

### Chapter 3

---

## 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.<sup>1</sup> In Victorian and Edwardian Britain, conjecture about the “odd woman” emerged in literary works by George Gissing and E.M. Forster,<sup>2</sup> but debates about both unmarried and married women’s roles were primarily focused on the themes of suffrage, empire, and emigration.<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup>

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.<sup>5</sup>

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."<sup>6</sup> 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).<sup>7</sup> 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.<sup>8</sup>

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).<sup>9</sup> Figure 1<sup>10</sup> 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.<sup>11</sup> 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.”<sup>12</sup> 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*.<sup>13</sup> For local and specific cases, this chapter examines material from the secondary studies conducted by William Hubbard,<sup>14</sup> John Knodel,<sup>15</sup> and Jürgen Kocka,<sup>16</sup> as well as the primary investigations of Friedrich Prinzing and Erwin Moll.<sup>17</sup>

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.<sup>18</sup> 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.”<sup>19</sup> 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.<sup>20</sup> 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.”<sup>21</sup> In sum, marriage is a vehicle for transmitting “established prestige.”<sup>22</sup> 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.”<sup>23</sup>

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.<sup>24</sup> Visions of love, destiny, and companionship increasingly formed public ideals of what marriage *ought* to be.<sup>25</sup> 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.”<sup>26</sup> 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.<sup>27</sup> 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.”<sup>28</sup> 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).<sup>29</sup> 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.”<sup>30</sup> 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.”<sup>31</sup> 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.<sup>32</sup> 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.<sup>33</sup> 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.<sup>34</sup> 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.<sup>35</sup> 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.”<sup>36</sup> 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.”<sup>37</sup> 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.<sup>38</sup> 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.”<sup>39</sup> 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.<sup>40</sup> 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.<sup>41</sup> 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.<sup>42</sup> 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.<sup>43</sup> 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.”<sup>44</sup> 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.<sup>45</sup> 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.<sup>46</sup> 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).<sup>47</sup> 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).<sup>48</sup> 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.<sup>49</sup>

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.<sup>50</sup> 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).<sup>51</sup> 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.”<sup>52</sup> 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.”<sup>53</sup> 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).<sup>54</sup> 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.<sup>55</sup> 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.<sup>56</sup> 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.”<sup>57</sup> 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.<sup>58</sup> 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.<sup>59</sup>

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).<sup>60</sup> 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,<sup>61</sup> 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.<sup>62</sup> 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.”<sup>63</sup>

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.<sup>64</sup> A growing surplus of unmarried German women did not exist (Table 13; Figure 12).<sup>65</sup> The proportion of single women decreased consistently throughout the imperial period, while the size of the female married population grew.<sup>66</sup> 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.<sup>67</sup> 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.<sup>68</sup> 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.”<sup>69</sup> 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.”<sup>70</sup> 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.”<sup>71</sup> Cities were far more likely to experience fluctuation in marriage rates based upon periods of economic boom and bust.<sup>72</sup> 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.”<sup>73</sup> 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.<sup>74</sup> 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).<sup>75</sup> 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.<sup>76</sup> 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.<sup>77</sup> 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.<sup>78</sup> 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 Germany<sup>79</sup> 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.<sup>80</sup> 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 ... *favored 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.”<sup>81</sup> 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.*”<sup>82</sup> 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.”<sup>83</sup>

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.”<sup>84</sup> 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.”<sup>85</sup>

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.<sup>86</sup>

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."<sup>87</sup> 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."<sup>88</sup> 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."<sup>89</sup> 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."<sup>90</sup> 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."<sup>91</sup>

The importance of profession in determining marital age is demonstrated in Table 19 and summarized in Figure 22.<sup>92</sup> 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.<sup>93</sup> 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.<sup>94</sup> 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.<sup>95</sup> 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),<sup>96</sup> Kocka examined male ages at marriage and found a clear increase from 1830 to 1910 (Figure 23).<sup>97</sup> 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).<sup>98</sup> 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).<sup>99</sup> 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).<sup>100</sup> 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.<sup>101</sup> 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.<sup>102</sup> 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.<sup>103</sup> 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.<sup>104</sup> 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.<sup>105</sup> 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 Zaborsky, “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 19<sup>th</sup>- and 20<sup>th</sup>-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 Sönsner Breen and Fiona Peters (New York, 2005), 19–38; Regina Schulte, *Sperrbezirke: Tugendhaftigkeit und Prostitution in der bürgerlichen Welt* (Frankfurt a.M., 1979).