catholics when I saw how the people who stepped into the confessional entered an atmosphere of comfort. There one could pour out one's heart and was certain that silence would be preserved."⁹⁵ Absorbed by communal reconciliation, shame disappeared. Even if one did not become a nun (though Gnauck-Kühne long considered it, finally giving up the idea when Rösler advised her against it),⁹⁶ the comforting arms of the Church could provide the family that single women had been missing. The convent as rhetorical rather than practical entity forged the link between the *Frauenüberschuß* and Catholicism. Knowing that most surplus women would not become nuns, Gnauck-Kühne raised "a theoretical question, whether the unmarried *can* find a fulfilling substitute or not, and for this principal decision, the *number* that comes into question is irrelevant. If marriage is the only purpose of temporal existence ... then every other life form is a stopgap."⁹⁷ By privileging the convent as a female pursuit, Catholicism provided women with an empowering vision of the female calling. Gnauck-Kühne argued that because the Church called women to vocations outside of marriage, other fields of engagement also could and should be opened to them.

The convent provided a superlative model of community for single women in four ways: first, it provided an ontological expansion of the female purpose beyond the confines of marriage. Second, cloister life demonstrated a fine example of childless maternalism: "Marriage and motherhood become *a* path to the goal. The other path is to place one's eye *directly* on the goal of eternity and move directly toward that goal, not weighed down by earthly burdens ... This last path is the more difficult of the two. The mother cares for her own, the women of the cloister serve strangers."⁹⁸ Third, in the guise of spiritual motherhood, the women of the convent provided a historical prototype for the type of social service that Gnauck-Kühne believed formed the most important vocation for single women. Finally, sisterhoods offered a demonstration of communal relations that would replace the lost families of the unwed: "Transmitted via many centuries, [we] can look back upon a form of association which has protected Christendom under the most varied conditions: the association of *religious-democratic* principles, the convent."⁹⁹

Gnauck-Kühne maintained that spiritual solace for single women would be secured if unwed women either entered convents or joined institutions based upon similar religious-democratic principals. The importance of the Catholic doctrine of authority played a key role here. Community could not thrive if it was merely an association of separate units bound only by the need for company: “A community without individuality is weak, but a community without cooperation is barren ... The women’s movement must find its way between both paths. Between blind subordination and unquenched self-fulfillment lies the way to order ... and through order can be found the way toward fulfillment. Such a goal calls for authority.”¹⁰⁰ Gnauck-Kühne simultaneously argued for the viability of nonreligious communities while legitimizing her own activity in forming women’s associations. The Catholic convent provided a fully formed model for female communities and ratified the importance of establishing an ersatz family for her single women.

Gnauck-Kühne’s support for communal life extended beyond the Church. A number of new forms of association marked the importance of cooperative living in the industrial age: apartment houses designed for small families or single women, clubs, homes, and hospices for both middle-class and working women, worker’s associations, and a variety of special interest associations.¹⁰¹ The KDF had a very special role to play in this era of communal societies because it was the organization that most closely emulated the convent model. Gnauck-Kühne recognized that not all women could be or wanted to be nuns. But if an unmarried woman forced outside of her family sought a shared life beyond the convent, where could she go? Secular professional and voluntary associations lacked the clear authoritarian justification and organizing principles that Gnauck-Kühne deemed as essential. And unlike the Protestant women’s association she had helped to establish in 1899, the KDF was elevated by the Catholic view of virginity. Catholicism offered unique status to unmarried women and provided them with the mission of protecting their own. Gnauck-Kühne exhorted the KDF: “Think of the solitary! ... Each unhappy one who, seeking employment, moves from home to the large city. ... How many unfortunate [women] in this situation fall into the quagmire and stay there! ... If we could help one single individual keep the head above water or grace a single soul by shining in a ray of light, we will be richly repaid.”¹⁰² Glowing words indeed, if a bit simplistic in their hope for change. The KDF acted as a harbor where maternal instincts would serve as the emotional and psychological deliverance of those surplus women who risked falling into a quagmire more spiritual than material—women much like Elisabeth Gnauck-Kühne herself.

Gnauck-Kühne believed that through her conversion to Catholicism and the foundation of the KDF, she had united the three areas most formative to her life’s work: education, family, and the experience of suffering. Her views on the nature of education gained a more vocational and maternalist bent over time. Catholicism changed her view of the family toward that of a communal entity modeled by the convent and the KDF. And her very personal acquaintance with suffer-

ing was given fresh purpose through the Catholic faith. Gnauck-Kühne saw the spiritual pain and rarefied status of the Virgin Mary reflected in contemporary lives of single women. The Church offered a haven in which the surplus woman could receive the blessings of the Virgin while emulating Mary through the work of spiritual maternalism. Elisabeth Gnauck-Kühne identified in Catholicism a sanctuary where virginity was sanctified rather than scorned.

* * *

Recent scholarship has encouraged historians to confront the question: “*Why* could confessional affiliation function as a powerful social category in [imperial] Germany?”¹⁰³ Elisabeth Gnauck-Kühne’s intellectual and organizational work provides important historical evidence with which to explore that question.¹⁰⁴ Confessional affiliation formed the lens through which she offered an influential reading of the *Frauenfrage*. Gnauck-Kühne’s legacy rests in the success of the two organizations she established in an attempt to create a more multifaceted and spiritual women’s movement. The DEF and KDF still exist and, throughout their history, have had sizeable memberships. The religious organizations at least nominally touched many more women’s lives than did the more studied radical movement.¹⁰⁵ Ranks of membership disclose neither the meaning of these organizations in women’s lives nor Gnauck-Kühne’s significance in relation to them. But a 1910 letter to Gnauck-Kühne from Paula Müller, the leader of the DEF from 1900 until 1933, suggests the impact of Gnauck-Kühne’s early leadership.¹⁰⁶ The formative connection of Gnauck-Kühne’s work and ideas to the KDF is indisputable.¹⁰⁷ She remained committed to a purposeful direction of the organization throughout her life.

Yet recognition of Gnauck-Kühne’s legacy ought not to mask the chaotic aspects of her career. As Dagmar Herzog has argued regarding the religious dissent movement of the 1840s, calls for female emancipation emerging out of a religious framework “mobilized many different, indeed contradictory, images of womanhood, thereby complicating and undermining their own feminist demands in subtle, but unmistakable ways.”¹⁰⁸ Gnauck-Kühne frequently portrayed women as lazy, vain, and aimless when left without the guidance of a greater authority (be it husband or Church). Moreover, the passion of her religious convictions and the tempestuous nature of her activism made her a figure with whom many contemporaries found it difficult to work. She was clearly headstrong and her prolific writings frequently reveal ardor for a momentary cause.

The conspicuous nature of her spirituality in the context of the largely secular movement for women’s rights makes Gnauck-Kühne a difficult figure to categorize. Few leaders of Western women’s movements find their *raison d’être* in Christianity, let alone Catholicism. And Gnauck-Kühne’s confessional fluctuation raises questions. Did she convert to Catholicism, or to Augustin Rösler, or to Mary? Did Catholicism create her very special vision of religious maternalism, or did feminism lead her to Catholicism? The evidence suggests it was the latter. If so, Gnauck-Kühne’s career as a female activist followed an exceptional path. Her

Catholicism originated predominantly from a faith in redemption from pain. The Virgin Mary offered that redemption and at the same time provided a model of solace for single women. Gnauck-Kühne attached to the haven of the Church an agenda of social reform in the guise of religious maternalism.

After her death in 1917, Hedwig Dransfeld, president of the KDF, marked Elisabeth's passing with the following words: "Elisabeth Gnauck-Kühne's spirit will live on, especially in the KDF ... Through the KDF, Catholicism should make itself felt as a cultural factor in the woman's movement. Advising and leading ... she provided a motto of the Catholic women's movement ... Being female means to be like a mother."¹⁰⁹ In that motto, the woman, the vision, and the association merge. This phrase, taken from Gnauck-Kühne's masterwork, *The German Woman*,¹¹⁰ was her most important legacy: the essence of womanhood lay in the maternal capacity as embodied in the Virgin Mary. Modern day virgins would find vocation in the KDF, the convent, or maternal occupations such as teaching, childcare, nursing, and social work. Gnauck-Kühne believed that Catholic female fellowship offered to all women a welcoming godly realm where marital status was irrelevant: "The decisive factor is that we come to the goal of our life's voyage, not whether we travel first or fourth class or sit alone in the woman's compartment."¹¹¹

Notes

1. Brunnhilde Fabricius and Ursula Hansen, "Wir stehen auf ihren Schultern," in *Elisabeth Gnauck-Kühne (1850–1917): Zur sozialen Lage der Frau um die Jahrhundertwende*, eds. Elisabeth Prégardier and Irmingard Böhm (Annweiler, 1997), 14.
2. Ute Gerhard, *Unerhört. Die Geschichte der deutsche Frauenbewegung* (Reinbek bei Hamburg, 1992), 203; on Zetkin, see chapter 7.
3. Clara Zetkin, "Nach der Drucklegung des Vortrages 'Die soziale Lage der Frau'" (1895), in *Sozialen Lage*, eds. Prégardier and Böhm, 121.
4. On the ESK, see Manfred Schick, *Kulturprotestantismus und soziale Frage* (Tübingen, 1970).
5. See Introduction.
6. See Gerhard, *Unerhört*, which is structured under the organizing framework of moderate versus radical. Ann Taylor Allen, *Feminism and Motherhood in Germany, 1800–1914* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1991), asserts the essential importance of the moderate/radical split while also advocating spiritual motherhood as a new category of analysis. Historical accounts of local women's movements such as Elisabeth Meyer-Renschhausen, *Weibliche Kultur und soziale Arbeit; Eine Geschichte der Frauenbewegung am Beispiel Bremens, 1810–1927* (Cologne, 1989), and Nancy Reagan, *A German Women's Movement: Class and Gender in Hanover, 1880–1933* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1995), have demonstrated ideological variance by region, tempering the dominance of the moderate/radical archetype.
7. The DEF had a membership of 200,000 by 1926; the KDF grew to the size of 250,000 by 1928. At that time, the BDF numbered about 500,000. See Ute Frevert, *Women in German History: From Bourgeois Emancipation to Sexual Liberation*, trans. Stuart McKinnon-Evans (New York, 1989), 173.

8. Three authors who have studied female religious activism and who have challenged the moderate/radical paradigm are: Douglas J. Cremer, in "The Limits of Maternalism: Gender Ideology and the South German Catholic Workingwomen's Associations," *Catholic Historical Review* 87 (3) (2001): 428–452; Ursula Baumann, *Protestantismus und Frauenemanzipation in Deutschland, 1850–1920* (Frankfurt, 1992); and Marion Kaplan, whose work has uncovered the importance of religious identity and organizations for German Jewish women; see especially Marion Kaplan, *The Making of the Jewish Middle Class. Women, Family, and Identity in Imperial Germany* (New York, 1991).
9. See Margaret L. Anderson, "The Limits of Secularization: On the Problem of the Catholic Revival in Nineteenth-Century Germany," *Historical Journal* 38(3) (1995): 647–670, and "Piety and Politics: Recent Work on German Catholicism," *Journal of Modern History* 63(4) (1991): 681–716; David Blackburn, *Marpingen: Apparitions of the Virgin Mary in a Nineteenth-Century German Village* (New York, 1995); Raymond Chien-Sun, *Before the Enemy is within our Walls: Catholic Workers in Cologne, 1885–1912* (Boston, 1999); Margaret Stieg Dalton, *Catholicism, Popular Culture, and the Arts in Germany, 1880–1933* (Notre Dame, IN, 2005); Wilfried Loth, ed., *Deutscher Katholizismus im Umbruch zur Moderne* (Stuttgart, 1991); and Jonathan Sperber, *Popular Catholicism in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Princeton, NJ, 1984). Helmut Walser Smith, ed., *Protestants, Catholics, and Jews in Germany, 1800–1914* (New York, 2001), offers significant insight into the Catholic experience, including Lucian Hölscher, "The Religious Divide: Piety in Nineteenth-Century Germany," 33–48; Anthony J. Steinhoff, "Building Religious Community: Worship Space and Experience in Strasbourg after the Franco-Prussian War," 267–296; and Jeffrey Zalar, "The Process of Confessional Inculturation: Catholic Reading in the 'Long Nineteenth Century,'" 121–152.
10. Work on gender and Catholicism has been more extensive in the history of pre-unification Germany. See Joel F. Harrington, *Reordering Marriage and Society in Reformation Germany* (New York, 1995); Dagmar Herzog, *Intimacy and Exclusion: Religious Politics in Pre-Revolutionary Baden* (Princeton, NJ, 1996); Sylvia Paetschek, *Frauen und Dissens: Frauen im Deutsch-katholizismus und in den freien Gemeinden, 1842–1852* (Göttingen, 1990); Catherine M. Prelinger, *Charity, Challenge, and Change: Religious Dimensions of the Mid-Nineteenth Century Women's Movement in Germany* (New York, 1987); and Ulrike Strasser, *State of Virginity: Gender, Religion, and Politics in an Early Modern Catholic State* (Ann Arbor, MI, 2004).
11. *Kulturkampf* translates as "a conflict of cultures or civilizations," and refers specifically to the clash between the Prussian Ministry of Culture and the Catholic Church from 1872–1878. During the *Kulturkampf*, Jesuit institutions were closed, clerical education was taken over by the state, and civil marriage became mandatory.
12. Michael B. Gross, *The War against Catholicism: Liberalism and the Anti-Catholic Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Ann Arbor, MI, 2004), 206.
13. *Ibid.*, 225.
14. Primary sources for this chapter include unpublished material from Gnauck-Kühne's papers held at Cologne's Archiv des Katholischen Frauenbundes (ADKF, Nachlass EGK); Gnauck-Kühne's writings; and Helene Simon, *Elisabeth Gnauck-Kühne* vol. 1, *Pilgerfahrt* (M. Gladbach, 1928), and vol. 2, *Heimat* (M. Gladbach, 1929). Simon's exhaustive biography includes transcriptions of a substantial amount of Gnauck-Kühne's correspondence and unpublished writings.
15. Gnauck-Kühne in Simon, *Pilgerfahrt*, 12.
16. Elisabeth Kühne, *Prospekt der Lehr und Erziehungs-Anstalt für Töchter höherer Stände* (Blankenburg a.H.: W. Kircher, undated [1875]), 5. ADKF, Nachlass EGK, Familienpapiere.
17. The daughters of eminent historian Theodor Mommsen were among her students.
18. Elisabeth Kühne, "Abschiedswort an meine Zöglinge," 15 August 1888, 1, in ADKF, Nachlass EGK, Familienpapiere.
19. *Ibid.*, 2.
20. *Ibid.*, 3.

21. Ibid.
22. Ibid., 4.
23. ADKF, Nachlass EGK, Familienpapiere, Simon's notes from interview with Frl. Martini.
24. ADKF, Nachlass EGK, Familienpapiere, Simon's notes from interview with Hänichen.
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid.
27. ADKF, Nachlass EGK, Familienpapiere.
28. Ibid., Simon's notes from interview with Frl. Hänichen.
29. Ibid.
30. On Schmoller, see Erik Grimmer-Solem, *The Rise of Historical Economics and Social Reform in Germany, 1864–1894* (New York, 2003). Schmoller (1838–1917) was the leader of the “new historicists” who challenged neoclassical economic theory.
31. Elisabeth Gnauck-Kühne, *Goldene Früchte aus Märchenland. Märchen für jung und alt* (Bremen, 1904); see Introduction.
32. Gnauck-Kühne to Augustin Rösler, 16 September 1900, in Simon, *Heimat*, 196–197.
33. Gnauck-Kühne, *Goldene Früchte*, 107.
34. The most influential works include: Elisabeth Gnauck-Kühne, *Das Universitätsstudium der Frauen: Ein Beitrag zur Frauenfrage*, 3rd ed., (Oldenburg, 1892); the pamphlet containing her 1895 ESK speech, *Die Soziale Lage der Frau* (Berlin, 1895); and Elisabeth Gnauck-Kühne, *Die Deutsche Frau um die Jahrhundertwende: Statistische Studie zur Frauenfrage* (Berlin, 1904).
35. Gnauck-Kühne, *Universitätsstudium*, 2.
36. See chapter 7.
37. Gnauck-Kühne, *Universitätsstudium*, 17.
38. Ibid., 17–18.
39. Gnauck-Kühne to Minna Bachem-Singer, 22 May 1902, in Simon, *Pilgerfahrt*, 220.
40. Gnauck-Kühne, *Frau*, 9.
41. Ibid., 142; see chapter 6 on Bré.
42. See chapter 3; on Gnauck-Kühne and maternalism, see Baumann, *Protestantismus*, 91, and Cremer, “Limits of Maternalism,” 437–443.
43. Gnauck-Kühne, *Lage*, 14.
44. Ibid., 15–16.
45. Gnauck-Kühne, *Universitätsstudium*, 13.
46. Ibid., 4.
47. Gnauck-Kühne, *Lage*, 3.
48. See chapter 6.
49. Ibid., 4.
50. Gnauck-Kühne, *Lage*, 24–25; on the tension between maternalist ideals and paternalist views of the working-class in Gnauck-Kühne's social agenda, see Cremer, “Limits of Maternalism,” 433; 443–452.
51. Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* [1792] (New York, 1992), 81.
52. Gnauck-Kühne, *Universitätsstudium*, 4–5.
53. Gnauck-Kühne, *Frau*, 123–124.
54. Gnauck-Kühne, *Lage*, 20; see chapter 5 for a discussion of Lange and Salomon.
55. Gnauck-Kühne, *Frau*, 139–140; on individually focused education, George Bernstein and Lottelore Bernstein, “Attitudes toward Women's Education in Germany,” *International Journal of Women's Studies* 2 (1979): 482.
56. Gnauck-Kühne, *Lage*, 9.
57. Gnauck-Kühne, *Universitätsstudium*, 11–12.
58. Elisabeth Gnauck-Kühne, “Abkehr vom Protestantismus” (1900), in *Frau und Religion: Gotteserfahrungen im Patriarchat*, ed. Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel (Frankfurt, 1985), 171–172.
59. See chapter 3 on the demography of the *Frauenüberschuß*.
60. Gnauck-Kühne, *Universitätsstudium*, 6.

61. Gnauck-Kühne, *Lage*, 8.
62. *Ibid.*
63. *Ibid.*, 26.
64. See, for example, Gertrud Bäumer, "Elisabeth Gnauck-Kühne," in *Die Frau*, May 1917; Ludwig Langemann, *Der Deutsche Bund zur Bekämpfung der Frauenemanzipation* (Berlin, 1913), 5–9.
65. See Gerhard, *Unerhört*, 203; Alfred Kall, *Katholische Frauenbewegung in Deutschland: eine Untersuchung zur Gründung katholischer Frauenvereine im 19. Jahrhundert* (Paderborn, 1983), 211–306; Elisabeth Moltmann-Wendel, "A Woman between Churches: Elisabeth Gnauck-Kühne, Sociopolitical Scientist," *American Benedictine Review*, 43(2) (1992): 207–219; and Prégardier and Böhm, *Sozialen Lage*. Baumann, *Protestantismus*, and Cremer, "Limits of Maternalism," stand as exceptions in their treatment of Gnauck-Kühne as an important figure of social and women's history.
66. On the distinctiveness of Catholic and Protestant cultural identity, see David Blackbourn, *The Long Nineteenth Century. A History of Germany, 1780–1918* (New York, 1997), 283–302, and Thomas Nipperdey, *Deutsche Geschichte, 1800–1866* (Munich, 1984), 529ff.; Hölscher's "Religious Divide" describes the piety movement of the nineteenth century.
67. Baumann, *Protestantismus*, 97–98.
68. Gnauck-Kühne to Dyhrenfurth, October 1899, in Simon, *Pilgerfahrt*, 163.
69. See Augustin Rösler, *Die Frauenfrage vom Standpunkte der Natur, der Geschichte und der Offenbarung* (Vienna, 1893).
70. Augustin Rösler, "Aus der Hauschronik Mautern," 1900, 50, in Simon, *Heimat*, 209.
71. Personal recollection of Franz Mair, in Simon, *Heimat*, 210.
72. Mair cited in Simon, *Heimat*, 210.
73. In a letter to Gertrud Dyhrenfurth, 13 December 1904, in Simon, *Heimat*, 219, Gnauck-Kühne describes her passion as a character flaw that she struggled against her entire life.
74. One exception can be found in Gnauck-Kühne, *Universitätsstudium*, which was for the most part devoid of religious commentary until an extraordinary declaration in the conclusion: "If the doors toward knowledge were open, she [woman] would discover: 'Everything is yours. But you are Christ. Christ is God'" (1892, 60). This use of faith to justify expanded female rights suggests a direction of things to come.
75. Gnauck-Kühne, "Abkehr," 170–171.
76. Gnauck-Kühne, *Frau*, 9.
77. Gnauck-Kühne, *Lage*, 2, 9.
78. Gnauck-Kühne, "Abkehr," 172–173.
79. On historical interpretations of the life of Katharina von Bora, see Jeanette C. Smith, "Katharina von Bora through Five Centuries: A Historiography," *Sixteenth Century Journal* 30(3) (1999): 745–774.
80. Gnauck-Kühne, "Abkehr," 173.
81. Rosa Mayreder, *A Survey of the Woman Problem*, trans. Herman Scheffauer (New York, 1913; reprint, Westport, CT, 1994), 54; Mayreder (1858–1938) was a leader of the Austrian women's movement.
82. Gnauck-Kühne, "Abkehr," 164–165.
83. Blackbourn, *Marpingen*, 106.
84. Gnauck-Kühne, *Universitätsstudium*, 46–47; emphasis in text.
85. Gnauck-Kühne's interpretation echoes that of Johannes Ronge, the leader of the mid-century German Catholic movement. Prelinger, *Charity*, shows how Ronge linked Marian imagery "not only [to] women's philanthropic obligation but also [to] their right to higher and secular education" (1987, 121).
86. Gnauck-Kühne, *Universitätsstudium*, 8.
87. Michael Gross has described how some liberals of the early *Kaiserreich* were dismayed by the growing number of female religious orders and congregations that emerged in German states

- between the Revolution of 1848 and the *Kulturkampf*, enhancing the difference between Catholic and Protestant Germany in terms of their views of women. One opponent of female cloistered life linked the rise in religious orders to the perception of an early female surplus, believing that “it was becoming increasingly difficult for women, especially in the midsized cities, to find a partner for marriage” (2004, 212).
88. Gnauck-Kühne, “Über den Mangel an Diakonissen,” *Unterhaltungsbeilage der “Tägliche Rundschau”* 228 (28 September 1899).
 89. See chapter 1 on the iconography of the old maid.
 90. Gnauck-Kühne, “Abschiedswort,” 4.
 91. Gnauck-Kühne to Rösler, 26 August 1899, in Simon, *Heimat*, 166–167; emphasis in text.
 92. Gnauck-Kühne, “Abkehr,” 166–168.
 93. Gnauck-Kühne to Dyhrenfurth, 2. Festtag 1903, in Simon, *Heimat*, 218–219.
 94. Gnauck-Kühne in *Mitteilungen des ESK*, (May/June 1900) 2, quoted in Baumann, *Protestantismus*, 97.
 95. Gnauck-Kühne to Helene Simon, in Simon, *Pilgerfahrt*, 185.
 96. Gnauck-Kühne to Rösler, undated, in Simon, *Heimat*, 189.
 97. Gnauck-Kühne, *Frau*, 154; emphasis in text.
 98. *Ibid.*, 153; emphasis in text.
 99. *Ibid.*, 146; emphasis in text.
 100. *Ibid.*, 144.
 101. *Ibid.*, 146.
 102. Gnauck-Kühne, cited in Simon, *Heimat*, 88.
 103. Steinhoff, “Building Religious Community,” 267; emphasis in text.
 104. Gnauck-Kühne’s place in German women’s history ought to be redressed, not only because of her prolific presence on the scene, but also because of the unique religious and social scientific perspectives she brought to bear. Gnauck-Kühne’s position on the periphery is best demonstrated by Gerhard, *Unerhört*, 203, which briefly cites her in a sidebar as the “Catholic Zetkin.” Ute Frevert’s *Women in German History* mentions Catholic female activism only once, during a discussion of voting patterns in the Weimar era. Ann Taylor Allen’s *Feminism* (1991) also does not address the particularities of Catholic maternalism. Local studies have challenged this trend; Reagin’s *A German Women’s Movement* offers an integrated consideration of Catholic women. But to date, no history of female activism has explored the Catholic women’s movement of the *Kaiserreich* in the way that parallels Ursula Baumann’s work on *Protestantismus*.
 105. The DEF had a membership of 200,000 by 1926; the KDF grew to the size of 250,000 by 1928. See Frevert, *Women*, 173; Helene Stöcker’s *Bund für Mutterschutz* had a membership of approximately 3800 in 1907. Allen, *Feminism*, 175.
 106. ADKF, Nachlass EGK, Correspondence, Ordnen 17.
 107. On Gnauck-Kühne’s Catholic legacy, see Prégardier and Böhm, *Elisabeth Gnauck-Kühne*.
 108. Herzog, *Intimacy*, 86.
 109. Cited in Simon, *Heimat*, 70.
 110. Gnauck-Kühne, *Frau*, 124.
 111. *Ibid.*, 153.

THE SURPLUS WOMAN



The surplus woman stands as an important cultural icon of the *Kaiserreich* (Imperial Germany). The *Frauenüberschuß* (female surplus) offered a presumed demographic event that provided urgency to calls for change and served as a platform for the reform of education, the professions, the institution of marriage, and sexuality. It also elicited sympathy for a cohort of middle-class women who, through no fault of their own, had been left outside of home, motherhood, and marriage. In the course of the twentieth century, demographic circumstances altered dramatically to create a brutally real female surplus. In light of two world wars, discussion about a female population surplus emerged in a culture already informed by the social and cultural distress created by “too many” women. *The Surplus Woman* concludes by exploring the rhetoric surrounding marital status in World War I and post-Imperial Germany, followed by an assessment of the importance of the female surplus to our understanding of German history.

The Surplus Woman of World War I

The onset of war in 1914 brought forth a period of extraordinary and unanticipated trauma for Germans. The Kaiser’s call for national mobilization at the outset of the war occasioned the recasting of the great social questions that had characterized the cultural, political, and social discourse of the *Kaiserreich* since national unification in 1871. Discussions regarding the rights of laborers, the division of political power, the role of the military in society, the ownership of capital, and the structure and composition of a healthy nation—all intensely

debated topics in the press, the universities, and among political parties—were channeled anew in the wake of the guns of August. The woman question was no less transformed during the Great War. The rhetoric of the German women's movement changed during the early years of the war with particular regard to the topic of marriage. While marital status and the role of single women had been a foundational concern prior to 1914, the outbreak of military hostilities brought about a marked shift in the language and agendas of the movement. Just as female marital prospects became increasingly shaky in light of the devastating battlefield casualties, the leaders of the German women's movement began to stop talking about the plight of single women.¹

As soldiers West and East dug in and men began to be killed in the millions, European demography changed irrevocably. Social Democrat Luise Zietz wrote in 1916, "The war has mightily increased the *Frauenüberschuß*. Very many young, single or recently married soldiers have been killed and among the severely maimed, young men in their teens and in the best years of manhood are represented in greater numbers. Therefore the marital possibilities for *Mädchen* [girls] are reduced to a not insignificant extent."² The facts: straightforward, inarguable, and as might well be expected in the context of such a tremendous conflict. Yet Zietz's articulation of those facts is one of the only clear statements made by a leader of the prewar women's movements about the demographic realities of war and their consequences for female marital prospects.

With slaughter rampant across Europe, the surplus of unmarried women became a stark reality. During the course of the war, the number of marriages in Germany decreased significantly. In 1913, 252 marriages occurred for every 10,000 unmarried Germans over the age of fifteen; by 1916, that rate had dropped to 127 per 10,000, increasing to 156/10,000 by 1918.³ Among German females over the age of fifteen, the percentage of those unmarried rose from 34.7 percent in 1913 to 38.6 percent by 1918, representing a numerical increase of 1.3 million single women.⁴

Facing the reality of a war that manifested appalling lethality from the outset and which seemed endless, women's rights advocates may well have continued and expanded their discussion of the female surplus as a central pillar of calls for change. Yet, evidence derived from texts on the nature of female wartime service by key figures in the women's movement written during the period from 1914 to 1916 shows that this was not the case. The surplus single woman disappeared from the rhetoric of the German women's movement just when reason dictated her real arrival. Three factors brought about this change: the celebration of unity occasioned by the war; the patriotic nationalism that resounded in wartime solicitations of women's work; and the vision of maternal citizenship that emerged as a corollary to calls for female service to the state.

The early years of the war mark a clear topical shift in the rhetoric of the women's movement away from the material conditions that had created the surplus woman and into the patriotic realm of female wartime service. The period of the war occupies a transitional space between Wilhelmine advocacy of expanded

professional, educational, and legal rights, and the Weimar-era adjustment to suffrage, labor reconfiguration, and the tensions between democratic principles of egalitarianism and cultural and social limitations on gender equality. Much of the scholarship on the wartime women's movement has emphasized the belief held by leading women's rights advocates that female service during the war would bring about "recompense and reward" in the form of postwar legal rights, especially suffrage.⁵ But expectation of payback (and accompanying debates about female opportunism) emerged much more in the later war years than during the early years of patriotic solidarity.⁶ Expectations of postwar rewards for loyalty increased congruently as the horrific trials exacted by the war mounted. Historian Jean Quataert has noted a significant transition between the early war, when "a gendered war culture of patriotic duties extended deep into civil society," and the late war, when "soldiers and civilians alike had to make sense of the sacrifices asked of them. Then, the patriotic vocabulary of the August days, which had defined the sacrifices in the name of God, king, and fatherland, quickly faltered."⁷ Quataert identifies the "decisive turning point" as 1916, when "the army's voracious need for human and industrial resources was pushing Germany toward 'total war'."⁸ The wartime rhetoric of the German women's movement reflects Quataert's chronological reading through an early focus on unity, *das Volk*,⁹ and maternal citizenship. Addressing the needs of the surplus woman did not emerge on the wartime agenda.

In its prewar incarnation, the female surplus had been presented as primarily a middle-class issue. The Kaiser's call for peace in the fortress (*Burgfrieden*) at the outset of the war made such class-based interests seem unpatriotic.¹⁰ Leaders of the women's movement shared in this feeling as they repudiated endeavors emphasizing the needs of one group of Germans over another. During the Great War, these figures came to reevaluate the successes and to explore the failures of the antebellum women's movement. Chief among their criticisms was that the movement had been fragmented and misguided. The war itself had forced this reevaluation, leading women's leaders "in the most varied areas to relearn views that we held as irrevocable, to recognize it as essential to change and to make perspectives that we had long thrown overboard into our own intellectual property."¹¹

While some doubted whether commitment to the war effort could unite women,¹² most female activists saw the *Burgfrieden* as an opportunity to rejuvenate and consolidate organized German womanhood. In dispensing with old habits, moderates saw both women and Germany from a new political perspective: "These days most surprisingly have shown how far the socialist train of thought, also in that of social democracy, is active in very wide circles. We all hold it as a natural duty to assist not only the relatives of those who fight in the field, but also those otherwise affected by war and its consequences."¹³ As they sought sisterhood in the unity of women working for Germany, how could moderate women's rights advocates continue to articulate their concern for a small fragment of German society—that is, the unmarried women of the middle-class?

In striving to shrug off old 'views that had been held as irrevocable,' leaders of the German women's movement returned to some very traditional ground. Edu-

cational and vocational advances (benefits that largely advantaged single women) no longer formed the core arena of women's advocacy. Lily Braun argued that women should gather together "not to demonstrate for the right to vote but instead to place themselves in disposal for the care of the ill and wounded ... the breakthrough of a long-suppressed female feeling that wants nothing other than helping and healing—every primitive feeling of her sex that a single word best portrays: motherliness."¹⁴ In their energetic acceptance of calls for a unified fatherland, female activists advanced a new form of spiritual motherhood that set aside prewar concerns for the unwed.

Enthusiastic patriotism marks the writings of those women who discussed female service to society in the early years of the war. Gertrud Bäumer's view of the German cause expressed fervent national loyalty: "Germany has been forced to defend with the blood of its men the fruits of its cultural strength ... We German women are a part of our land with every love and every hate, with every pain and every joy ... The deeper we feel the greatness of these actions, the higher our own duties as women must stand. If already so many tears must now flow, then we want to take care that none flow that could be dried. If already the lives of thousands must be given, the more beautiful and greater the mission to protect life, to preserve, to nurture."¹⁵ Maternalism nestled comfortably within the German wartime mission. Women had to perform acts both large and small—drying tears while also protecting, preserving, and nurturing that for which the good soldiers were fighting. In the discourse surrounding wartime service, homefront duties could never be viewed as a hardship: "Is what we bring forth with our work then a sacrifice? No, it is a blessing to us ... it is a necessity of the heart to serve our beloved fatherland as custodians and protectors of its material and cultural wealth which our brothers defend outside in the field with body and life."¹⁶ The advocates of wartime service configured it as all things good: a blessing and a duty, the next best thing to fighting at the fronts. For some women, the ability to participate in the historical movement of the times was no doubt a tremendous motivation. But for many others, war work was not a choice to elevate the spirit, but a grave necessity conditioned by privation, scarcity, and—yes—absent men.¹⁷

Commitment to the war effort meant commitment to the nation above all else. The enthusiasm of the early months of war caused Gertrud Bäumer to review the history of women's activism and to lament its internationalist tendencies: "The word 'sisters' for women of other countries was natural for us; we were gladdened by their successes, pained by their defeats and disappointments ... [Yet] we felt all the more strongly how very much we nonetheless were rooted in our own German ways ... In interactions with the others we were all the more deeply and engagingly conscious of our own essence ... we experienced that which has well been named the German cultural distinction: the particular knack that we Germans bring to the intellectual work of the world."¹⁸ Bäumer's nationalist enthusiasm contrasted strikingly with her prewar belief that, "It is in the nature of certain intellectual movements not to be contained by national

boundaries.”¹⁹ Before the war, as Angelika Schaser has argued, “internationalism and nationalism were not mutually exclusive.”²⁰ Yet after 1914, the celebration of German distinctiveness became the cornerstone of the BDF’s support for the war. Internationalist tendencies signified subversive pacifism, a sphere from which the moderates held themselves far distant. Helene Lange argued that German *Kultur* had created envy throughout the world. Jealousy of a superior civilization had created the belligerence: “In this mirror of world envy we saw our Germany with its flourishing cultural strength which in peaceful conquest had attempted to create space for itself in the world. Truly not to the disadvantage of humanity, for whom the German achievements . . . have brought immeasurable cultural advancement.”²¹ Lange saluted the might of German *Kultur* and urged female commitment to the war effort.

A conflict over the destiny of civilized society naturally had very deep consequences for each individual—man or woman—who “at a single blow comprehended that his own piece of life was a part of this great, steady, inherently joined community of work and effort, against which an entire world had raised themselves in enmity. Each now at once saw his existence . . . as a link in a chain, a threatened part of the whole.”²² These links created the united national community; as constituent parts, women could no longer identify marital status as a topic of great relevance. Peacetime could afford comparison of women and men, or wed and unwed. But during the war such categorization served only to divide and distract the *Volk*. Single women had not been forgotten; they simply no longer merited discussion even as their numbers counted ever higher. Lange wrote that, “we feel our Germanness as a condition and foundation of all other blessings, as our united common internal strength—all must be expended in order now to strive for its value, for its future existence.”²³ In giving up everything for German civilization, moderate and conservative activists alike found the plight of the unmarried woman to be expendable. The women’s movement let go of the surplus woman and adopted a vision of female citizenship. This rhetorical shift provided female activists with an empowered political position in the early years of the war.²⁴ But that strength would be fleeting, for as Margaret Higonnet has argued, assessments of wartime gains tend to emphasize “visible but isolated material changes. The evidence points to ideological mechanisms limiting the transformation of gender lines.”²⁵ Such a limiting ideology manifested itself in the vision of the motherly citizen advocated by leaders of the women’s movement during the war.

The onset of war provided the pivotal opportunity to reassess the female path toward German citizenship. By linking the traditional goal of education to national duty, women’s advocates could claim that expanding female access to learning was in fact patriotic. Activists emphasized female duty over development and the welfare of the greater national whole over the fate of individual daughters. If, prior to the war, unmarried women needed to work in order to replace the void left by marriage, during the war they simply were needed to work—no explanation was necessary. With greatest urgency, “the war demonstrated that the state

needs the woman.”²⁶ Called upon to take men’s positions in factory, field, and the professions, women had to do their part in filling the spaces left behind by those killed or mutilated on the fields of battle.²⁷ Because so many married women were left to function as single women during the war, the previously firm connection between marital status and working life among middle-class women all but vanished in discussions of replacement work.

Wartime discussion of female service repeatedly put forth the question: how and where might women best serve the German cause? Echoing a central theme of the *Kaiserreich* women’s movement, female writers asserted that a woman should tap into her essential maternal nature as she configured her life and work. Lily Braun set her advocacy of the maternalist spirit in dialogue with the sacrifices of German men in war: “If the dead could talk, our dead, they would elevate themselves and call to us, ‘How can you my mother, you my wife not want to prove as my blood [that you will] devote everything for the greatness to come—even in death to serve life?’”²⁸ The dead beckoned to mothers and wives, but not sisters. The maternal ties of mother to son and of wife to children yet-to-be summoned these ghostly cries. Braun was interested in precisely this essential link and believed that maternalism manifested itself in the female gut-feeling that emerged upon the outbreak of war: “All thinking and actions of women were immediately subjected to the natural female instinct which broke through with elemental power—the instinct that intellectualism had seemed almost to dissolve.”²⁹ Away with women’s movements and strategies, away with the mechanical bureaucracy of university entrance and job training! These had been the concerns of prewar women who had lost touch with their essence, women who had been numbed by a prosperous civilization into forgetting that which was most primordial—women who were not mothers.

Braun believed that the onset of the war had demonstrated that “the women’s movement was in danger of petering out. The war leads it ... to fresher waters. The return of the woman to the primitive feelings of her sex also further produces their corresponding ability to contribute.”³⁰ The fragmented, intellectualized women’s movement could never have equaled the mission brought forth by war: “Now it is the women who have to ... return themselves to the highest law of nature, through the strong, conscious will of motherhood.”³¹ Such a vision left no room for tinkering with the concerns of those unwed women who had been excluded from or unequal to the natural female calling. In this way, single women were subsumed into a maternalist community of citizens, providing sustenance through the grim years of war as well as hope for the victorious future. The prewar women’s movement had focused on the problem of surplus women and the spirit of maternalism; World War I removed the female surplus from the discourse, leaving maternalism to stand alone.

War called upon the spirit of mothers. Elisabeth Gnauck-Kühne argued that a mandatory year of service would provide benefits for German society as a whole by infusing it with maternal essence; at the same time, “each German girl will be trained for her female calling.”³² Only in this way could females serve on par with

men: “German men have developed their accomplishments in the community through their blood ... The empire stands like a building of granite and iron ... The establishment of female duty in direct service of the fatherland ... would be the crowning construction of our empire.”³³ Compulsory service provided the clearest way to prepare women for the type of work the war demanded of them. While calls for compulsory service long preceded the war, the age of hostilities brought new energy to such proposals. Discussions of service absorbed the types of rhetoric that had surrounded the female surplus prior to the war. Calls for mandatory service shared a similar reading of history to that which had described the pathos of the superfluous woman: “The female sex, whose domestic activity was in part altered and in part devalued by the economic development, had to first struggle for broadened living conditions. Then she pressed into the factory, office and shop and found a place at the counter ... In what direction moves this development now?”³⁴ Gnauck-Kühne’s query suggested that factory, office, and shop had already succeeded in providing a haven for the displaced women whose fate she had so lamented prior to the war. The fact that wartime losses made prospects of marriage ever slimmer is not mentioned in the wartime work of Gnauck-Kühne, the great proponent of the prewar female surplus.

War is a creative force both despite and because of the upheaval it brings forth. In the light of August 1914, women’s lives and women’s movements faced new pressures and exigencies—as well as opportunities. Antebellum feminist advocates had looked upon middle-class single women as a group in need. The war provided the occasion for this cohort to be recast (both in rhetoric and action) as social stabilizers rather than as threats to the prevailing order, as essential rather than superfluous, as citizens rather than burdens. The raging conflict and its domestic disruption formed a crucible in which a social dilemma could become a source of civic strength.

Recognizing the intrinsic potential of an era of patriotic fervor and social upheaval, women’s rights advocates seized onto a vision of maternal female citizenship as the centerpiece of their calls to action. Anna Pappritz noted that the work of the BDF was most consequential “when it teaches its members to feel like responsible citizens of the state who have the duty to dedicate their ability to work not only in the narrow circle of family, but also to fatherland and *Volk*.”³⁵ Assertions of mutual interdependence informed the connection between women’s work and German citizenship. During war, leading activists of the German women’s movement argued that through service rather than through suffering, females would earn the right for the state to support their vocational, educational, and spiritual needs. The war made such service vital rather than voluntary; the hope was that the state then would respond in kind.

Lily Braun put the *quid pro quo* in direct terms: “The war has demonstrated that the state needs women; that women are themselves conscious of their duties regarding the state ... In the path of educating a woman to be a citizen, she would ... be in the position to earn the same certification as the man.”³⁶ Rights would follow once women proved their abilities to serve the state. Women would have

to earn recognition by demonstrating their capacity for citizenship, rather than by jockeying for rights on the basis of damage done to them by the reverberations of social and economic change—such an approach had been (so wartime activists believed) the mistake of the fragmented prewar women’s movement. The war provided the opportunity to demonstrate female civic potentiality and offered functionality to a segment of society that had been notable for its dysfunction. The prewar emphasis on marital status was exchanged for a wartime vision of national citizenship. It would take future German women much of the twentieth century to develop a feminism that moved beyond contextual categories of demography or national allegiance.

The Great War changed single women from a cohort that German society had to do something about to a category that Germany would not survive the war without. Women—married and unmarried, of means and indigent—were essential to the functioning of German society. War made this evident in ways that in peacetime begged explanation. In the antebellum *Kaiserreich*, the notion of a female surplus provided one such explanation: the changing economy had pushed surplus women outside of the home; thus, they had to be educated and given useful work. Yet war—in every way but demographically—erased the female surplus. Prior to 1914, a lack of female vocational training meant that single women would falter. In wartime, a lack of female vocational training meant that Germany would falter. Single women were no longer on the front lines and the central object of the German women’s movements; instead, Germany was on the front lines and all women, wed and unwed, were called to duty.

The ebbing of concern over the fate of the surplus woman at the onset of World War I makes clear how very much she was a product of the *Kaiserreich*. The old maid had been a dominant signifier of aberrance, but war created a culture far more concerned with the deviance of foreigners and pacifists, war-evaders and Communists. The surplus woman had functioned as a means to create awareness of the need for social change, but war necessitated changes so obvious that her symbolic utility disappeared even as her numbers grew. The changes wrought by war emerged both in the role of women in German society (most particularly through female patriotic mobilization and labor, and female suffrage after the war) and in the nature of German society itself. The icon of the surplus woman no longer was necessary to convey the tumult of a society in transition. Death and defeat had ably taken on that role.

Post-*Kaiserreich* Readings of the Surplus Woman

In Imperial Germany, concerns regarding the nature of modernity were articulated through expansive debates over industrial expansion, socialism, sexuality, women’s rights, and demographic change. As historian Kevin Repp has argued, during this period an activist core of social reformers had sought to come to terms with the future. They formed the hub of a reformist sphere that operated

largely outside of politics in pursuit of institutions that could adapt to changing times. The *Kaiserreich* provided a context in which the “peculiarities of the German political system,” with its impotent legislature and anti-democratic federal structure, “acted as ‘incubator’ for the Wilhelmine reform milieu ... These fragile, yet protective confines were crushed by the First World War.”³⁷

During the war and into Weimar Germany, social debates became more pointed and urgent. Assessment of the consequences of industrial expansion tempered into debate over postwar recovery and reparation repayment; the socialist threat was made vivid by the Russian Revolution; vague anxieties about sexuality and sexual activity gained specificity through the wartime proliferation of venereal disease; demographic upheavals in urbanization and population gave way to territorial redistribution and the mortality of war; and the broadly construed *Frauenfrage* (woman question) was transformed by the advent of female suffrage, the iconography of the New Woman, and the realities of redressing the wartime disruption of the private sphere. The *Frauenüberschuß* had been a prism that had refracted myriad anxieties about change. In a belligerent, ultimately vanquished state, such refraction gave way to more concrete exigencies.

The First World War created in fact what proponents of the female surplus had long fancied to be true: an unambiguous preponderance of women. The surfeit was most clear in cohorts of marriageable age. Demographer Rudolf Meerwarth compared sex ratios and marriage rates for the years 1910 and 1925 and found that a distinct surplus of women emerged in the years following the Great War (Appendix: Table 25).³⁸ The war had extensive impact on marriage rates as well. Among women, the number married decreased from 1910 to 1925, while nuptiality among men actually increased in the postwar era (Table 26).³⁹ Meerwarth explained this gender difference as emerging from the fact that “the marital desire of men, in any case the inclination of men to marry, becomes greater in the postwar period.”⁴⁰ This assessment of marriage statistics relied upon the rather ambiguous notion of male desire as the deciding factor in marriage creation. A similar line of scientific observation and gender-role stereotyping can be found in Meerwarth’s assumption that marriage was the primary goal of the female sex: “In order to arrive at marriage, women often will direct their attention towards companions of the same age or even younger.”⁴¹ Women sought to arrive at or to entice marriage; the wedded union was a female goal to attain. Yet the marriage rate was dependent upon male inclination or desire, making weddings a male choice. This statistical reading emulated the *Kaiserreich* view of surplus women desperately depending upon men to absorb their abundance.

An isolated but nonetheless extraordinary analysis of the female surplus during the interwar period came from General Walther Reinhardt, early architect of the Weimar-created *Reichswehr* (German Armed Forces). Reinhardt believed that a surplus of women might best be addressed militarily: “With the full use of military capable men, the use of women at the front is not necessitated by the force of numbers ... But it remains a possibility to withdraw men and insert women, not due to lack of numbers, but following a considered plan. From the

standpoint of effectiveness it will be right where women do better work, from the standpoint of maintaining the *Volk* it will be just as good, if a surplus of women can be prevented, or if such a surplus can be reduced.⁴² Perhaps it would have been just as good for the *Volk*—but not for those women sacrificed in order to reduce the surplus! While Reinhardt's proposition did not lead to the creation of a female regiment, it does suggest that (for at least some Germans) 'too many women' remained a problem to be solved.

Unwed women remained a problematic cohort in the Weimar era, even if no longer a core focus of the women's movement. Never-married women continued to be lampooned, though with less frequency and different nuances than in the satirical accounts of the *Kaiserreich*. In a description of postwar German womanhood, Erik Ernest Schwabach reified the *alte Jungfer's* (old maid's) status as a pariah:

[The unmarried woman is like] the piano out of tune [or] dried watercolors. She is an *alte Jungfer*, inferior, disdained, contaminated, embittered, incapable of every activity, because she has not learned any. She is free. But what should she do with this freedom? She acts like a fish in an aquarium, a glass pane is shoved between her and this or that that she might like to explore, and with every attempt she hits her head. After some time the fishmonger removes her because she poses a painful taboo ... In the same way, the *alte Jungfer* does not recognize that the pane between her and the dangerous world has fallen, no taboos exist between her and the world, and she could step outside without suffering harm. She remains voluntarily in an open prison, in order to decay there.⁴³

Schwabach's depiction continues the Wilhelmine practice of immersing old maids in the animal kingdom. While earlier accounts bound unmarried women to their pets, Schwabach made her a metaphorical fish out of water. Yet Schwabach's take on the *alte Jungfer* differed from those of her imperial antagonists. Schwabach encouraged her to embrace the world outside and wanted to let the unmarried woman know that that world could be a welcoming place. This Weimar old maid suffered from a more individualized malady than the *alte Jungfer* of a quarter-century earlier. Schwabach hinted at the transformative potential of Weimar political and social reconstruction by suggesting that the new age might well be ready to release the single woman from her self-imposed prison.

Interwar literature on sexuality also reflected upon the unmarried woman as abnormal. As discussed in chapter 2, single women became the subject of a new kind of scrutiny as the field of sexology emerged during the *Kaiserreich*. The notion of a female sex drive slowly gained currency as Freudian thought proliferated in the postwar era. In her examination of interwar French cultural history, Mary Louise Roberts has described how sexology merged with medicine in the conviction that abstinence "could lead to nervous illnesses and disorders of all kinds, including hysteria, nymphomania, and breast and uterine cancer."⁴⁴ The dissemination of new knowledge in the sexual area continued a vision of the abstinent old maid as aberrant.

In his extraordinarily titled 1931 work, *Maidenhood: Virginity and Defloration as a Cultural Problem*, physician J.R. Spinner provided a semi-scientific account of *Altjungfernschaft*:

Virgin—forever a virgin—*alte Jungfer* ... This epithet gives virginity its particular urgency. One might generally defend virginity as one will, but it nevertheless remains the case that the *alte Jungfer* is a caricature in our culture. Still more, she is a socio-pathological figure, physically and mentally. She is the highest grade of the unfulfilled female ... The female body is so completely oriented to sexual activity that it externally documents the characteristics of repression in far greater degree than that of the male. When does the virgin begin to become an *alte Jungfrau*?⁴⁵

Spinner answered the question by placing the onset of old maidenhood as early as the age of 21. By a woman's late twenties, "the tragedy of *Jungfräulichkeit*" surfaced in earnest as those "who still were not married already were considered to be somewhat suspect—because they were unpopular, because they were not in a position to become visible, because they matured into wallflowers. At thirty the *alte Jungfer* had already begun."⁴⁶ Interwar sexual science legitimated what nineteenth-century taunts had implied all along: unmarried women were abnormal. Yet despite the occasional literary and sexological accounts of the German old maid, the postwar iconography of the surplus woman did not serve as a source of social activism.

Germany's defeat in the Great War had changed the rhetoric of the women's movement. At the same time, the surplus woman receded behind two very different female models: the New Woman and the Maternal Citizen. The New Woman reacted against both the surplus woman of the *Kaiserreich* and the patriotic worker of the Great War. Historian Atina Grossman has described the New Woman as representing "both a blurring of traditional gender roles and a polarization of gender experience during the war: men in the trenches and women on the home front." The New Woman encapsulated sexual subversives like "the intellectual with a Marlene Dietrich-style suit and short mannish haircut" as well as "the young white-collar worker in a flapper outfit." Marital status configured this modern female far less than it had the surplus woman. In Grossman's typology, the New Woman might also be "the young married factory worker who cooked only one warm meal a day, cut her hair short into a practical *Bubikopf*, and tried with all available means to keep her family small."⁴⁷ The overdrawn lines of the New Woman stereotype helped to fuel reactionary politics in favor of eradicating the trailblazing icon and replacing her with the patriotic *Hausfrau* and her hardworking, pure daughter.

The Maternal Citizen served as a continuation rather than a repudiation of female patriotism. While the New Woman certainly reflected the experience of some German women of the Weimar era, she was more a cultural construction than lived reality.⁴⁸ Historian Susanne Rouette found in a study of early Weimar labor and social policy that the gender politics of the postwar emphasized

“talents considered ‘natural’ to women: as wives, homemakers, and particularly as mothers ... Such desires and demands could serve as justification for a conservative reconstruction of gender relations.”⁴⁹ The linkage of motherhood and citizen’s rights was built upon the tenets of prewar maternalism. Rouette argues that the “gender stereotypes [of early Weimar] returned to a program of femininity within which, in the course of the nineteenth century, ‘motherliness’ had been granted a central status.”⁵⁰ A simple yet crucial change from the prewar women’s movement’s view of motherliness had taken place during the war: single women had been rhetorically removed from the central stage of maternalist engagement. This does not mean that the women’s movement abandoned all concern for the unwed. But while prewar maternalism sought to point out the feminine power of those who were not mothers (while also eliciting sympathy for them), wartime and Weimar maternalism emphasized motherhood itself as the most outstanding characteristic of the new female citizen. This reading of female civic belonging resulted in the bourgeois women’s movement calling in November 1918 “for women’s participation as ‘mothers and citizens’ in ‘building Germany’s future.’”⁵¹ The Maternal Citizen embodied a vision of womanhood that was *völkisch* and timeless. In contrast, the surplus woman of the *Kaiserreich* had been a phenomenon rooted in her era, a victim of circumstances specific to her time and place.

Scholarship on the Weimar women’s movement is marked by descriptions of its disappointments and paralysis, its generational conflict and lost sense of purpose.⁵² The irresolute nature of Weimar feminism was in part a consequence of the dialectical opposition of Weimar’s New Woman and Maternal Citizen. Ute Frevert has observed that “the [women’s] movement had no answer to the question of how the ‘new woman’ could resolve the conflict between modern occupational demands and traditional family ties ... Instead, it offered women another role: that of dutiful, selfless, conciliatory members of an idealized *Volksgemeinschaft* [community of the German *Volk*].”⁵³ The wartime shift away from the surplus woman and toward maternalist-nationalist rhetoric helped to create the divisive gender politics of the Weimar era. By predicating female advancement upon women’s inclination and ability to serve the nation in a time of conflict, wartime women’s rights advocates abandoned their earlier emphasis on the plight faced by the unwed. This shift advanced a feminism that appeared to be more unified, useful, universal, and patriotic. Such an approach to women’s rights left a very real void, however, when the postwar women’s movement attempted to carve a new identity in an era that ultimately brought them “to echo the ideas of the Right.”⁵⁴

In her account of single women in Nazi and divided Germany, Elisabeth Heine-man describes single marital status as a potent category of aberrance in fascist Germany. She notes that in the Nazi era, “when women were denied permission to marry because of supposed eugenic flaws or asocial behavior, it might be accurate to say that perceptions of their shortcomings ‘caused’ their single status. Yet the reverse was also true: single status made it more likely that women would attract official disapproval in the first place.”⁵⁵ Single women—especially never-married women past the prime age of first marriage—formed a suspicious cohort to the

pro-nation, pro-natalist Nazis. Heineman concludes that in both postwar East and West Germany, “marital status continued to determine the contours of women’s lives,” despite the fact that in the first census after World War II, 126 women existed for every 100 men.⁵⁶ Among adults of marriageable age, the statistics are more resounding with estimates of 2,242 available women for every 1,000 men.⁵⁷ Even after World War II, the continuing centrality of marital status in the German conception of womanhood is supported by the enduring presence of hackneyed visions of the *alte Jungfer*.⁵⁸ After the Second World War, the concept of the female surplus continued to single out a problematic component of the population. An article in *Constanze*, a post-World War II women’s magazine, decried the prevailing understanding of the *Frauenüberschuß*—“What an ugly word! And what an even uglier meaning! A word that is taken from the language of trade and signifies nothing more or less than a product, and at that a product of which there is an excess, which is superfluous.”⁵⁹ Mid-twentieth century readings of single women indicate that the optimistic visions of *Kaiserreich* reformers had not been realized. The iconic *alte Jungfer* did not go away and, even by the middle of the century, the surplus woman could not completely transcend descriptions of her abnormality. In part because post-World War I female activists left behind their advocacy of relief and advancement for single women, conceptions of the aberrant unwed remained throughout the twentieth century. The surplus woman’s political utility disappeared even as she remained a convenient prop in the panorama of German culture.

The rhetoric and reformist efforts of *Kaiserreich* maternalists like Helene Lange, Alice Salomon, and Elisabeth Gnauck-Kühne contributed enormously to the abiding importance of marital status in defining the ‘contours of women’s lives.’ In their focus upon the *Frauenüberschuß*, maternalist female reformers in Imperial Germany had succeeded in opening professional and public spheres to unwed women, but also had continued to hallow marriage as the life form that women most longed to choose, if they only could. Moderates also helped to maintain the iconography of the single woman as irregular and problematic. By championing maternal capacity as the surplus woman’s route to salvation, moderate and religious activists advanced a German cult of motherhood—even as they sought to reconfigure the maternal presence outside of the traditional family.

In her study of *Mothers in the Fatherland*, Claudia Koonz asserts that emphasis on female difference as well as the celebration of the maternal capacity, so prominent in the *Kaiserreich*, also found great resonance in Nazi ideology: “Motherly love in its separate sphere, far from immunizing women against evil, fired women’s dedication to the *Führer’s* vision of an ‘Aryan’ future and expanded opportunities for women to reign in their own *Lebensraum*.”⁶⁰ By no means did the maternalist vein of the German women’s movement necessitate the extremes of Nazi family policy. But maternalism did provide an ideological foundation to the delineation of separate spheres by arguing for women’s rights based on difference. This worldview made female resistance to Nazi cultural politics much less likely to occur. In the particular political, economic, and social circumstances of

interwar Germany, this was dangerous stuff: “The habit of taking psychological differences between men and women for granted reinforced assumptions about irrevocable divisions between Jew and ‘Aryan’. In place of class, cultural, religious divisions, race and sex became the dominant social markers.”⁶¹

Yet the historian needs to be wary of a teleological vision that attempts to connect the dots on the path to Hitler. The religious, moderate, and radical voices that speak in this book also articulated a vital critique of the modern era, a critique that fueled farsighted programs of female organization, educational reform, professional development, and ideological innovation. The use of marital status as a foundation for reform did indeed open the door for the reconfiguration of bourgeois, radical, and religious feminism in the service of politics that deemed patriarchal family structure as the norm. But introduction of the surplus female as a political figure worthy of rights also lent credence to dramatic calls for social and cultural change; radical figures such as Ruth Bré and Lily Braun saw the eradication of marriage as a potential next step in the solving the crisis of the surplus woman, while for August Bebel and Clara Zetkin, the supposed existence of the excess female provided further evidence of the rot at the core of bourgeois society.

As Ann Taylor Allen has observed in her history of German maternalism, the *Kaiserreich* “idea of women’s social role ... was, in fact, both backward- and forward-looking, seeking to preserve positive aspects of women’s traditional work as well as to open up new possibilities.”⁶² Proponents of the female surplus looked to the past to explain the present. It was a past they lamented and a present that alarmed them. They thus developed a vision for the future guided by a hope that “unwanted” women could be welcomed into a more encompassing, nurturing, universal family. This rather radical conception of the future neither anticipated nor shared the ideals of the fascist familial order that would later triumph in Germany.

The Surplus Woman: Icon of Anxiety and Hope

In his epic *Buddenbrooks*, Thomas Mann employed a cohort of old maids as the ultimate misfits of Imperial German bourgeois culture.⁶³ He offered no way out for either the Buddenbrooks or the old maids, concluding the novel with the chorus of single women musing upon “the past and the future—though of the future there was in truth almost nothing to be said.”⁶⁴ Unlike Mann, the leaders of the German women’s movement believed that there could be a future for such un-modern women—and they sought to provide it. The writings of female social reformers of the *Kaiserreich* demonstrate how very much they understood the stigmatization facing unmarried women like Mann’s old maid, Clothilde. The activists employed similar derogatory characterizations to justify the imperatives of the social movement that they pursued. While some of them may have identified with Mann’s stereotypes personally, all acknowledged the archaic sphere of *Altjungferntum* as confronting a particularly painful fate in the face of moder-

nity. These depictions of single women were suffused with class-consciousness, as moderates and religious activists described the pain of the middle-class plight, while radicals and socialists suggested that the staying power of the German old maid demonstrated the moral bankruptcy of the bourgeoisie.

The surplus woman is in part the pathetic creature portrayed in *Buddenbrooks*. Mann presented her static nature as fictive commentary on the fruitlessness of the ambition hub-bubbling about her, while many other depictions of the era conveyed the surplus woman as made increasingly pathetic by industry and embourgeoisement. The *Frauenüberschuß* was adapted to causes as disparate as Gnauck-Kühne's version of Catholicism, the moderate maternalism of Lange and Salomon, and the subversive visions of socialism, marriage reform, and the *Neue Ethik*. Though predicated upon a perceived population crisis, the female surfeit was a product of imagined demography. Yet the significance of this cultural construct surpassed its supposed quantifiable origins both as an expression of the distress resulting from industrial and capitalist advancement and as a mandate for change to enhance the quality of women's lives. Herein rests the importance and strength of this cultural icon: her pathetic origins offered the opportunity for transformative power.

The champions of the surplus woman created an icon that signified anxieties about changing gender roles in the modern era and formed a provocative pillar of broadly based social reform. As a conceptual notion, the female surplus proved to be enormously malleable and thus quite useful to disparate voices in search of social change. Imperial advocates of women's rights presented single women as a special, newly configured cohort: not simply unmarried women, they were the *Frauenüberschuß*. This conceptual shift hinted at a reconfiguration of gender roles in the *Kaiserreich*; while Thomas Mann affixed his unwed female characters as passive entities in pre-modern guise, female activists, social scientists, and sexologists identified surplus women as active combatants ever seeking to find their place in the modern world. That search did not achieve unequivocal success in the form of legal or political advancement, but in ennobled failure the surplus woman gained ever greater symbolic potency.

This book has sought to shed light on the *Frauenüberschuß* as an important point of reference in the social debates of Imperial Germany. As both the target and justification for reform, the surplus woman had great civic potentiality. Many of the most prominent female activists in Imperial Germany were unwed women. As advocates of change, they sought to extend agency to other unmarried women and create new opportunities for themselves in the process. The concept of the female surplus as a basis for reform covered a whole rubric of contemporary issues by offering a critique of industrial society, providing an explanation for the predominance of bourgeois interests in reformist activities, explaining the gendered consequences of demographic fluctuation, and reflecting the maternalist sensibilities so predominant in the German women's movement.

The surplus woman emerged out of critical observations of industrial society. Reformers configured the bourgeois single woman as one who stood alone not

by choice, but because the economic conditions of unified Germany had left her no option. The machine had revolutionized the home and forced the spinster outside. Moderate feminists, radicals, socialists, and religious reformers all shared in a formulation of the female surplus that emerged out of the particular consequences of the industrial mode of production. These activists argued that the society that had created the *Frauenüberschuß* needed to be fundamentally reformed.

Socialists and the critics of marriage and morality read the female surplus as a critical symptom of a debauched society. Clara Zetkin and August Bebel offered a Marxist interpretation, placing the *Frauenüberschuß* squarely in the bourgeois milieu and asserting that only through proletariat revolution would the female surplus cease to matter. Ruth Bré and Lily Braun utilized the plight of the female unwed as a prominent component of their critiques of marriage. Helene Stöcker went further, using the surplus woman as a prime exemplar of the stultifying consequences of the prevailing moral code; should the *Neue Ethik* gain foothold in German culture, the *alte Jungfer* would disappear into an environment of love, openness, and freedom.

Moderate and Catholic advocates constructed their vision of reform along class lines, justifying middle-class interest on the basis of the upheaval of the bourgeois home wrought by the advance of capitalist professions and commodities. Lange, Salomon, and Gnauck-Kühne observed that it was socially acceptable and often fiscally imperative for working-class unmarried women to work—thus removing unskilled female laborers from the ranks of the *Frauenüberschuß*. These reformers hoped to advance a culture that would provide unmarried bourgeois women with the options and skills to work. In their justification of middle-class professional opportunities on the basis of economic necessity, moderate feminists dodged a rhetorical bullet. Theirs was not an emancipatory feminism, but rather an advocacy based on circumstance—all the easier for would-be opponents to consider without fear. This advocacy was immersed in maternalist ideology. Who better to serve as the spiritual nurturers of the industrial world than those women who, through no fault of their own, would never have the opportunity to physically nurture their own children? Professions such as teaching, social work, nursing, and midwifery, along with voluntary activities, provided a means by which the great social malaise of the capitalist epoch might be infused with the healing capacity of spiritual motherhood. Surplus women would be the first to answer this call.

Was the surplus woman simply an unfortunate victim of the times? Indeed, she could not have chosen her single status willfully if the *Frauenüberschuß* was to serve as an inspiration for reform. If the surplus woman had been a voluntary visionary (like Weimar's "New Woman"), then she would have played a very different symbolic role as an explicitly political individual pursuing and embracing change. But the female surplus of Imperial Germany was comprised of women who suffered because of the uncertain times in which they lived. The moderate Helene Lange spoke to a much broader audience than did her contemporaries who articulated a vision of equality-based feminism. The undesired, unchosen,

untethered status of the surplus woman licensed the tone and extent of reform efforts.

The iconic surplus woman depended upon imagined demography for her victim status. As has been demonstrated, the numbers do not provide any clear evidence of a female surplus, let alone one that was worsening in the imperial era. But the course of social change does not depend upon verifiable facts; it hinges much more upon what contemporaries believe to be true. The power of the *Frauenüberschuß* lay not in its demographic actuality, but in its perceived verity and the anxiety such a perception caused. Evidence suggests that Imperial Germans very much believed that a female surplus existed. In many ways, it was a welcome conundrum for female activists in that it offered both an explanation for female trauma and the opportunity to advance agendas of change. For unmarried women, the notion of an economic and demographic engine propelling them into the unknown must have been more comforting than facing that unknown without considering why. And it would have been worse yet for unwed bourgeois women to face undefined futures while blaming themselves for failing to marry. Moreover, the concept of the *Frauenüberschuß* provided single women with a way to familiarize the unfamiliar by bringing their untapped maternal skills into a world in need of nurturance.

The notion of women made surplus encompassed social categories much broader than marital status. Excess women had been abandoned not only by men, but also by the promise of maternity, the security of home, and the sanctuary of the family. Imperial Germans frequently portrayed the female unwed as living in a condition of *Not*—implying a predicament or plight, or more dire circumstances of distress, misery, even peril. The *Frauenüberschuß* described a category of women in a state of emergency. This depiction rent asunder bourgeois gender norms of male provider and female nurturer. Out of this rupture, the cultural icon of the surplus woman emerged. Moderates, radicals, socialists, and religious figures interpreted and reconfigured her in the pursuit of social reform. As distinct interest groups debated the origins and fate of the female surfeit, they mutually informed one another about the hopes and anxieties of those who had gone before them and beside them. The female surplus thus provides a lens by which historians can consider the connections between groups usually regarded as distinct.

Made problematic by the discourse surrounding marriage, motherhood, sex, and demography, the surplus woman of Imperial Germany was a vessel through which apprehension about modernity could be expressed. The demographic evidence that supports the notion of a female surfeit is scarce, but that fact does not trivialize the cultural resonance of the surplus woman. Amidst the reformist ethos pervading the *Kaiserreich*, a statistically unsubstantiated concept became an important current in the social debates of the day. Women who had been conditioned to expect marriage deeply feared that it *might* not happen to them. Marriage, the home, motherhood, and family seemed to have been assaulted by the modern age. Generalized anxieties about one's future in the modern world

might have been hard to articulate or pinpoint, but particularized concerns about the fate of young bourgeois women served as a way of expressing fears far greater. The surplus woman stood as a reformist beacon both pragmatic and rhetorical in the culture of Imperial Germany.

Notes

1. For an extended discussion of the rhetorical shift of the wartime women's movement, see Catherine Dollard, "Marital Status and the Rhetoric of the Women's Movement in World War I Germany," in *Women in German Yearbook 22*, eds. Helga Kraft and Maggie McCarthy (Lincoln, NE, 2006), 211–235.
2. Luise Zietz, *Zur Frage der Frauenerwerbsarbeit* (Berlin, 1916), 12.
3. Ute Daniel, *The War from Within: German Working-Class Women in the First World War* (New York, 1997), 133.
4. *Ibid.*
5. Ute Frevert, *Women in German History*, trans. Stuart McKinnon-Evans (New York, 1989), 162; on the hopes for political gain, especially suffrage, see also Sabine Hering, *Die Kriegsgewinnlerinnen: Praxis und Ideologie der deutschen Frauenbewegung im Ersten Weltkrieg* (Paffensweiler, 1990), 122–137, and Elizabeth Harvey "The Failure of Feminism? Young Women and the Bourgeois Feminist Movement in Weimar Germany, 1918–1933," *Central European History* 28 (1995): 6.
6. Hering, *Kriegsgewinnlerinnen*, 130–133.
7. Jean Quataert, *Staging Philanthropy: Patriotic Women and the National Imagination in Dynastic Germany, 1813–1916* (Ann Arbor, MI, 2001), 272.
8. *Ibid.*, 274; on 1916 as the central turning point in the German civilian view of the war, see also Roger Chickering, *Imperial Germany and the Great War, 1914–1918* (New York, 1998), 65, 76–82.
9. *Das Volk* connotes a patriotic view of the German people rooted in a mythic past and immersed in the German countryside, language, and folk culture.
10. On *Burgfrieden*, see Peter Fritzsche, *Germans into Nazis* (Cambridge, MA, 1998), 51–66, and Jeffrey Verhey, *The Spirit of 1914: Militarism, Myth, and Mobilization in Germany* (New York, 2000), 139–146, 160–181.
11. Josephine Levy-Rathenau, "Die Lehren des Krieges für die Frauenberufsbildung," in *Kriegsjahrbuch des Bundes Deutscher Frauenvereine* [BDF], ed. Elisabeth Altmann-Gottheiner (Berlin, 1915), 60.
12. Elisabeth Gnauck-Kühne, *Dienstpflicht und Dienstjahr des weiblichen Geschlechts* (Tübingen, 1915), 24.
13. Marie Baum, "Volkskraft zur Kriegszeit," in *Kriegsjahrbuch des BDF*, 35.
14. Lily Braun, *Die Frauen und der Krieg* (Leipzig, 1915), 11.
15. Gertrud Bäumer, "Die Frauen und der Krieg," in *Kriegsjahrbuch des BDF*, 8.
16. Anna Pappritz, "Nationaler Frauendienst," in *Kriegsjahrbuch des BDF*, 33.
17. On the impact of World War I domestic privation, see Daniel, *War from Within*, 189–207, and Belinda Davis, *Home Fires Burning: Food, Politics, and Everyday Life in World War I Berlin* (Chapel Hill, NC, 2000), 24–92.
18. Bäumer, "Frauen," 3.
19. Gertrud Bäumer, "Frauenbewegung und Nationalbewußtsein," *Die Frau* 20: (1912/13): 387;

- quoted in Angelika Schaser, "Women in a Nation of Men: The Politics of the League of German Women's Associations (BDF) in Imperial Germany, 1894–1914," trans. by Pamela Selwyn, in *Gendered Nations: Nationalisms and Gender Order in the Long Nineteenth Century*, eds. Ida Blom, Karen Hagemann, and Catherine Hall (New York, 2000), 260.
20. Schaser, "Women," 260.
 21. Helene Lange, "Der Krieg und der deutschen Kultur," in *Kriegsjahrbuch des BDF* 7.
 22. *Ibid.*, 17.
 23. *Ibid.*
 24. Nancy Reagin, *A German Women's Movement: Class and Gender in Hanover, 1880–1933* (Chapel Hill, NC, 1995), 187.
 25. Margaret R. and Patrice L.-R. Higonnet, "The Double Helix," in *Behind the Lines: Gender and the Two World Wars* (New Haven, CT, 1987), 33.
 26. Braun, *Frauen*, 46.
 27. Alice Salomon, "Probleme der Sozialen Kriegsfürsorge," in *Kriegsjahrbuch des BDF* 52.
 28. Braun, *Frauen*, 51.
 29. *Ibid.*, 12.
 30. *Ibid.*, 45.
 31. *Ibid.*, 53.
 32. Gnauck-Kühne, *Dienstpflicht*, 24.
 33. *Ibid.*, 19–20.
 34. *Ibid.*, 7–8.
 35. Pappritz, "Nationaler," 33.
 36. Braun, *Frauen*, 46–48.
 37. Kevin Repp, *Reformers, Critics, and the Paths of German Modernity: Anti-Politics and the Search for Alternatives, 1890–1914* (Cambridge, MA, 2000), 315.
 38. Rudolf Meerwarth, Adolf Günther, and Waldemar Zimmerman, *Die Einwirkung des Krieges auf Bevölkerungsbewegung, Einkommen und Lebenshaltung in Deutschland*, Wirtschafts- und Sozialgeschichte des Weltkrieges, ed. Carl Melchior, no. 11 (Stuttgart, 1932), 91–92; on Meerwarth's career and impact on official statistics in Imperial and Weimar Germany, see J. Adam Tooze, *Statistics and the German State, 1900–1945* (New York, 2001), 50–51, 54–56, 97–102. Tables appear in the appendix preceding the bibliography.
 39. Meerwarth, *Einwirkung*, 91–92.
 40. *Ibid.*, 92.
 41. *Ibid.*, 39.
 42. Walther Reinhardt, *Wehrkraft und Wehrwille*, ed. Ernst Reinhardt (Berlin, 1933), 63, cited in William Mulligan, *The Creation of the Modern German Army* (New York, 2005), 205.
 43. Erik Ernst Schwabach, *Die Revolutionierung der Frau* (Leipzig, 1928), 80; Schwabach (1891–1938) was a poet, translator, and biographer of Paul Gauguin.
 44. Mary Louise Roberts, *Civilization without Sexes: Reconstructing Gender in Postwar France, 1917–1927* (Chicago, 1994), 169.
 45. J.R. Spinner, *Die Jungfernschaft. Virginität und Defloration als Kulturprobleme* (Leipzig, 1931), 285; Spinner was a colleague of Magnus Hirschfeld.
 46. *Ibid.*, 287.
 47. Atina Grossman, "The New Woman and the Rationalization of Sexuality in Weimar Germany," in *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality*, eds. Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell, and Sharon Thompson (New York, 1983), 156.
 48. On the New Woman as cultural icon, see Marsha Meskimmon, *We Weren't Modern Enough: Women Artists and the Limits of German Modernism* (Berkeley, CA, 1999), and Katharina von Ankum, ed., *Women in the Metropolis: Gender and Modernity in Weimar Culture* (Berkeley, CA, 1997).
 49. Susanne Rouette, "Mothers and Citizens: Gender and Social Policy in Germany after the First World War," *Central European History* 30 (1997): 51; Rouette argues that this "conservative

- reconstruction of gender relations” is identifiable in early Weimar labor and social legislation which aimed toward a “restoration of the gender-hierarchical division of labor” (1997, 59).
50. *Ibid.*, 63.
 51. *Ibid.*, Rouette cites here the Petition of the Federation of German Women’s Associations to the Reichstag, 4 November 1918, quoted in Else Wex, *Staatsbürgerliche Arbeit deutscher Frauen 1865 bis 1928* (Berlin, 1929).
 52. On disappointment, see Reagin’s chapter “A Movement Adrift,” in *Movement*, 203–219; Schaser, “Women,” (2000, 262), notes the minimization of “female national tasks” in early Weimar. On paralysis, see Harvey, “Failure,” which describes an “immobile” (1995, 2) Weimar’s women’s movement facing “senility” (1995, 8); Frevert, *Women*, characterizes the Weimar movement as both “harmless and predictable” (1989, 171) and “confused and contradictory” (1989, 203); Ute Gerhard, in *Unerhört. Die Geschichte der deutsche Frauenbewegung* (Reinbek bei Hamburg, 1992), describes the leadership as “timid and evasive” (377). On generational conflict, see Frevert, *Women*, 198, 201; Gerhard, *Unerhört*, 370–372, and Harvey’s article which describes the older bourgeois movement, which, “in seeking to bridge the generation gap ... felt it necessary to change their language and reshape the presentation of their ideas ... to meet the perceived shift of young middle-class educated women to the right” (1995, 24). On lost purpose see Reagin, *Movement*, 203–208, and Rouette, “Mothers,” 66.
 53. Frevert, *Women*, 203.
 54. *Ibid.*, 6; On the rightward shift of the Weimar women’s movement, see the discussion of a “backward-looking utopia” in Rouette, “Mothers” (1997, 64); Harvey, “Failure,” 24–28, on the increasing compromises of the women’s movement in late Weimar; and Reagin’s chapter in *Movement*, “Growth on the Right,” 221–247.
 55. Elizabeth D. Heineman, *What Difference Does a Husband Make? Women and Marital Status in Nazi and Postwar Germany* (Berkeley, CA, 1999), 26.
 56. *Ibid.*, 236.
 57. Robert G. Moeller, *Protecting Motherhood: Women and the Family in the Politics of Postwar West Germany* (Berkeley, 1993), 27.
 58. See for example: Charlot Strasser, foreword to *Der Donor*, by Gertrud Isolani (Biel, 1949), 21. Strasser evokes familiar bestial imagery:

Are there not multiple, eccentric characters ... which give themselves to surrogates of cats and dogs, on which they bestow enormous amounts of love as recompense, women who live without relationships, for themselves, selfishly, ... sometimes already *altjüngferlich*, women for whom ... diagnoses would apply, either in the form of hysteria or neurosis, or in the form of a schizoid?
 59. Helga Prollius, “Ein Königreich für einen Mann?,” in Annette Kuhn and Doris Schubert, eds., *Frauen in der Nachkriegszeit und im Wirtschaftswunder, 1945–1960* (Frankfurt a.M., 1980), 53; cited in Moeller, *Protecting Motherhood*, 28.
 60. Claudia Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland: Women, the Family, and Nazi Politics* (New York, 1987), 14.
 61. *Ibid.*, 6.
 62. Ann Taylor Allen, *Feminism and Motherhood in Germany, 1800–1914* (New Brunswick, NJ, 1991), 230.
 63. See chapter 1.
 64. Thomas Mann, *Buddenbrooks* [1901], trans. H.T. Lowe-Porter (New York, 1984), 602–603.

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¹ Most of the data utilized in the tables are derived from the *Statistisches Jahrbuch für das Deutsche Reich* [SJDR] (Berlin, 1876; 1880–1914). Unless otherwise noted, statistics have been gleaned from successive volumes; individual editions are cited only when an entire table or chart is derived from one volume. Statistics for a given year appeared in the volume published two years later (e.g., figures from 1904 appeared in the volume published in 1906). The supporting material for the figures is

Table 1. Population of Germany and Selected Areas

	1871	1875	1880	1885	1890	1895	1900	1905	1910
Berlin	822,487	966,858	1,120,942	1,315,287	1,578,794	1,677,304	1,888,848	2,040,148	2,071,257
Hohenzollern	65,558	66,466	67,526	66,720	66,085	65,752	66,780	68,282	71,011
Westphalia	1,775,175	1,905,697	2,039,311	2,204,580	2,428,661	2,701,420	3,187,777	3,618,090	4,125,096
GERMANY	41,054,782	42,727,360	45,095,000	46,855,704	49,428,470	52,279,901	56,367,178	60,641,278	64,925,993

Source: SJDR.

Table 2. Religious Distribution of Germany and Selected Areas

	% Protestant	% Catholic	% Jewish
BERLIN			
1871	89.1%	6.2%	4.4%
1890	85.7%	8.6%	5.0%
1910	81.6%	11.7%	4.3%
HOHENZOLLERN			
1871	2.7%	96.2%	1.1%
1890	3.8%	95.2%	1.0%
1910	5.0%	94.4%	0.6%
WESTPHALIA			
1871	45.4%	53.5%	1.0%
1890	47.5%	51.5%	0.8%
1910	47.2%	51.4%	0.5%
GERMANY			
1871	62.3%	36.2%	1.2%
1890	62.8%	35.8%	1.1%
1910	61.6%	36.7%	1.0%

Source: SJDR.

Table 3. Number of Marriages per 1000 Population by Decade

	1841/50	1851/60	1861/70	1871/80	1881/90	1891/1900	1901/12
Berlin	9.3	9.7	11.3	11.9	10.7	10.7	10.6
Hohenzollern	7.0	5.8	7.2	7.9	5.8	6.5	7.1
Westphalia	8.1	8.1	8.9	7.9	8.4	8.4	8.2
Germany	8.1	7.8	8.5	8.6	7.8	8.2	8.0

Source: SJDR.

Table 4. % Female of Total Population

	1871	1875	1880	1885	1890	1895	1900	1905	1910
Berlin	49.59%	49.77%	51.62%	51.96%	51.89%	52.47%	52.19%	51.73%	52.00%
Hohenzollern	51.69%	52.12%	52.00%	52.29%	52.39%	52.42%	52.16%	52.14%	51.48%
Westphalia	49.17%	48.96%	49.22%	49.10%	48.92%	48.89%	48.37%	48.64%	48.72%
Germany	50.92%	50.88%	50.90%	51.05%	50.98%	50.92%	50.79%	50.72%	50.65%

Source: SJDR.

Table 5. Family Status at Marriage

MALE	FEMALE				% Single Women – Single Men
1901	Single	Widowed	Divorced	Total	
Single	86.5%	2.9%	0.5%	89.9%	3.8%
Widowed	6.7%	2.4%	0.2%	9.3%	
Divorced	0.5%	0.2%	0.1%	0.8%	
TOTAL	93.7%	5.5%	0.9%	100.0%	
1902					
Single	86.5%	2.8%	0.5%	89.9%	3.8%
Widowed	6.7%	2.4%	0.2%	9.3%	
Divorced	0.5%	0.2%	0.1%	0.8%	
TOTAL	93.7%	5.4%	0.9%	100.0%	
1903					
Single	86.6%	2.8%	0.6%	89.9%	3.8%
Widowed	6.6%	2.4%	0.3%	9.2%	
Divorced	0.6%	0.2%	0.1%	0.9%	
TOTAL	93.7%	5.3%	0.9%	100.0%	
1904					
Single	86.5%	2.8%	0.6%	89.9%	3.8%
Widowed	6.6%	2.3%	0.3%	9.2%	
Divorced	0.6%	0.2%	0.1%	0.9%	
TOTAL	93.7%	5.3%	1.0%	100.0%	
1905					
Single	86.4%	2.7%	0.6%	89.7%	4.0%
Widowed	6.6%	2.4%	0.3%	9.3%	
Divorced	0.7%	0.2%	0.1%	1.0%	
TOTAL	93.7%	5.3%	1.0%	100.0%	
1906					
Single	86.6%	2.7%	0.7%	90.0%	3.7%
Widowed	6.3%	2.4%	0.3%	9.0%	
Divorced	0.7%	0.2%	0.1%	1.1%	
TOTAL	93.7%	5.2%	1.1%	100.0%	
1907					
Single	86.7%	2.6%	0.7%	90.0%	3.7%
Widowed	6.2%	2.3%	0.3%	8.8%	
Divorced	0.8%	0.2%	0.1%	1.2%	
TOTAL	93.7%	5.2%	1.2%	100.0%	
1908					
Single	86.6%	2.6%	0.7%	90.0%	3.6%
Widowed	6.2%	2.4%	0.3%	8.9%	
Divorced	0.8%	0.2%	0.2%	1.2%	
TOTAL	93.6%	5.2%	1.2%	100.0%	

MALE	FEMALE				% Single Women – Single Men
1909	Single	Widowed	Divorced	Total	
Single	86.5%	2.6%	0.8%	89.9%	3.6%
Widowed	6.1%	2.4%	0.3%	8.9%	
Divorced	0.9%	0.2%	0.2%	1.3%	
TOTAL	93.5%	5.3%	1.3%	100.0%	
1910					
Single	86.5%	2.5%	0.8%	89.8%	3.7%
Widowed	6.1%	2.4%	0.3%	8.9%	
Divorced	0.9%	0.3%	0.2%	1.3%	
TOTAL	93.5%	5.2%	1.3%	100.0%	
1911					
Single	86.7%	2.4%	0.8%	90.0%	3.6%
Widowed	5.9%	2.3%	0.4%	8.6%	
Divorced	0.9%	0.3%	0.2%	1.4%	
TOTAL	93.6%	5.0%	1.4%	100.0%	
1912					
Single	86.8%	2.4%	0.9%	90.0%	3.5%
Widowed	5.8%	2.3%	0.4%	8.6%	
Divorced	1.0%	0.3%	0.2%	1.4%	
TOTAL	93.5%	5.0%	1.5%	100.0%	

Source: SJDR.

Table 6. Germany: Average Age at First Marriage

	Male	Female	Age Difference (Male Avg – Female Avg)
1871	28.8	26.3	2.5
1875	28.3	25.7	2.6
1880	28.1	25.5	2.6
1885	28.3	25.6	2.7
1890	28.1	25.6	2.5
1900	27.8	25.5	2.3
1910	27.9	25.3	2.6
Average	28.2	25.6	2.6

Source: Knodel, 43.

Table 7. Female Surplus: Women 20–25 versus Men 25–30

	1875			1880			1885		
	Men 25–30	Women 20–25	% Female Surplus	Men 25–30	Women 20–25	% Female Surplus	Men 25–30	Women 20–25	% Female Surplus
Berlin	60,854	62,249	2.2%	61,100	67,144	9.0%	67,290	75,731	11.1%
Hohenzollern	2,367	2,501	5.4%	2,129	2,584	17.6%	1,986	2,382	16.6%
Westphalia	78,090	80,024	2.4%	79,533	85,854	7.4%	88,393	90,461	2.3%
GERMANY	1,579,637	1,820,446	13.2%	1,620,272	1,972,554	17.9%	1,735,819	2,018,795	14.0%
	1890			1900			1910		
	Men 25–30	Women 20–25	% Female Surplus	Men 25–30	Women 20–25	% Female Surplus	Men 25–30	Women 20–25	% Female Surplus
GERMANY	1,842,393	2,152,357	14.4%	2,225,108	2,559,718	13.1%	2,509,319	2,802,105	10.4%

Source: SJDR.

Table 8. Average Female Marriage Age (All Marriages): European Nations, 1851–1899

	Belgium	England	France	Italy	Netherlands	Sweden
1851–1860	28.8	25.7	26.1 ^a			
1861–1870	28.7	25.6	25.7			28.3
1871–1880	28.7	25.7	25.5	25.5 ^b		28.2
1881–1885	28.0	25.6	25.0	25.1	27.4	27.8 ^c
1886–1890	27.0	25.8	25.1	24.9 ^d	27.2	28.0 ^e
1891–1895		26.2	25.2 ^f		27.2	
1896–1899				24.9		27.4 ^g

Notes a. 1853–1860 c. 1882–1886 e. 1887–1891 g. 1896 only
 b. 1872–1880 d. 1886–1890 f. 1891–1893

Source: Prinzing, “Wandlungen,” 661.

Table 9. Average Marriage Age (All Marriages): Bavaria & Prussia, 1835–1899

	Bavarian Men	Bavarian Women	Prussian Men	Prussian Women
1835–1860	32.4	29.4		
1862–1868	32.7	29.5		
1867–1869			29.8	27.9
1872–1875	32.3	28.7	29.5	26.9
1876–1880	31.6	28.0	29.6	27.1
1881–1885	30.6	27.6	29.5	26.3
1896–1899			28.9	26.6

Source: Prinzing, "Wandlungen," 663.

Table 10. Family Status at Marriage: Berlin and Germany

BERLIN: 1871/72—Female Status					GERMANY: 1871/75—Female Status				
Male Status	Single	Widowed	Divorced	Total	Male Status	Single	Widowed	Divorced	Total
Single	80.0%	4.9%	1.2%	86.1%	Single	79.3%	5.3%	0.3%	84.8%
Widowed	9.8%	2.3%	0.4%	12.5%	Widowed	10.9%	3.6%	0.2%	14.7%
Divorced	1.1%	0.3%	0.1%	1.4%	Divorced	0.3%	0.1%	0.0%	0.5%
TOTAL	90.9%	7.4%	1.7%	100.0%	TOTAL	90.5%	9.0%	0.5%	100.0%
BERLIN: 1891/92—Female Status					GERMANY: 1891/95—Female Status				
Male Status	Single	Widowed	Divorced	Total	Male Status	Single	Widowed	Divorced	Total
Single	83.2%	3.5%	1.4%	88.2%	Single	84.2%	3.6%	0.5%	88.3%
Widowed	6.8%	2.0%	0.4%	9.3%	Widowed	7.8%	2.9%	0.2%	10.9%
Divorced	1.8%	0.5%	0.2%	2.5%	Divorced	0.5%	0.2%	0.1%	0.8%
TOTAL	91.8%	6.1%	2.1%	100.0%	TOTAL	92.6%	6.6%	0.8%	100.0%
BERLIN: 1911/12—Female Status					GERMANY: 1911/12—Female Status				
Male Status	Single	Widowed	Divorced	Total	Male Status	Single	Widowed	Divorced	Total
Single	83.2%	2.2%	2.3%	87.7%	Single	86.8%	2.4%	0.8%	90.0%
Widowed	5.3%	2.0%	0.7%	8.0%	Widowed	5.9%	2.3%	0.4%	8.6%
Divorced	3.2%	0.5%	0.6%	4.3%	Divorced	0.9%	0.3%	0.2%	1.4%
TOTAL	91.7%	4.7%	3.6%	100.0%	TOTAL	93.6%	5.0%	1.4%	100.0%

Table 11. Family Status at Marriage: Berlin and Germany—Summary

BERLIN		GERMANY	
	1871–1872	1891–1892	1911–1912
MEN			
Single	86.1	88.2	87.7
Widowed	12.5	9.3	8.0
Widowed & Divorced	13.9	11.8	12.3
BERLIN		GERMANY	
	1871–1872	1891–1892	1911–1912
WOMEN			
Single	90.9	91.8	91.7
Widowed	7.4	6.1	4.7
Widowed & Divorced	9.1	8.2	8.3

BERLIN		GERMANY	
	1871–1872	1891–1892	1911–1912
MEN			
Single	84.8	88.3	90.0
Widowed	14.7	10.9	8.6
Widowed & Divorced	15.2	11.7	10.0
GERMANY		GERMANY	
	1871–1872	1891–1892	1911–1912
WOMEN			
Single	90.5	92.6	93.6
Widowed	9.0	6.6	5.0
Widowed & Divorced	9.5	7.4	6.4

Source: Hubbard, 75–76.

Table 12. Composition of Overseas Emigration, Mecklenburg-Strelitz (1846–1914)

	# of Emigrants	% of Total Emigrant Population
“Arbeiter”	803	13.3%
“Tagelöhner”	898	14.9%
Farmhands, other Laborers	1523	25.3%
Artisans [Master Artisans]	948 [79]	15.7% [1.3%]
Clerks, Intellectuals, Artists, Soldiers, Officers	96	1.6%
Women	1173	19.4%
“Mädchen”	590	9.8%
[Total Female Emigrants]	[1763]	[29.2%]
TOTAL	6031	100%

Source: Lubinski, 63.

Table 13. Family Status of Female Population, Berlin and Germany: 1871, 1890, 1910

	BERLIN				GERMANY			
	Single	Married	Widowed	Divorced	Single	Married	Widowed	Divorced
1871	43.1	43.6	12.0	1.0	38.0	49.7	12.0	0.3
1890	40.1	46.1	12.8	0.9	35.9	50.8	13.0	0.3
1910	37.2	48.7	12.8	1.3	34.6	53.2	11.8	0.4

Source: Hubbard, 72.

Table 14. Age at Marriage and Proportion of Single Population by Size of Residence, c. 1880
Selected German States and England & Russia

STATE / COUNTRY	MALE POPULATION			FEMALE POPULATION		
	Ages 25–29	Ages 45–49	Mean Age at Marriage	Ages 25–29	Ages 45–49	Mean Age at Marriage
	% Single			% Single		
Prussia, 1880						
Rural	49.7	7.6	27.91	72.3	8.0	25.42
Urban under 20,000	52.5	8.4	28.29	74.8	11.3	25.67
Urban over 20,000	55.2	9.3	28.47	77.1	13.2	26.07
Saxony, 1880						
Rural	35.0	4.9	26.46	67.9	6.7	24.72
Urban under 20,000	37.5	5.6	26.91	67.5	6.9	24.75
Urban over 20,000	53.4	8.9	28.43	77.4	14.0	26.07
Bavaria, 1880						
Rural	60.7	12.6	28.80	78.7	15.8	25.46
Urban under 20,000	60.2	11.6	29.12	77.2	19.5	25.10
Urban over 20,000	63.3	12.2	29.45	80.1	19.8	26.21
England & Wales, 1881						
Excluding London	31.0*	9.7**	27.09	65.8*	10.8**	25.76
London	33.2*	9.6**	27.34	67.9*	14.6**	26.32
European Russia, 1897						
Rural	35.4*	2.9**	23.54	20.2 ⁺	4.1**	21.16
Urban	60.0*	10.5**	26.58	37.5 ⁺	11.7**	23.11

Notes * 25–34 + 20–29

** 45–54 ** 40–49

Source: Knodel and Maynes, 131.

Table 15. 1880 Nuptiality Measures by City Size, Prussia & Bavaria

	% Single Men: Aged 15-49	% Single Women: Aged 15-49	Male Mean Age at Marriage	Female Mean Age at Marriage
Prussia				
Cities over 100,000	10.0	16.0	28.76	26.85
Cities 50,000-99,999	8.4	12.6	28.14	25.63
Cities 20,000-49,999	8.7	12.0	28.02	25.42
Towns under 20,000	8.8	12.0	28.37	25.72
Rural	8.1	8.3	28.07	25.49
Bavaria				
Cities over 100,000	15.4	21.7	30.06	26.46
Cities 50,000-99,999	9.4	17.5	28.77	25.59
Cities 20,000-49,999	9.9	17.8	28.42	25.62
Towns under 20,000	11.4	19.4	29.28	25.43
Rural	12.1	15.5	28.82	25.52

Source: SJDR.

Table 16. Average Ages at First Marriage—1902, 1904, 1906

	Average Female Age at First Marriage			Average Male Age at First Marriage		
	1902	1904	1906	1902	1904	1906
Berlin	25.5	25.6	25.8	28.2	28.1	28.0
Hohenzollern	26.5	26.8	27.2	29.1	29.4	29.4
Westphalia	24.9	24.7	24.8	27.8	27.8	27.8
GERMANY	25.4	25.4	25.4	27.8	27.9	27.9

Source: SJDR.

Table 17. Berlin Female Population over 15: Unmarried & Total—1871, 1890, 1910

	Unmarried Women	% Unmarried Women of Total Population	Total Women	% Women of Total Population	Population Berlin
1871	161,473	19.55%	409,000	49.52%	826,000
1890	309,009	19.57%	819,000	51.87%	1,579,000
1910	386,751	18.67%	1,077,000	52.00%	2,071,000

Source: Hubbard, 69–70.

Table 18. Fertile Women as % of Total Population & % Unmarried Fertile Women—1871, 1880, 1885

	Women 17–50 as % of Total Population			% Unmarried among Women 17–50		
	1871	1880	1885	1871	1880	1885
Berlin	28.6%	29.1%	29.3%	53.1%	49.1%	49.4%
Hohenzollern	22.2%	22.5%	23.6%	52.3%	46.0%	46.5%
Westphalia	21.5%	21.5%	21.2%	45.2%	41.7%	41.9%
GERMANY	22.3%	22.9%	22.9%	46.5%	43.7%	44.2%

Source: SJDR.

Table 19. Average Marriage Age According to Class of Origin and Mobility, Borghorst, Westphalia—1830–59 / 1860–79 / 1880–1911

Class of Origin	MEN			WOMEN		
	Descending	Persistent	Ascending	Descending	Persistent	Ascending
Agrarian Labor						
1830–1859	N/A	30.2	31.6	N/A	29.5	27.0
1860–1879	N/A	28.9	30.3	N/A	28.4	28.4
1880–1911	N/A	27.8	29.3	N/A	26.5	27.5

Class of Origin	MEN			WOMEN		
	Descending	Persistent	Ascending	Descending	Persistent	Ascending
Agrarian Labor						
Unskilled Labor						
1830-1859	N/A	28.8	28.0*	N/A	28.7	24.3*
1860-1879	N/A	28.8	26.4	N/A	29.5	24.5*
1880-1911	N/A	26.9	27.3	N/A	25.4	25.8
Skilled Labor						
1830-1859	30.7	30.6	33.1	29.2	30.1	28.2
1860-1879	27.6	29.6	34.3	27.0	27.7	28.2
1880-1911	28.9	28.2	30.7	27.0	26.6	27.6
Low-level Bureaucracy, other Working Class						
1830-1859	N/A	27.0*	N/A	28.0*	N/A	N/A
1860-1879	25.0*	28.0*	N/A	27.0*	26.7*	27.5*
1880-1911	26.8	25.7	30.3	25.2	27.6	26.3*
Agrarian Middle Class						
1830-1859	30.4	32.0	34.3	30.3	27.9	27.4
1860-1879	32.1	33.9	N/A	29.2	29.1	24.5*
1880-1911	29.0	31.5	42.1	27.6	27.9	32.3
Industrial Middle Class						
1830-1859	31.8	30.6	30.5	28.3	26.5	22.0*
1860-1879	29.7	33.2	24.0*	27.5	25.2	32.0*
1880-1911	27.0	31.3	30.3	25.6	27.5	23.9
Mid-level Bureaucracy, other Middle Class						
1830-1859	27.0*	30.7*	N/A	30.3*	27.0*	N/A
1860-1879	37.0*	31.0*	27.0*	27.5*	N/A	N/A
1880-1911	26.1	31.7	34.0*	23.5*	25.0	26.5
Upper Class						
1830-1859	33.7	32.3	N/A	31.1	27.1	N/A
1860-1879	34.1	33.1	N/A	26.2	27.8	N/A
1880-1911	31.0	35.0	N/A	27.7	26.5	N/A

* small sample size

Source: Koeka, 256.

Table 20. Average Marriage Age According to Class of Origin, Borghorst, Westphalia

CLASS OF ORIGIN	MEN				WOMEN			
	1830–1859	1860–1879	1880–1911	AVG: 1830–1911	1830–1859	1860–1879	1880–1911	AVG: 1830–1911
Agrarian Labor	30.6	29.3	28.2	28.9	29.0	28.7	26.8	27.8
Unskilled Labor	30.2	28.4	27.0	27.3	27.5	28.3	25.5	25.8
Home Workers	29.6	29.3	28.9	29.3	28.9	27.3	29.2	28.7
Skilled Labor	30.8	29.3	29.0	29.5	29.4	27.5	27.1	27.7
Low-level <i>Beamten</i> , other								
Working Class	33.0*	26.5*	27.2	27.4	28.0*	27.0	25.7	26.0
Agrarian Middle Class	31.7	31.9	30.1	30.7	29.3	28.9	27.9	28.4
Industrial Middle Class	30.5	31.2	29.6	30.1	27.8	26.5	26.6	26.7
Mid-level Bureaucracy, other								
Middle Class	29.7	31.4	29.4	29.6	28.5	27.5*	24.5	25.3
Upper Class	32.3	34.2	33.2	33.1	29.2	28.0	27.2	28.0
AVERAGE	30.6	30.2	29.0	29.6	29.0	28.0	27.0	27.7

* small sample size
 Source: Kocka, 267.

Table 21. Class Stratification of Bielefeld, Westphalia

	1831	1861–1865	1895–1896
Working Class	67.3%	66.1%	72.0%
Middle Class	25.9%	29.1%	23.4%
Upper Class	6.7%	4.8%	4.6%

Source: Kocka, 289.

Table 22. Average Marriage Ages of Prussian Men by Occupation
Urban & Rural—1881–1886

OCCUPATION	Average Urban Marriage Age	Average Rural Marriage Age
Mining & Foundry	27.9	27.5
Factory Work	27.8	27.5
Metalwork	27.9	28.2
Earth/Stone Work	28.3	28.1
Construction	28.9	28.5
Lumber & Woodwork	28.6	28.9
Engineering	29.1	28.9
Education	30.3	28.0
Military Service	29.2	29.6
Day Labor (Unpropertied)	29.4	29.0
Farming	31.6	29.5
Textiles	30.1	30.0
Trade & Commerce	30.5	29.5
Business & Insurance	30.9	31.0
Medicine	32.0	31.2
Clergy	32.6	32.3
Civil Service	33.1	34.5

Source: Prinzing, “Heiratshäufigkeit,” 553.

Table 23. Average Marriage Ages of Prussian Men and Women by Occupation, 1881–1886

MEN		WOMEN	
Occupation	Marriage Age	Occupation	Marriage Age
Civil Service	33.41	Innkeeping	36.94
Clergy	32.48	Agriculture	35.86
Lodging & Food Service	32.08	Shop Management	34.31
Health Care	31.76	Midwife	32.51
Chemical Industry	31.58	Housekeeper	30.94
Heating & Electrical	31.58	Dayworker	29.85
Trade & Insurance	30.94	Teaching	29.02
Art, Literature, Press	30.62	Washing	28.66
Transportation	30.02	Cooking	28.56
Textiles	30.02	Weaving	27.60
Agriculture	29.61	Kindergartner	26.75
Military	29.30	Waitress	26.40
Drapery & Cleaning	29.14	Seamstress	25.98
Teaching	29.11	Knitting	25.84
Paper & Leather Industries	29.05	Shop Assistance	25.76
Machine Industry	28.98	Domestic Service	25.36
Food & Luxury Trade	28.90	Unemployed Haustochter	25.35
Lumber & Woodworking	28.74	Tobacco Work	24.99
Fishing	28.73	Factory Work	24.62
Construction	28.64	Collier	23.52
Artisanry	28.21		
Stone & Earthwork	28.17		
Metalwork	28.04		
Domestic Service	27.75		
Factory Work	27.67		
Printing	27.62		
Mining	27.57		
AVERAGE	29.51	AVERAGE	26.27

Source: Hubbard, 80.

Table 24. Danish Age at Marriage by Class Status

CLASS	Male	Female
I	30.3	27.2
II	30.7	27.2
III	32.0	28.2
IV	30.5	25.4

Source: Prinzing, "Heiratshäufigkeit," 550.

Table 25. Number of Women per 1000 Men

Age Cohort	1910	1925
25–30	1002	1151
30–35	1001	1260
35–40	1003	1180
40–45	1022	1108

Source: Meerwarth, 91–92.

Table 26. Number Married per 1000 of Age Cohort

Age Cohort	MEN		WOMEN	
	1910	1925	1910	1925
20–25	90	107	287	244
25–30	509	539	663	612
30–35	773	796	798	739
35–40	854	876	819	769
40–45	878	901	804	776
45–50	880	902	765	767

Source: Meerwarth, 91–92.

Figure 1. Population of Germany and Selected Areas: 1871–1910

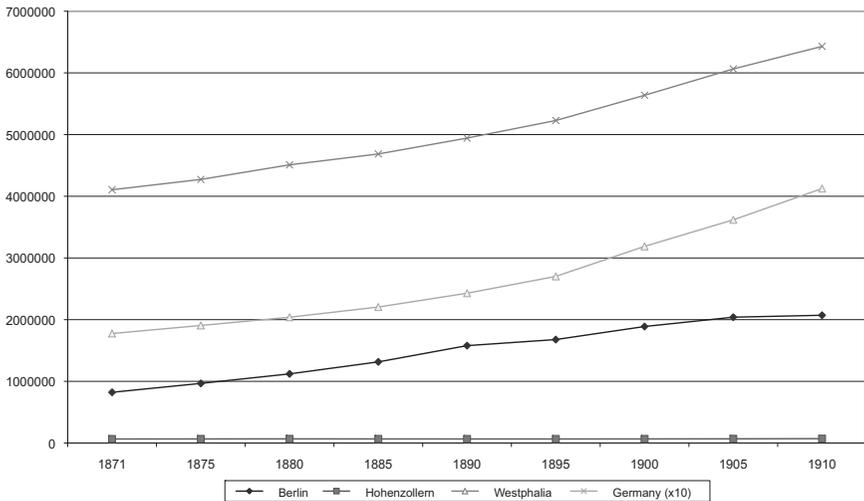


Figure 2. German Marriage Rate: 1872–1881

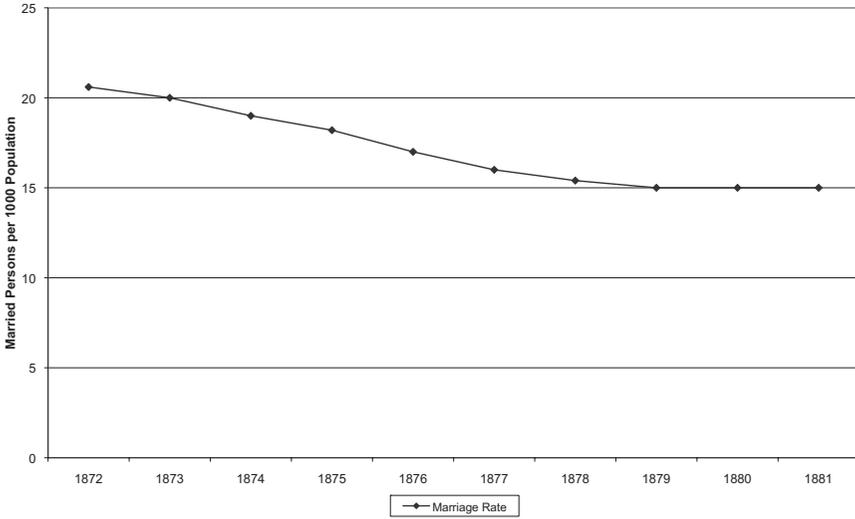


Figure 3. German Marriage Rate: 1851–1912

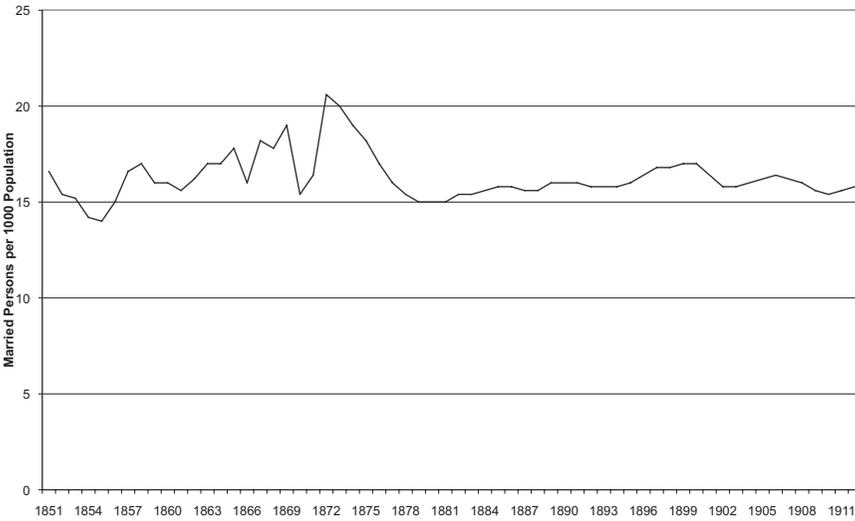


Figure 4. % Female of Total Population, Germany and Selected Areas

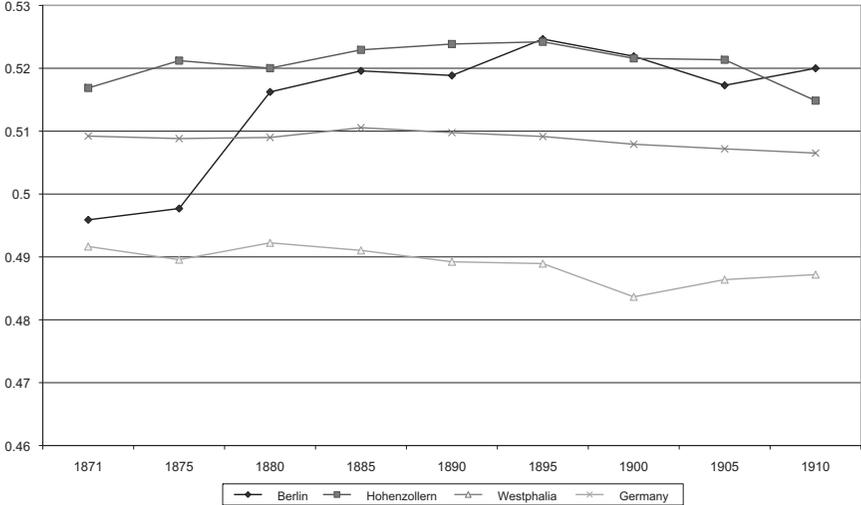


Figure 5. % Female Population: Berlin and Germany, 1871–1895

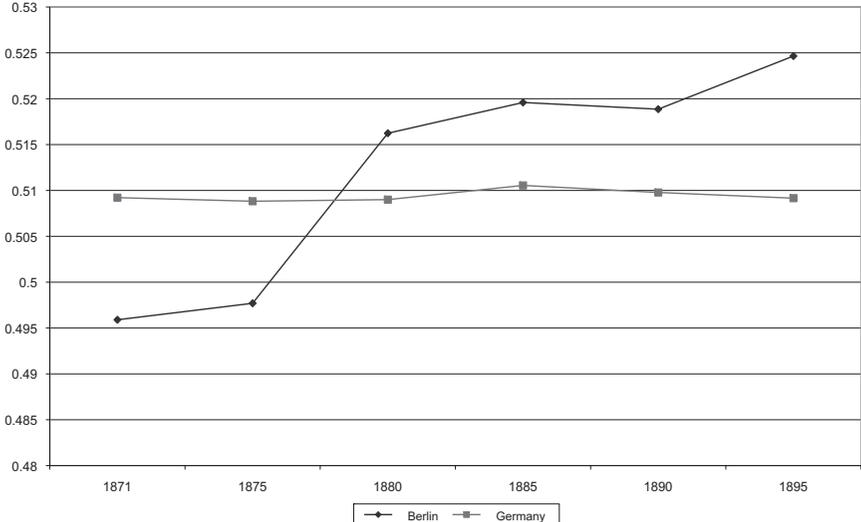


Figure 6. German Population: 1851–1912

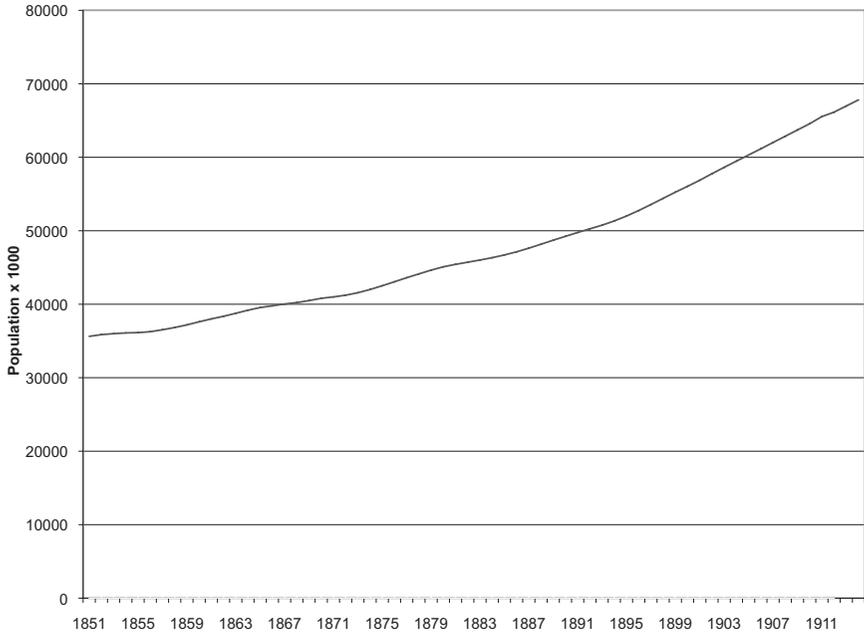


Figure 7. German Birth Rate: 1841–1912

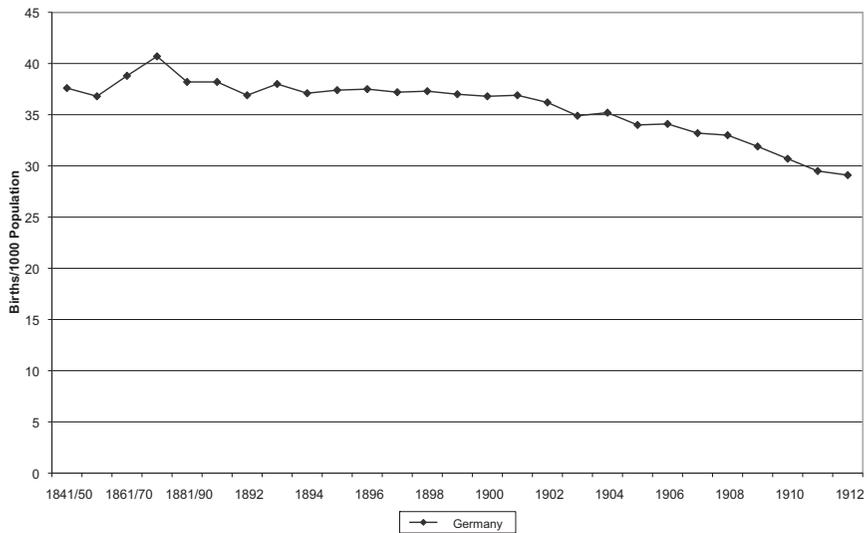


Figure 8. % German Female Surplus: Women 20–25 vs Men 25–30

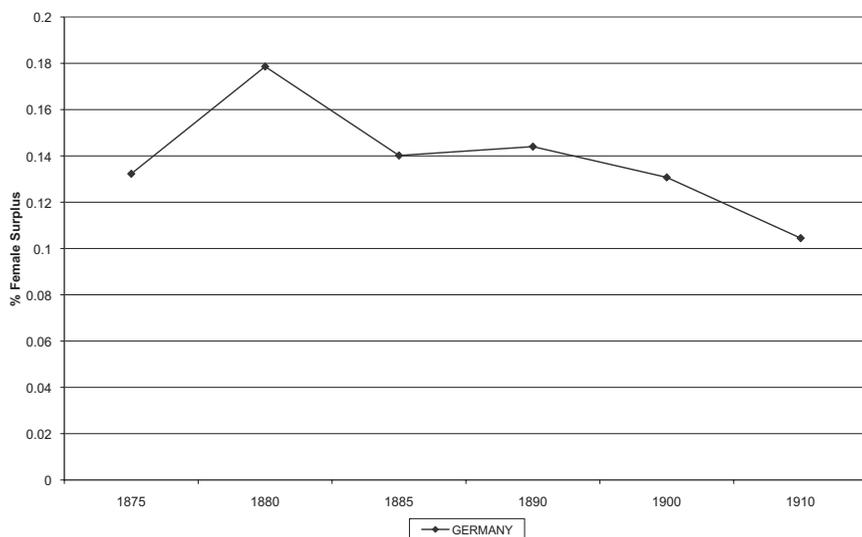


Figure 9. German Mortality Rate

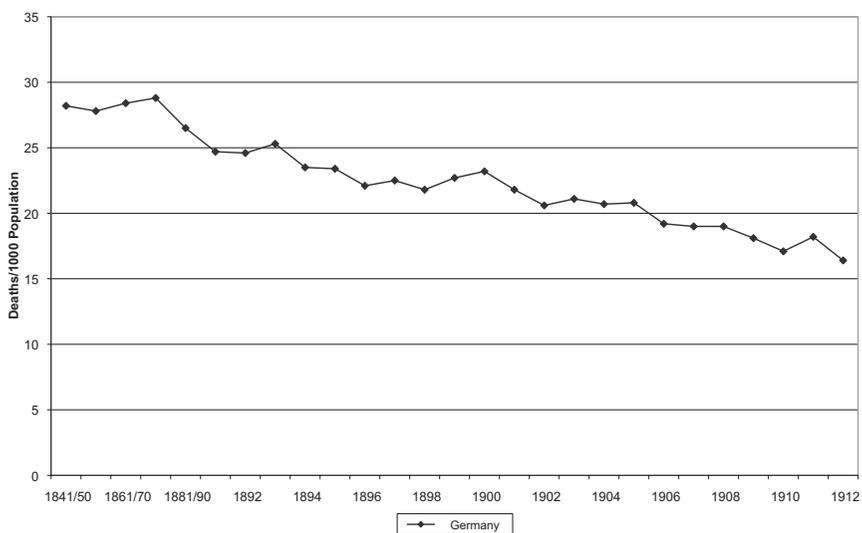


Figure 10. % of Marriages with Widower as Groom, 1871–1911

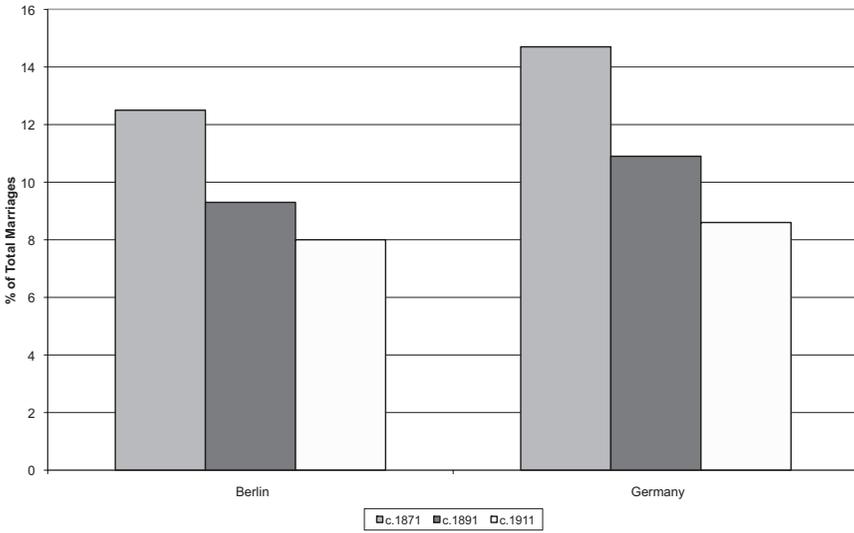


Figure 11. % of Marriages with Widower/Divorced Male as Groom, 1871–1911

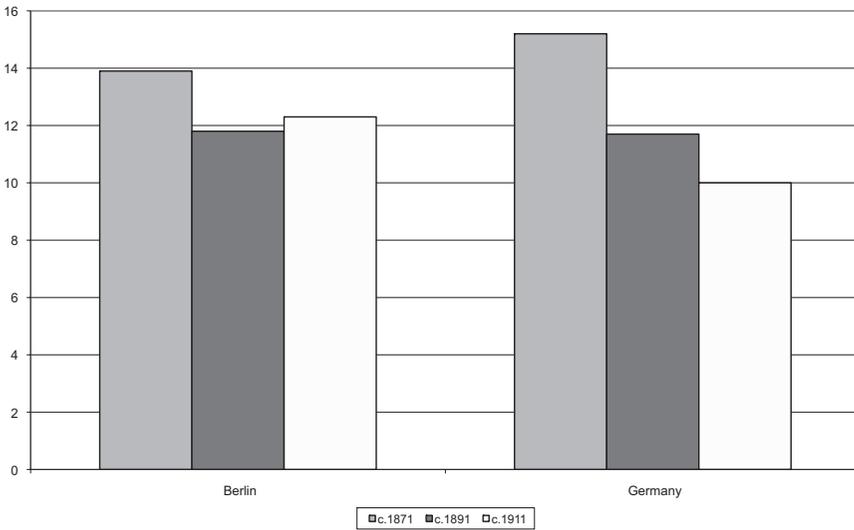


Figure 12. Berlin & Germany: Family Status of Female Population over 15

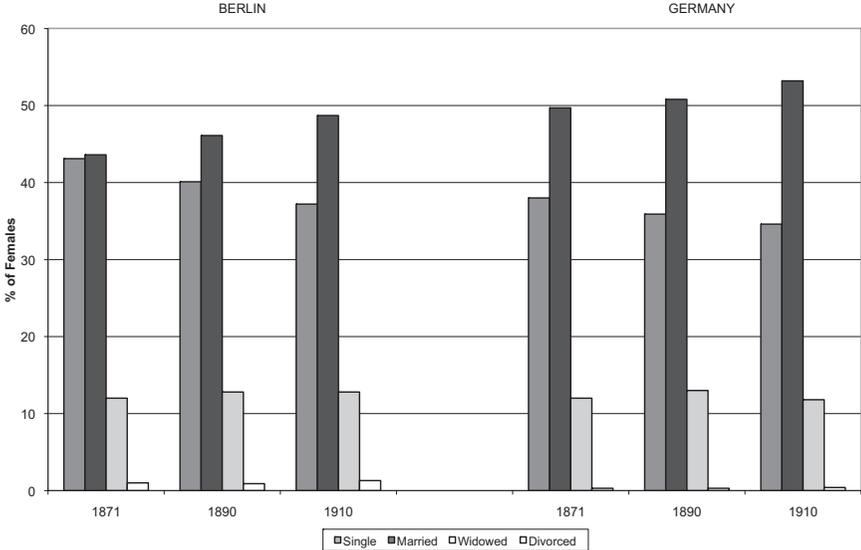


Figure 13. Average Male Age At First Marriage: 1902, 1904, 1906

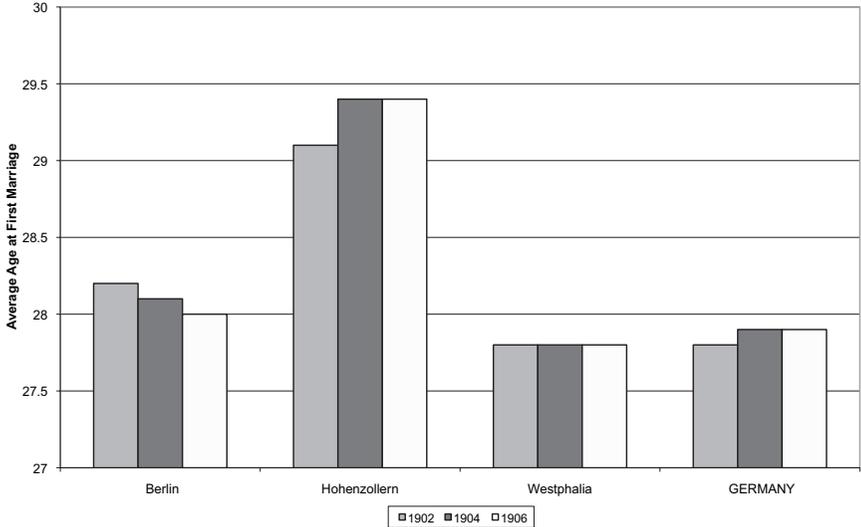


Figure 14. Average Female Age at First Marriage: 1902, 1904, 1906

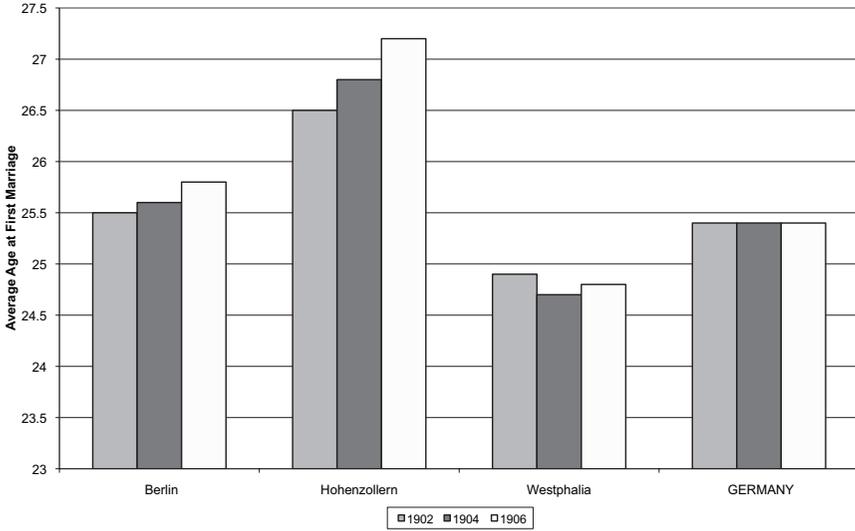


Figure 15. Marriage Rates by Region: 1891–1912

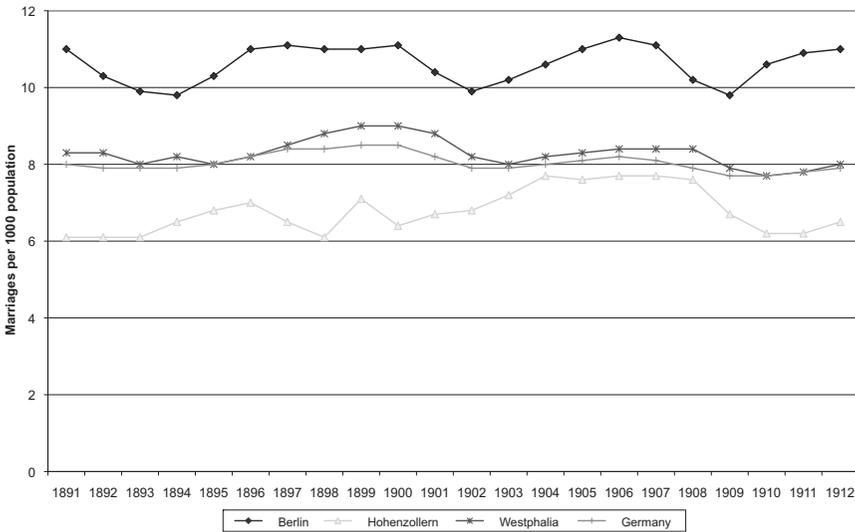


Figure 16. Age Difference at First Marriage: Quernheim, Westphalia

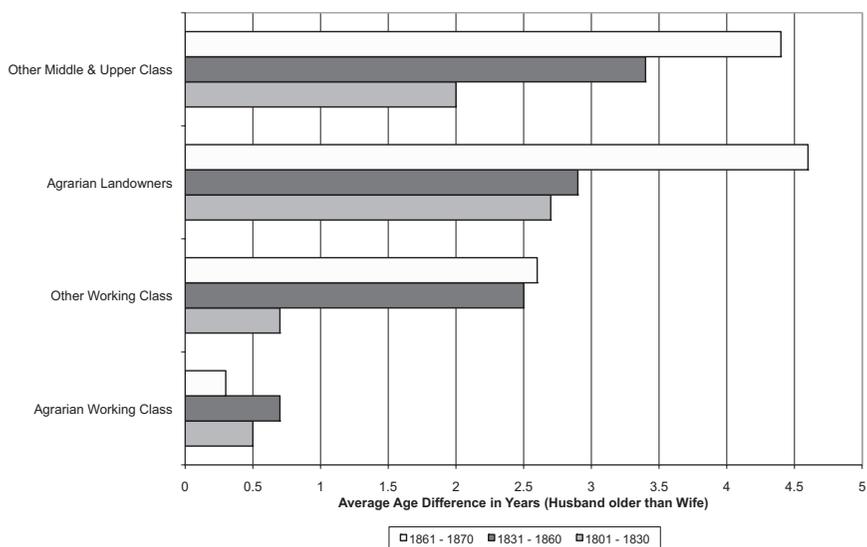


Figure 17. Marriage Rates: Berlin & Germany: 1841–1890

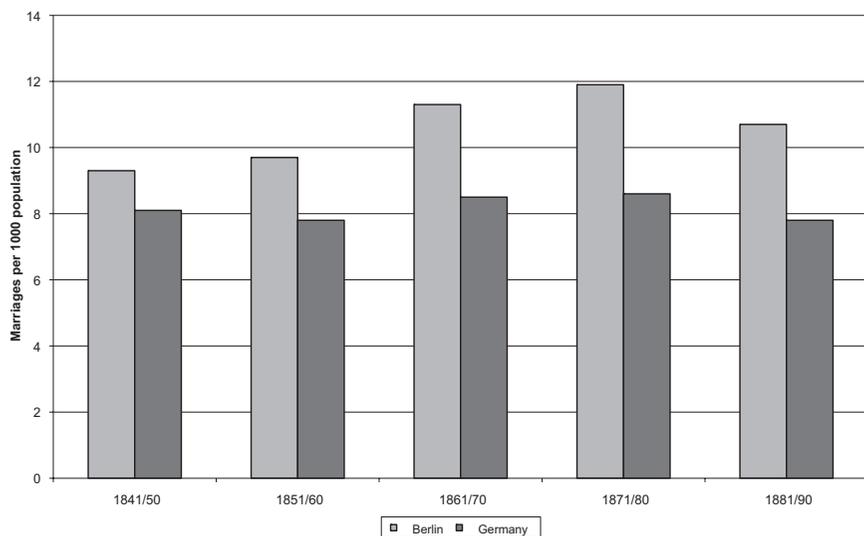


Figure 18. Berlin Population by Gender: 1837–1910

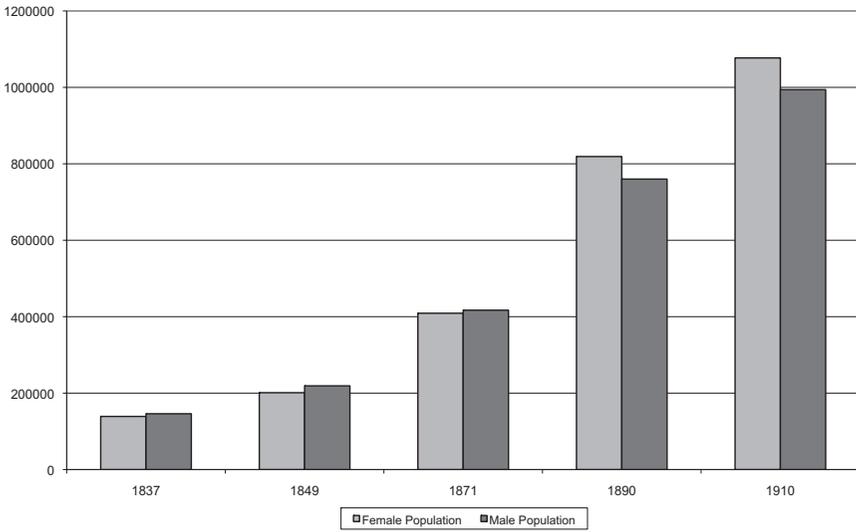


Figure 19. Marriage Rates by Region (Decade Averages): 1841–1912

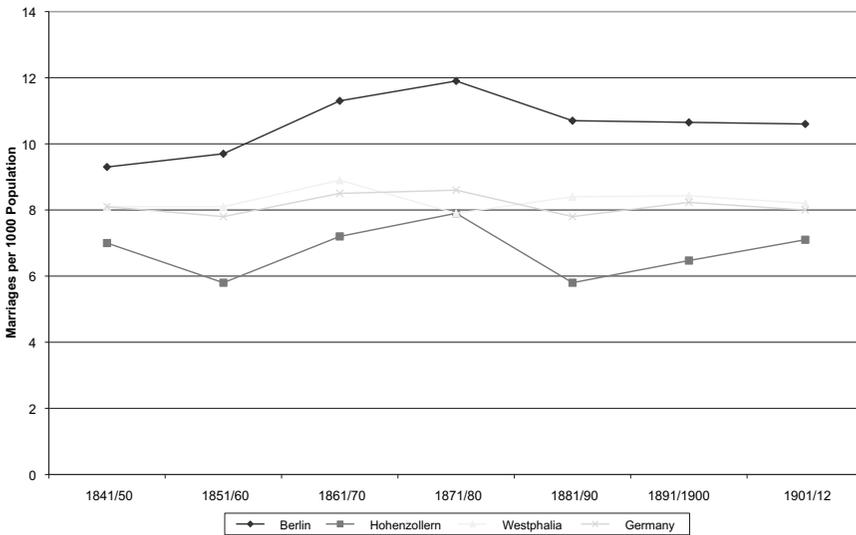


Figure 20. Women Aged 17–50 as % of Total Population

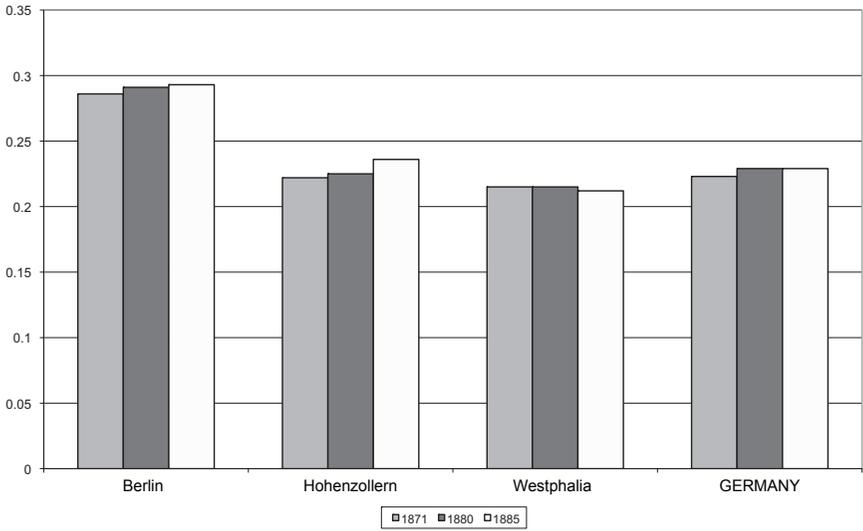


Figure 21. Women Aged 17–50: % Unmarried

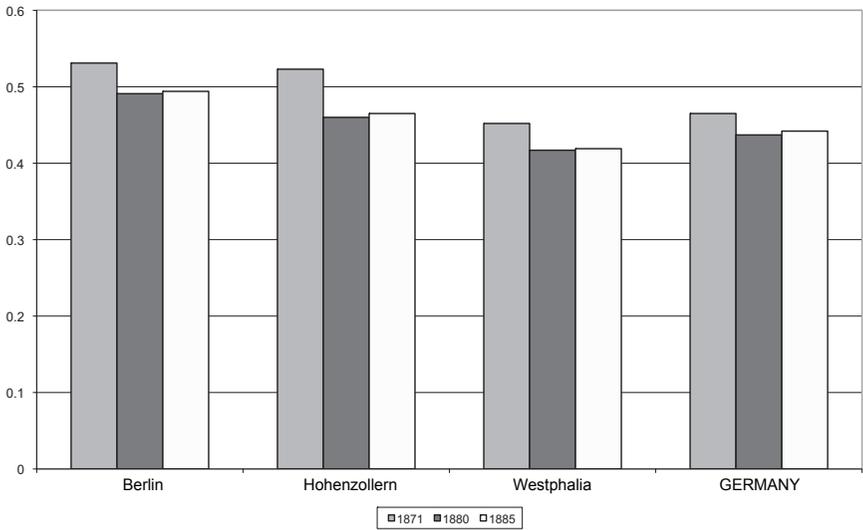


Figure 22. Average Age at Marriage: Borghorst, Westphalia

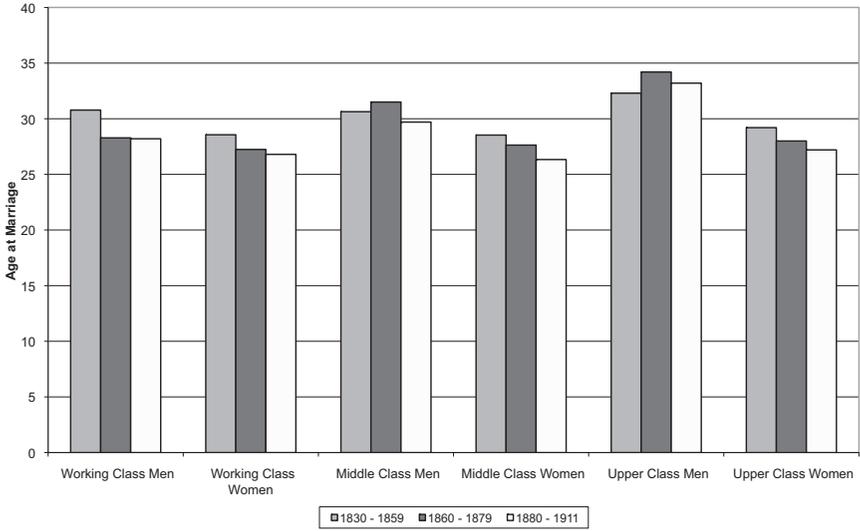
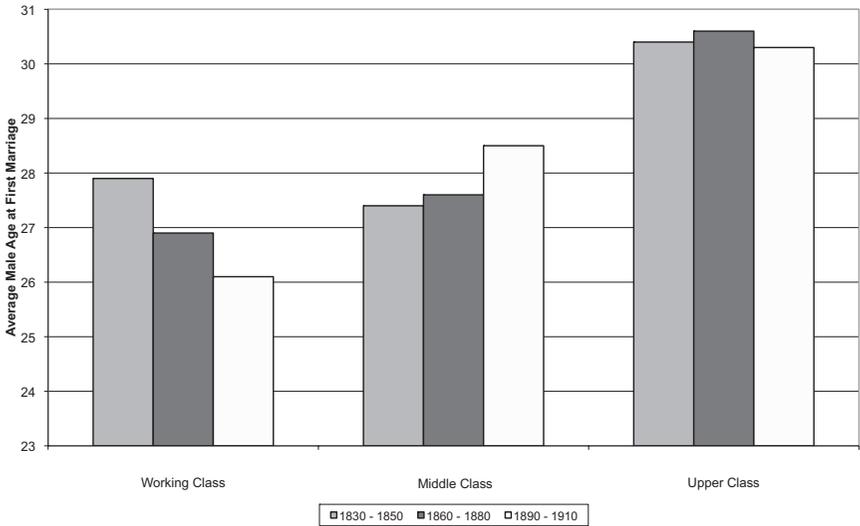


Figure 23. Average Male Age at Marriage: Bielefeld, Westphalia



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HLA-BDF Karton 49, Mappe 219

HLA-BDF Karton 49, Mappe 221

HLA-BDF Karton 54, Mappe 245

HLA-BDF Karton 77, Mappe 310

Nachlass Helene Lange: Karton 1, Mappe 1-3

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