

**Contesting the “Laws of Life”: Feminism, Sexual Science and  
Sexual Governance in Germany and Britain, c. 1880-1914**

by

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enthusiastic readers. We have discussed points of logic, style and grammar in great detail during wonderful, long Skype conversations. Indeed, in an effort to help me curb my penchant for baroque sentences, my father gave me one of the most valuable tips on writing I have yet received: “Sometimes it is good to make the reader think, you know.” Writing a dissertation is a long, lonely process utterly alien to anyone who has not undertaken the task; sharing my work with my parents has, I feel, brought us closer together. My parents inspired a love of reading and writing in me at a young age; in addition to this passion for knowledge and ideas, I am grateful to them for their unconditional love, and their unflinching, constant, vocal encouragement.

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## Preface

This dissertation came about as a result of an unexpected encounter with the histories of gender and sexuality in 2003. At the time I was a Master's student at the Institute of Political Economy at Carleton University in Ottawa, Canada, and intended to pursue a discourse analysis of submissions to the parliamentary committee hearings on the Canadian same-sex marriage bill, which became law in 2005. By chance I took a graduate history course on sex, gender and the body in Victorian Britain, which ultimately changed the course of my studies. I ended up writing my MA thesis on the British socialist Eleanor Marx-Aveling (1855-1898) and her attempts to integrate socialism and feminism in praxis.

While researching Marx-Aveling's life and work, I was struck by two important insights. First, I learned that transnational circulations of individuals and ideas profoundly shaped Marx-Aveling's life. The ex-pat Marx household in London served as the nexus of a vast network of political dissidents that extended to Germany and France.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, thanks to England's policy of accepting political refugees, nineteenth century London was home to radical figures from Marx and Engels to the Russian anarchist Prince Kropotkin.<sup>2</sup> The transnational character of Marx-Aveling's life suggested to me

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<sup>1</sup> Her sisters Jenny and Laura married French socialists Charles Longuet and Paul Lafargue, respectively. Marx-Aveling herself was also briefly engaged to Prosper Olivier Lissagaray.

<sup>2</sup> See Rosemary Ashton, *Little Germany: Exile and Asylum in Victorian England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986).

that Europeans—particularly politically active Europeans—were much more intellectually and interpersonally interconnected than exclusively national histories would suggest.

Second, analyzing Marx-Aveling’s intellectual influences and interpersonal networks led me to discover the fledgling field of fin-de-siècle sexual science. Sexual science played an important role in shaping Marx-Aveling’s thoughts regarding sex and feminism, and major figures within the early history of British sexual science, namely Havelock Ellis and Edward Carpenter, belonged to her extensive network of friends and comrades. Moreover, as I learned from Lucy Bland’s study of first-wave British feminist sexual thought, Marx-Aveling was not alone in viewing sexual science as a resource for feminist sexual politics: Marx-Aveling’s feminist contemporaries such as Olive Schreiner, Frances Swiney, and Elizabeth Blackwell were also keenly interested in the relationship between science, feminism, and sexual reform.<sup>3</sup>

Through Marx-Aveling, and particularly through her essay “The Woman Question” (1886), I also became aware of German sexual science, and its influence on sexual knowledge production and sexual politics in Britain. Marx-Aveling’s “The Woman Question,” which she co-wrote with her common-law partner Edward Aveling, was effectively a summation of German socialist August Bebel’s *Woman and Socialism* (*Die Frau und der Sozialismus* first edition 1879) for English audiences.<sup>4</sup> In *Woman and Socialism*, Bebel critically deployed scientific theory and evidence, along with claims to ‘nature,’ to demand the wholesale reform of sexual life, and above all the expansion of women’s sexual freedoms. The radicalness of Bebel’s ideas and arguments, his

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<sup>3</sup> Lucy Bland, *Banishing the Beast: English Feminism and Sexual Morality, 1885-1914* (London: Penguin Books, 1995).

<sup>4</sup> Eleanor Marx and Edward Aveling, *The Woman Question* (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1886).



mobilization of science for political ends, and his explicit (in the context of the time) discussion of sex, all provoked my interest in contemporaneous German sexual politics and sexual science, which I pursued in my doctoral studies.

In Wilhelmine Germany I discovered a much more developed sexual science and much livelier and wide-ranging sexual politics than that which existed in late-Victorian and Edwardian Britain. I was especially captivated by the vigorous and public discussion of homosexuality that existed in Germany—a discussion that was effectively silenced in Britain following the Oscar Wilde trial.<sup>5</sup> I first encountered German women speaking publicly about female homosexuality in the second year of my doctoral studies, beginning with Anna Rüling (1880-1953) and her now famous speech, “What Interest Does the Women’s Movement Have in the Homosexual Problem?” (“Welches Interesse hat die Frauenbewegung an der Lösung des homosexuellen Problems?” 1904). As I discuss in Chapter Two, Rüling’s speech is remarkable, not only as one of the earliest, public articulations of a modern lesbian subjectivity, but also for its engagement with sexual science. Sexual science both informed and legitimized Rüling’s understanding of the subject she referred to as the Urninde. It seemed apparent to me that, for Rüling, sexual science constituted what Foucault termed a tactically polyvalent discourse, that is, a discourse that could serve as both an instrument of, and point of resistance to, power.<sup>6</sup> My analysis of Rüling’s speech as an example of tactical polyvalence, which I initially

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<sup>5</sup> Tellingly, Havelock Ellis and John Addington Symonds’ *Sexual Inversion* (1897) was published in Germany following the text’s censorship in Britain; likewise, Carpenter’s texts *Love’s Coming of Age* (1896) and *The Intermediate Sex* (1908) were quickly translated into German. See Mark Lehmstedt, “Selektive Wahrnehmung. Die Publikations- und Rezeptionsgeschichte der Schriften von Edward Carpenter in Deutschland zwischen 1895 und 1930,” *Mitteilungen der Magnus Hirschfeld Gesellschaft*, Nr 26 (Juli 1998).

<sup>6</sup> See Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, Volume I, trans. Robert Hurley (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 100-102.

undertook as a term paper, provided the intellectual foundation of this dissertation. In addition to developing my interest in sexual science as a tactically polyvalent discourse, this study also enabled me to think about the inextricability of gender and sexuality in defining “sex” at the turn of the century.

I further developed these interests through my research on the German feminist and sex reformer Johanna Elberskirchen (1864-1943) in my third year. I examined Elberskirchen’s monographs and articles, written between the years 1896 and 1906, to trace the entry of scientific ‘facts’ into her analyses and claims-making, and to examine its discursive effects. I found that the ‘scientization’ of Elberskirchen’s analyses and writings produced a shift in tone and rhetorical strategy, from the highly subjective and impassioned, to the objective and authoritative. Even more intriguing was the fact that Elberskirchen expressed her sharpest critiques and most radical demands when writing in the guise of science. Science, it seemed to me, enabled Elberskirchen to analytically and politically transcend the limitations of the ‘man-made’ world, and endowed her analyses and claims with legitimacy. Although she often railed against what she claimed was the bias of male scientists, Elberskirchen nonetheless considered sexual scientific ‘facts’ and theories as resources for feminist sexual politics.

While researching Johanna Elberskirchen, I became exposed to the broader historiography on German feminism and its engagement with sexual science. This literature opened my eyes to the fact that Anna RÜling and Johanna Elberskirchen were not alone in their deployment of science for feminist and sex reforming purposes. In fact, their work demonstrated that science and appeals to nature transcended ideological boundaries, and were engaged by ‘radicals’ such as Helene Stöcker to ‘moderates’ like

Gertrud Bäumer.<sup>7</sup> However, this literature persistently analyzed German feminists' relationship with sexual science in terms of its responsibility for laying the intellectual foundation for Nazi racism, given the biological determinism involved in some feminist arguments, particularly surrounding motherhood. This analytic tendency was true even of those scholars who rejected this link. In light of my previous knowledge of what was happening in Britain, I was intrigued (and admittedly somewhat frustrated) by the fact that this question constituted the primary, sometimes exclusive, analytic through which historians understood this phenomenon. Moreover, while feminists' appeals to science were undoubtedly and in many ways problematic, as I note in the dissertation, they were not merely limiting; as the cases of Rüling and Elberskirchen demonstrate, they were also empowering. Moreover, ignoring this aspect of feminists' engagement with science—that is, that it constituted a critical form of feminist praxis—arguably effaces the importance of an emerging “biological consciousness” for the development of modern sexual politics.

Thus, my work on Rüling and Elberskirchen, informed by my previous knowledge of British history, sparked my interest in exploring the relationship between sexual science and feminist sexual politics at the turn of the century. In my dissertation, I wanted to examine why sexual science appeal to some feminists at this time, how sexual science informed feminist thought concerning sex, and what roles sexual science played in feminist sexual politics. Moreover, the fact that this discursive practice occurred concurrently in both Germany and Britain, despite their significant political, social, and cultural differences, suggested to me that this relationship could not be understood solely

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<sup>7</sup> See especially Kevin Repp, “More Corporeal, More Concrete: Liberal Humanism, Eugenics, and German Progressives at the Last Fin de Siècle,” *Journal of Modern History* 72 (September 2000): 683-730.

within the context of the nation. I therefore wanted to take a transnational approach in my research in order to think about the relationship of sexual science and feminist sexual politics in the context of a particular time rather a particular place.

As my bibliography indicates, my archival work was rather broad, spanning four nations; it was also highly inductive. I cast my net broadly, identified points of connection, similarity, and difference, and pursued curious and suggestive leads. I discovered fascinating monographs, essays, articles, pamphlets, handbooks, and novels that invoked science to promote an array of feminist sexual reform proposals, ranging from the modest to the revolutionary, the pragmatic to the utopian. My archival work led me to focus on the four case studies at the heart of this dissertation: namely, on the ‘normal’ female sex drive, abnormal female sexual subjectivity, critiques of male heterosexuality, and the relationship between women’s rights, eugenics, sex, and race. It also led me to specifically focus on a number of German-speaking and British feminists who have been largely overlooked within the historiography of fin-de-siècle feminism, namely Henriette Fürth (1861-1938), Ruth Bre (?-1912), Johanna Elberskirchen, Anna Rüling, Rosa Mayreder (1858-1938), Frances Swiney (1847-1922), Grete Meisel-Hess (1879-1922), and Jane Hume Clapperton (1832-1914).

Over the course of conducting my research, the ideological plurality of feminists’ engagement with sexual science was reaffirmed, as was the fact that understandings of gendered and sexual subjectivities were markedly unstable at this time. However, it became increasingly clear that feminists’ engagement with sexual science was not strictly strategic, but rather reflected a fundamental epistemological commitment to science as revealing the ‘true nature’ of sexuality. Over the course of my archival work, I also

discovered that, while highly critical of what they perceived as male bias in scientific knowledge production, many feminists, particularly in Germany, collaborated with male scientists in various sex reform and feminist projects. I therefore came to argue that, despite the power differentials between these feminists and male scientists, these actors belonged to a common epistemic community.

Admittedly, I had hoped to find more evidence of personal contact, particularly transnational interconnection, between feminists in the archives. While these feminists were very mobile—in fact, many German feminists spent significant time in Britain, and at least one British feminist migrated to Germany—most of the direct evidence I found of interpersonal links between Germany and Britain were conducted through men. What I did discover was evidence of feminists making very similar arguments, which I maintain was a result of their common exposure to circulating bodies of scientific and feminist knowledge. I therefore came to understand feminists' transnational engagement with sexual science as a parallel and interconnected phenomenon, and as an instance of equifinality, a principle which suggests that a shared conclusion can be reached by many potential means.

My understanding of the broader dynamics and implications of my project was strengthened by conversations with my dissertation committee and other research networks. Discussions with my committee members forced me to address the question of what was at stake in feminists' production of scientized sexual knowledge. Why did feminists debate so vigorously and definitively questions of sexual subjectivity, of normality and abnormality? Initially, I conceived of feminist sexual politics in terms of rights and freedoms. As I point out in the dissertation, these feminists often invoked their

‘biological’ and ‘sexual’ rights—and indeed, it was illuminating to think about the ways in which feminists viewed nature and especially the body as resources for emancipatory political claims-making. However, the language of rights and freedoms alone did not capture the fact that, through the production of knowledge about sex, these feminists were simultaneously making claims to regulatory power. I therefore tried to re-conceptualize sexual politics at the turn of the century more broadly and think about what actually was being contested, debated, and demanded.

I ultimately deployed the concept of “sexual governance” to reference the vast and interconnected complex of norms, ethics, and laws that transcended the divisions of public and private and, I argue, regulated sexual behavior by delineating relations of power between men and women. The concept of sexual governance appealed to me because it encompasses a broad range of regulatory apparatuses, and highlights the key role of knowledge in contestations of power. It also draws attention to the fact that feminists’ attempts to reform sexual governance not only involved making demands of the state, but also required transforming dominant modes of thinking about sex and subjectivity. Rethinking feminist sexual politics at the turn of the century in terms of sexual governance therefore draws our attention to the crucial role of feminist theorizing within sexual reform activism. Finally, it stresses the fact that feminists were not ‘outside’ of sexual governance, or simply subject to its restrictions. Feminists did not seek to throw off the shackles of sexual restraint and embrace untrammelled sexual liberty. Through their participation in public debates on sex, sexuality, and social order, feminists played a role—a role they actively sought—in shaping modes of sexual governance. Indeed, despite their many internal disagreements, feminists in general

demanded both the empowerment of individual women as autonomous sexual agents, *and* a new arrangement of social powers that would give women as a group greater regulatory control over sex, both in public and private.

In addition to discussions with my committee members, my involvement in the Max Planck Working Group on Gendered Uses of Science Beyond the Academy forced me to reconsider feminists' relationship to sexual science itself. Specifically, members of the Working Group encouraged me to think about the ways in which feminists were creating not only feminist knowledge, but also sexual scientific knowledge. If sexual science was a weak field, as I asserted, they pointed out that the distinction I posited between 'feminists' and 'sexual scientists' was a spurious one. Moreover, as I demonstrate throughout the dissertation, the relationship between male scientists and feminists was not unidirectional: male scientists also engaged with and drew upon feminist ideas as a source of 'fact'. Members of the Working Group helpfully pushed me on the question of who got to be a "sexual scientist," and caused me to think more about feminists' exclusion from the history of sexual science itself. It is therefore my hope that, in addition to rethinking the role of sexual science within feminist sexual politics, my dissertation can also encourage the writing of a more inclusive, hence more accurate, history of sexual science that fully accounts for feminists' crucial contributions.

## Table of Contents

<b>Acknowledgements</b>	<b>ii</b>
<b>Preface</b>	<b>vii</b>
<b>Abstract</b>	<b>xviii</b>
<b>Chapter One: Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
<i>The promise of science and the politics of reform in a biopolitical age</i>	12
<i>The polysemy of sexual politics: Why and how sex mattered at the turn of the century</i>	18
Sex, Power, Science: Foucault’s History of Sexuality	19
Sexual difference, sexual governance, and the feminist challenge: How feminists politicized sex	28
<i>Which feminists? What networks? Defining epistemic communities</i>	34
<i>Transnational ‘ways of seeing’ and the possibility of open-ended histories</i>	42
<i>Chapter Overview</i>	47
<b>Chapter Two: An ‘Elusive’ Phenomenon: The ‘Normal’ Female Sex Drive</b>	<b>52</b>
<i>Changing scientific understandings of the female sex drive</i>	56
<i>Gaining “clearer insight into the sex life of the female”: Feminists define the female sex drive</i>	72
<i>“Nature is a hopeless spendthrift and a reckless sower of discord”: Internal feminist debates on the limits and limitations of the ‘normal’</i>	84
<i>“[O]nly the natural drive which is innate in a healthy individual was referred to...”:</i> <i>The limits of the normal female sex drive</i>	91
<i>Conclusion</i>	95
<b>Chapter Three: Permutations of the Third Sex: Feminism and Alternative Sexualities</b>	<b>98</b>
<i>Inverts, Intermediaries, and Instigators: Female Homosexuality and Feminism in Sexual Scientific Theory</i>	104
<i>Outrage or Opportunity? Feminists’ Varied Engagements with the Question of Homosexuality</i>	119
“Rational Female Masculinity”: Anna Rüling’s Urninde	121
“Woman-Identified-Woman” <i>avant la lettre</i> : Johanna Elberskirchen’s feminine homosexual	129
Psychic hermaphroditism as evolutionary ideal: Rosa Mayreder’s Synthetic Human Being	136
<i>Conclusion</i>	145



<b>Chapter Four: The Trouble with ‘Normal’: Feminism, Science and the Critique of Male Sexuality</b>	<b>148</b>
<i>Masculinity and its Discontents: Fin-de-Siècle Discourses on Male Sexuality, Disease, and Degeneration</i>	152
<i>Discerning the ‘true nature’ of male sexuality: Sexual Science and Feminist Critique</i>	161
<i>Competing visions of sexual reform: Equality, Matriarchy, Asexuality, Unisexuality</i>	174
<i>Conclusion</i>	188
<b>Chapter Five: “The struggle for the rights of women are no more than a means to an end”? Women’s sexual freedom and racial regeneration</b>	<b>194</b>
<i>The “Chief Problems for Solution”: Race, Sex, and Science at the Turn of the Century</i>	202
<i>“Procreate, Not to Multiply, But to Advance!” Advocating women’s rights and racial regeneration in the Malthusian League and League for the Protection of Mothers and Sexual Reform</i>	214
<i>Jane Hume Clapperton’s Vision of the Future</i>	221
<i>The “Modern Worldview” of Grete Meisel-Hess</i>	231
<i>Conclusion</i>	244
<b>Chapter Six: Conclusion</b>	<b>248</b>
<i>Review of Arguments</i>	249
<i>Lines of Future Research</i>	256
<b>Appendix: Birth and Death Dates of Major Figures</b>	<b>264</b>
<b>Bibliography</b>	<b>265</b>
<i>Archival Sources</i>	265
<i>Selected Periodicals</i>	267
<i>Primary Sources</i>	267
<i>Secondary Sources</i>	282

## **Abstract**

Between 1880 and 1914, German-speaking and British ‘first wave’ feminists from varying political, religious and ethnic backgrounds engaged scientific “facts” and theories to underwrite and legitimize their demands for sexual reform. These scientific facts and theories, derived from the natural sciences, medical knowledge, anthropology, and psychiatric research, were coalescing into a fledging sexual science (sexology) at the turn of the century. In this dissertation, I examine how and why sexual science appealed to some feminists as an intellectual resource and potentially legitimizing discourse, even though sexual science was often used to disqualify feminists’ demands for equality and social justice. I focus in particular on the writings of lesser-known feminists, including Henriette Fürth, Ruth Bre, Johanna Elberskirchen, Anna Rüling, Rosa Mayreder, Frances Swiney, Grete Meisel-Hess, and Jane Hume Clapperton.

Based on case studies of discourses surrounding the ‘normal’ female sex drive, ‘abnormal’ female sexual subjectivity, male (hetero)sexuality, and the role of eugenics in feminist sex reform, I argue that feminists’ investments in sexual science were simultaneously epistemological and strategic. I maintain that sexual science appealed to many feminists because of its representation of sex as a natural, material ‘fact of life’ that required ‘objective’ study and understanding, not dogmatic moral judgments. Sexual science thus enabled feminists to think about sex, especially sexual subjectivities and sexual relations, in ways that transcended the limitations of ‘man-made’ world. It also

helped feminists to combat what they believed to be false and biased ‘pseudo-scientific’ knowledge about sex, and especially women’s sexuality. Feminists engaged sexual science as a tactically polyvalent discourse to produce their own ‘objective’ sexual knowledge, which they pitted against what they claimed were male scientists’ self-interested assertions. So doing enabled feminists to contest existing modes of what I have termed sexual governance, and to propose alternatives. Ultimately, while acknowledging the many ways in which feminists’ appeals to sexual science were problematic, I nonetheless argue that their engagement with sexual science was also empowering, and constituted a critical form of feminist praxis.

## Chapter One: Introduction

In a 1904 edition of the German weekly feminist newspaper *Frauen Rundschau*, then editor Dr. Ella Mensch used the entirety of her personal op-ed column to review fellow feminist Johanna Elberskirchen's treatise, *What has the man made of the woman, child, and himself? Revolution and the deliverance of woman. A break with the man. A guidepost to the future (Was hat der Mann aus Weib, Kind und sich gemacht? Revolution und Erlösung des Weibes. Eine Abrechnung mit dem Mann. Ein Wegweiser in die Zukunft*, Third Edition, 1904). Elberskirchen, a social democrat and supporter of women's suffrage and homosexual rights, argued in *Revolution* that women's liberation was only possible through what she termed a "break with man."<sup>1</sup> In her view, emancipating women from men's 'excessive' sexual demands would free them to cultivate their minds and strengthen their bodies. To achieve women's sexual emancipation, Elberskirchen advocated the establishment of a "new style matriarchy," wherein women would figure as the centre of both the family and the state. She also called for the recognition of female homosexuality's naturalness, along with its moral superiority over heterosexuality.<sup>2</sup> Intriguingly—and, for Ella Mensch, problematically—

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<sup>1</sup> Elberskirchen was a member of the Preussische Landesverein für Frauenstimmenrecht, the Fortschrittlichen Verein, the Sozialdemokratischen Verein, and a chairperson in the Scientific Humanitarian Committee. In 1912 she founded the Reichsverein für Frauenstimmenrecht.

<sup>2</sup> In Chapter Two I explore the definition and valences of "homosexuality" at the turn of the century. Here I want to clarify my use of the term "heterosexuality." I use 'heterosexuality' to refer to relations of intimacy between men and women, and the legal and social provisions that recognize and regulate their shared life. I therefore view heterosexuality as a social institution, *and* as a potential site for the creation of intimate bonds between men and women. In so doing I adopt a somewhat broader definition of the term

Elberskirchen supported her arguments and proposed reforms using evidence derived from biology, psychology, eugenics, and anthropology—bodies of knowledge whose findings were coalescing into a *Sexualwissenschaft*, or ‘sexual science,’ concerned with studying, and evaluating, sexed bodies, sexual relationships, sexual practices, and sexual desires.

In her review, Mensch challenged Elberskirchen’s proposals, and claimed that her “academic-scientific mode of argumentation” represented a threat to the goals and progress of the women's movement. Her skepticism was not groundless: throughout the nineteenth century opponents of women’s rights had used scientific ‘facts’ to prove women’s physiological and intellectual inferiority to man, and thus to disqualify feminists’ demands for women’s greater inclusion in public life.<sup>3</sup> According to Mensch, herself a novelist, teacher, and scholar of German culture, science was inherently anti-feminist and misogynist; focusing on science therefore only distracted feminists’ attention from moral, ethical and cultural questions. "As long as [Elberskirchen] continues on this path based on writings by Lamarck, Darwin, Haeckel and others," Mensch insisted, she "occupies the same ground that has given her opponents the most

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than Jonathan Ned Katz. See Jonathan Ned Katz, *The Invention of Heterosexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

<sup>3</sup> Many feminist historical works have pointed out the ways in which science was used to deny women’s rights. See especially Cynthia Eagle Russett, *Sexual Science: The Victorian Construction of Womanhood* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), and Janet Sayers, *Biological Politics: Feminist and Anti-Feminist Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 1990). Feminist theorists and historians working within the science studies tradition have also pointed out the ‘masculinism’ of science. See Londa Schiebinger, *Nature’s Body: Gender and the Making of Modern Science*, Second Edition (Rutgers, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2003); Ludmilla Jordanova, *Sexual Visions: Images of Gender in Science and Medicine between the Eighteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1993); Mary Jacobus, Evelyn Fox Keller, and Sally Shuttleworth, eds., *Body/Politics: Women and the Discourses of Science* (London: Routledge, 1989); Evelyn Fox Keller, *Reflections on Gender and Science* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986); and Sandra Harding, *The Science Question in Feminism* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986).

ammunition for their assertions."<sup>4</sup>

Elberskirchen was quick to respond to Mensch's critique, and her six-page rejoinder appeared as an open letter in a subsequent issue of the *Rundschau*. For Elberskirchen, women's biology not only possessed "the great inspiration for the question of women's rights," but also provided "the most realistic and therefore untouchable and undeniable proofs of the natural superiority of the female." Like the pioneering sexual scientist Dr. Magnus Hirschfeld, Elberskirchen insisted that science would lead to truth and justice. "As long as you rely on metaphysical arguments, which are elastic," she asserted, "a willing person with a good understanding of argumentation can confound you. That ends when you appeal to scientific facts, the results of natural history; they cannot be twisted or turned. If I deduce the superiority of women from their biology...[it is because] the source of every higher ethic, every higher moral is the laws of life."<sup>5</sup>

Given her historical marginality and aloofness from the major organizations of the German women's movement, it would be easy to isolate Elberskirchen as an exceptional figure; however, Johanna Elberskirchen was not unique among her compatriots in using science to argue for sexual reform.<sup>6</sup> Although scientific 'fact' served as a key weapon in the nineteenth century anti-feminist arsenal, scientific ideas ranging from evolution to psychoanalysis inspired a range of German-speaking feminists, such as Henriette Fürth, Grete Meisel-Hess, Helene Stöcker, and Adele Schreiber, who sought to fundamentally

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<sup>4</sup> Ella Mensch, "Perspektiven von Ella Mensch," *Frauen Rundschau* 5, no. 9 (1904): 257-259.

<sup>5</sup> Johanna Elberskirchen, "Offener Brief an Fräulein Dr. phil. Ella Mensch, Berlin," *Frauen Rundschau* 5, no. 12 (1904): 376-382.

<sup>6</sup> While Elberskirchen was marginal to most of the major German women's movement, archival records indicate that major feminists such as Henriette Fürth and Helene Stöcker were aware of, and had read, her writings. See Stöcker to Fürth, letter dated 20.10.1905, Folder 38, Kollektion Henriette Fürth, International Institute for Social History, Amsterdam, Netherlands.

transform the sexual status quo at the turn of the century.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, as historian Edward Ross Dickinson has observed, feminists were not alone in their enthusiasm for science: in fact, many "self-defined modernists and progressives" in Germany believed science would provide a foundation for "new ethical and social rules."<sup>8</sup> Indeed, the early years of the twentieth century saw the formation of numerous sex reform organizations in Germany, such as the League for the Protection of Mothers and Sexual Reform (Bund für Mutterschutz und Sexualreform, later Deutscher Bund für Mutterschutz und Sexualreform), the Scientific Humanitarian Committee (Wissenschaftlich-humanitäres Komitee), and the German Society for the Suppression of Venereal Diseases (Deutsche Gesellschaft zur Bekämpfung der Geschlechtskrankheiten), which brought together feminists, physicians, and scientists who shared a common commitment to scientific solutions for sexual problems.

However, this enthusiasm for, and politicization of, science was not limited to Germany. Appeals to sexual science also played an important role in British feminists' sexual politics. Historians such as Lucy Bland, Lesley Hall, and Judith Walkowitz have demonstrated that between the years 1880 and 1914, scientific evidence figured prominently in the discussions of the Men and Women's Club and the publications of the Malthusian League; in the writings of Havelock Ellis and Edward Carpenter; in the feminist treatises of Jane Hume Clapperton, Ellis Ethelmer, and Frances Swiney; and in

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<sup>7</sup> Throughout my dissertation I refer to "German-speaking" feminists—and sexual scientists—because I include Austrian and Swiss figures who participated in organizations, and influenced debates, in Germany and Britain. These figures include Grete Meisel-Hess, Rosa Mayreder, Richard von Krafft-Ebing, Otto Weininger, August Forel, and Sigmund Freud. However, I do not discuss Austria or Switzerland as sites.

<sup>8</sup> Edward Ross Dickinson, "Reflections on Feminism and Monism in the Kaiserreich," *Central European History* 34 (2001): 191.

the vigorous debates among feminists associated with the *Freewoman* journal.<sup>9</sup> Like their German counterparts, British feminists believed that science, as an epistemology and as a body of expert knowledge, could provide a foundation for their visions of, and demands for, sexual reform. Like Johanna Elberskirchen, British feminist Frances Swiney maintained that "[s]cience, i.e. knowledge of natural law" constituted "woman's invincible and strongest ally in her claim for the fullest human rights."<sup>10</sup>

These feminists' embrace of sexual science in the pursuit of sex reform, their enthusiasm for scientific values and epistemology, and the internationalism of this phenomenon, all raise a number of intriguing questions. Why did science appeal so strongly to feminists at the height of so-called 'first wave' feminism? What roles did science play in feminist sexual politics? How did science inform feminist thought concerning sex, as both a practice and an embodied reality? And in recognizing that feminists' enthusiasm for science was not nation-specific, what kinds of new insights and lines of inquiry present themselves? My dissertation addresses these questions by investigating why and how some German-speaking and British feminists engaged sexual science as part of their quest for sexual reform at the turn of the twentieth century.

Based upon four thematically-driven case studies, in this dissertation I argue that science appealed to the feminists I study both as an intellectual resource and as a potentially legitimizing discourse. I suggest that these feminists embraced science as a privileged way of knowing and understanding sex because science represented sex as a

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<sup>9</sup> See Lesley Hall, "Hauling down the Double Standard: feminism, social purity, and sexual science in late nineteenth century Britain," *Gender and History* 16 (April 2004): 36-56; Lucy Bland, *Banishing the Beast: English Feminism and Sexual Morality, 1885-1914* (London: Penguin Books, 1995); Judith Walkowitz, *City of Dreadful Delight: Narratives of Sexual Danger in Late-Victorian London* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

<sup>10</sup> Frances Swiney, *Science and Women: The Missing Factor* (Cheltenham: S. R. Grove, 1910).



material reality, that is, as a function and characteristic of bodies and brains that could be studied dispassionately as a natural ‘fact of life.’ Treating sex as a material reality broke with conceptualizations of sex as sin, and instead encouraged ‘objective’ biological and psychological inquiries into sexed bodies, desires, processes, and relationships. Indeed, the feminists I study insisted that gaining ‘objective’ knowledge about sex was a necessary precondition for the formation of moral opinions, and for the proper governance of sexual life. Moreover, I maintain that sexual scientific ‘facts’ and theories enabled these feminists to conceive of sexual life in ways that transcended the limitations of the ‘man-made’ world. As Elberskirchen’s defense of *Revolution* makes clear, these feminists believed that science exposed the true, ‘natural,’ and thus legitimate condition of sexual life—one in which females performed critical roles, possessed ‘natural’ and active sexual needs and instincts, and lived as autonomous and self-determining sexual agents. Feminists thus believed that scientific arguments and theories bolstered their demands for women’s greater participation and power in the governance of human sexual life.

Science’s attraction for feminists transcended ideological, national, religious, and political divisions; however, it appealed most strongly to feminists seeking to radically transform the governance of sexuality. Feminists disseminated their ideas through various publicly circulated texts, including treatises, newspaper and journal articles, petitions, novels, lectures, and handbooks of health—texts which were read and discussed not only by other feminists, but also by recognized (male) sexual scientific ‘experts’.

Importantly, feminists’ scientifically-informed analyses were not simply derivative of male-authored expertise. Rather, as I will demonstrate in the following

chapters, their ideas and texts represent a significant form of original intellectual labour. Indeed, the feminists I study ultimately emerge not as dependent upon male scientists and their expertise, but rather as actively engaged in the process of producing sexual knowledge, and debating the broader implications of this knowledge. Recovering the history of feminists' engagements with sexual science should, I maintain, lead scholars to question how they conceptualize sexual science and its epistemic community—and specifically, who is included within and excluded from the currently male-dominated intellectual canon of sexual scientific knowledge.

The feminists I study were certainly suspicious of a 'male bias' among sexual scientists, and therefore did not uncritically rearticulate scientific ideas. In fact, these feminists explicitly and implicitly pitted their 'objective' knowledge against what they claimed were male scientists' self-interested assertions. I therefore maintain these feminists not only embraced science for epistemological reasons, but also deployed science for strategic political reasons. To combat what they believed to be false and biased 'pseudo-scientific' knowledge about sex, and specifically about women's sexuality, these feminists engaged in a politics of sexual knowledge production, and seized upon science's truth-claims and increasing socio-political authority to legitimize their arguments. Moreover, science enabled feminists to speak publicly and frankly about sex in ways that did not severely compromise their respectability—a precious political commodity for disempowered social actors, and one that, for women, was premised upon the pretence of sexual ignorance. Deploying scientific ideas and language thus enabled feminists to claim, as Käthe Schirmacher did, that they were confronting

and representing the world “as it is,” in all its “darkness”—yet also imagining how it could be better.<sup>11</sup>

As an authoritative discourse that informed feminist thought *and* politics, I argue that science constituted a ‘tactically polyvalent’ discourse for fin-de-siècle feminism. Michel Foucault coined the term ‘tactical polyvalence’ in his *History of Sexuality*, Volume I to describe the ways in which authoritative discourses such as science can serve both as instruments of, and points of resistance to, power.<sup>12</sup> Foucault argued that disempowered subjects could appropriate the language and ideas of authoritative discourses, such as science, to construct ‘reverse discourses’ that challenged existing arrangements of power.<sup>13</sup> In drawing attention to the fluidity of discourses, tactical polyvalence illuminates the ways in which ideas—and the authority and legitimacy attached to them—migrate and circulate beyond their points of origin. The concept also highlights the important, intimate interconnection between knowledge and power in public debates.

Understanding feminists’ engagement with sexual science through the concept of tactical polyvalence can in turn help us grasp the stakes involved in feminist sexual politics at the turn of the century. In particular, the relationship between power and knowledge highlighted by tactical polyvalence helps reframe fin-de-siècle feminist sexual politics as a politics of what I call ‘sexual governance.’ Sexual governance refers to the vast and interconnected complex of norms, ethics, and laws that regulated sexual

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<sup>11</sup> See Käthe Schirmacher, *Herrenmoral und Frauenhalbheit* (Berlin: Verlag von Richard Taendler, 1896), 332.

<sup>12</sup> See Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, Volume I, trans. Robert Hurley (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 100-102.

<sup>13</sup> Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 101.

behaviour and delineated relations of power between men and women. These modes of sexual governance, which transcended the divisions of public and private, decided who could have sex with whom, where, when, and how often. They determined entitlements, or rights, to behave in certain ways, and did so not only through legal protections but also through moral sanctions. While sexual governance operated through legal channels, it also hinged upon hegemonic ways of thinking about sex. It further depended upon definitions of sexual subjectivities that simultaneously implicated gender and sexuality in adjudicating freedoms and restrictions. Consequently, feminists' attempts to reform sexual governance not only involved making demands of the state, but also required transforming dominant modes of thinking about sex and subjectivity.<sup>14</sup>

However, it is important to stress that feminists were not 'outside' of sexual governance, or simply subject to its restrictions. Feminists did not seek to throw off the shackles of sexual restraint and embrace untrammelled sexual liberty. Through their participation in public debates on sex, sexuality, and social order, feminists played a role—a role they actively sought—in shaping modes of sexual governance. Importantly, through their participation, feminists made claims to power. Indeed, despite their many internal disagreements, feminists in general demanded the empowerment of individual

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<sup>14</sup> "Subjectivity" and "the subject" are slippery concepts with multiple meanings within feminist and critical theory. In this study I use the term "subjectivity" to encompass the range of claims, aspirations, and normative investments articulated and asserted by German-speaking and British feminists concerning women's capacity—and need—to develop a sense of self reflective of their 'true nature' and powers as particularly sexed and gendered beings. The feminists I study understood subjectivity as a critical aspect of their ability to act on and transform both the world and themselves, that is, their agency and self-actualization. Helene Stöcker and Grete Meisel-Hess, for example, regularly wrote about women's need to "become subjects" (*Subjekt-werden*). On a political level, subjectivity clearly has implications for one's entitlement to rights and freedoms. My thanks to Elizabeth Wingrove for helping me articulate this definition and think through the varying levels of analysis involved in defining subjectivity.

women as autonomous sexual agents and a new arrangement of social powers that would give women as a group greater regulatory control over sex, both in public and private.

Yet feminists' engagements with sexual science were not unequivocally empowering, nor were they ethically unproblematic. In many ways, sexual science limited and undermined feminist sexual politics. Feminists' engagements with sexual science and attempts to reform sexual governance cannot be understood outside of the 'biopolitical' moment in which they occurred. Biopolitical concerns with the 'quality' of populations and the effects of individual acts on collective wellbeing inflected both sexual science and feminist sexual politics. Feminists certainly adjudicated sex and sexualities in the binary terms provided by sexual science, such as healthy versus sick, regenerative versus degenerative, natural versus unnatural, and normal versus abnormal. As a result, they asserted differential standards of biological value—and hence, rights and freedoms—among women, and thereby undercut the universal emancipatory potential of feminists' proposed sexual reform measures. Feminists also conceived of collective life in organic, racial terms—indeed, as a 'body politic' in an almost literal sense. While thinking about collective life in this way enabled feminists to assert 'natural' rights, it also tasked them with certain reproductive responsibilities that helped define—and restrict—what it would mean for women to be sexually 'free.' The feminists I study therefore helped entrench the biopolitical framework that shaped public discussions of sex in the early twentieth century, and further contributed to the 'biologization' of the social.<sup>15</sup> Likewise, by engaging the ideas and appropriating the authority of science,

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<sup>15</sup> Edward Ross Dickinson, "Biopolitics, Fascism, Democracy: Some Reflections on Our Discourse About 'Modernity'," *Central European History* 37 (2004): 3. Dickinson attributes the phrase 'biologization of the social' to Ulrich Herbert, citing Herbert's Ulrich Herbert, "Rassismus und rationales Kalkul," in

feminists helped buttress the power of science and scientific institutions—institutions that often marginalized and worked against women's interests.

Feminists' efforts to ground their visions of, and demands for, sexual reform in sexual science bequeathed an incredibly complicated historical legacy. This statement is particularly true of the German case. Considerable scholarly attention has been paid to 'first wave' German-speaking feminists' deployment of science for political ends; however, much of it has been directed, like Mensch's critique, at evaluating the negative implications of this practice. Until rather recently, historians have been preoccupied with determining feminists' responsibility for fomenting and legitimizing an intellectual environment in which Nazism could take root.<sup>16</sup> Yet such a nationally-specific line of questioning ignores the historical reality that this discursive phenomenon was not a strictly German one. Moreover, the scientization of feminist politics itself emerged as a result of significant intellectual exchanges between German-speaking and British scientists, feminists, and sex reformers.

I therefore maintain that viewing feminists' engagements with sexual science from a transnational perspective enables historians to view sexual science as a complex discourse of possibility and legitimacy for German-speaking and British feminists who sought to fundamentally transform sexual life. It further allows us to see that this discursive practice had no necessary, predetermined outcome. Like historians such as Edward Ross Dickinson and Peter Fritzsche, I maintain that specific enactments of

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*"Vernichtungspolitik": Eine Debatte über den Zusammenhang von Sozialpolitik und Genozid im nationalsozialistischen Deutschland*, ed. Wolfgang Schneider (Hamburg: Junius, 1991), 28.

<sup>16</sup> Richard Evans, *The Feminist Movement in Germany 1894-1933* (London: SAGE, 1976), 150-69, and Barbara Greven-Aschoff, *Die bürgerliche Frauenbewegung in Deutschland 1894-1933* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1981), 106-115; Claudia Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland: Women, the Family, and Nazi Politics* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987), 31.

scientifically-informed reform measures required catalysts and willing actors—not merely a particular national context.<sup>17</sup> In treating science as a discourse of possibility for feminists at the turn of the century, without deterministically linking my insights to future events, I seek to contribute to what Dickinson has called “open-ended” histories that are “more interested in potentials than in imperatives, in complexities rather than logics, perhaps even in agency rather than dynamics.”<sup>18</sup> Yet while arguing that this discursive practice had no predetermined outcomes, I nevertheless maintain that it had lasting consequences, specifically in shaping ‘modern’ ways of thinking about, and politicizing, sex.

In the remainder of this introduction, I elaborate the above arguments by examining why science appealed to a broad array of social reformers during the period under study; why and how sex became the focal point of social concerns and intervention as a result of biopolitics and feminist agitation; which feminists were attracted to sexual science; why I focus on German-speaking and British feminists; and how deploying transnational ‘ways of seeing’ this historical phenomenon offers new insights and provokes new lines of inquiry. I conclude by providing chapter overviews.<sup>19</sup>

### The promise of science and the politics of reform in a biopolitical age

Fin-de-siècle feminists were not alone in their belief that science should play a leading role in reforming social and political life. At the turn of the century, a wide range of activists and intellectuals in Germany and Britain embraced science as a means of

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<sup>17</sup> See Dickinson, “Biopolitics,” and Peter Fritzsche, “Did Weimar Fail?” *Journal of Modern History* 68 (September 1996): 629-656.

<sup>18</sup> Edward Ross Dickinson, “Not So Scary After All? Reform in Imperial and Weimar Germany,” *Central European History* 43 (2010): 166.

<sup>19</sup> I take the expression “way of seeing” from Margot Canaday, “Thinking Sex in the Transnational Turn: An Introduction,” *American Historical Review* 114 (December 2009): 1250-1257.

fundamentally reforming society and politics. In addition to feminists, this diverse group included socialists, nationalists, hygienists, aesthetes, life reformers, and self-understood ‘moderate’ social reformers.<sup>20</sup> Many of these actors were not academically-trained scientific experts; nevertheless, scientific ideas and values underwrote their critical analyses of current conditions, and informed their proposals for reform. These variegated actors helped create a public sphere of discursive engagement, beyond the realm of formal politics, in which they could debate their scientifically-informed visions of and measures for reform.

Science became available to diverse audiences thanks to the vast efforts to popularize scientific knowledge over the course of the nineteenth century. New scientific theories and findings were disseminated through journals, newspapers, lectures, exhibitions, novels, lyrical texts, and inexpensive tracts designed to make complex ideas accessible to educated lay audiences.<sup>21</sup> As a result of these efforts, enthusiasm for science transcended class and gender boundaries: indeed, both women and workers were avid consumers of science as it was popularized over the course of the nineteenth century.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> See, for example, Dickinson, “Not So Scary After All?”; Michael Hau, *The Cult of Health and Beauty in Germany: A Social History, 1890-1930* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2003); Kevin Repp, *Reformers, Critics, and the Paths of German Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000); Paul Weindling, *Health, Race, and German Politics between National Unification and Nazism, 1870-1945* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

<sup>21</sup> See Bernard Lightman and Aileen Fyfe, eds, *Science in the Marketplace: Nineteenth-Century Sites and Experiences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007); Bernard Lightman, *Victorian Popularizers of Science: Designing Nature for New Audiences* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007). The concept of ‘popular science’ and ‘popularized science’ are contested within the history of science; however, the controversial nature of this category stems from the dichotomy between ‘professional’ and ‘popular’ science it implies. The fact that scientific knowledge was publicly disseminated in the nineteenth century is not contested. For more on this historiographic debate, see the essays included as part of the “Focus: Historicizing ‘Popular Science’” in *Isis* 100 (June 2009), as well as Roger Cooter and Stephen Pumfrey, “Separate Spheres and Public Spaces: Reflections on the History of Science Popularization and Science in Popular Culture,” *History of Science* 32 (September 1994): 237-267.

<sup>22</sup> See, for example, Barbara Gates, *Kindred Nature: Victorian and Edwardian Women Embrace the Living World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998); Alfred Kelly, *The Descent of Darwin: The*



Science appealed to these diverse audiences for ideational and ideological reasons.<sup>23</sup> At this time, science was rather broadly understood as factual knowledge produced through objective, empirical investigation and analysis of the material world. While this definition elided the distinction between ‘natural’ and ‘social’ sciences, science indisputably connoted knowledge that was distinct from metaphysical philosophy, theology, spiritual ruminations, or subjective reflections. Unlike those bodies of knowledge, science purported to interrogate and reveal the world ‘as it is.’ Science claimed to deal in reality and truth, not in superstition, dogma, or custom.

Such understandings of science gave rise to the belief that it could provide an enduring, rational, and therefore more just foundation for human life, one that would break with the inequities and arbitrary authority of the past. By revealing the ‘laws of life’ and replacing ignorance with enlightenment, science offered to place human destiny under human control. Humans could then continually design futures that improved upon the past and present by enhancing material living and working conditions, physiological and psychological standards of health and wellbeing, and political and intellectual freedoms. Proponents maintained that science could liberate humanity by opening up new vistas of existential possibility.

The desire to determine human fate—and the belief that science could satisfy this desire—is profoundly modern, and reflects the ambitions of subjects vying for greater social and political power, rights and freedoms in the nineteenth and early twentieth

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*Popularization of Darwinism in Germany, 1860-1914* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1981). As Kelly notes on page 128, popular Darwinism dominated workers’ nonfiction reading. After August Bebel, the most popular nonfiction authors were Arnold Dodel, Oswald Köhler, Edward Aveling, Wilhelm Bölsche and Ernst Haeckel.

<sup>23</sup> For a general overview of the role of science in nineteenth century European thought and society, see Richard Olson, *Science and Scientism in Nineteenth Century Europe* (University of Illinois Press, 2008).

centuries.<sup>24</sup> Science and scientists played key roles in challenging the power of entrenched elites, namely the clergy and aristocracy, during the modern era; indeed, the emergence of science over the course of the nineteenth century is inextricable from the rise of the bourgeoisie.<sup>25</sup> Appeals to nature in particular underwrote powerful normative discourses: establishing what naturally “is” underwrote forceful prescriptions of what “ought” to be, and gave rise to variegated utopian visions.<sup>26</sup> Through their claims to scientifically established and verifiable knowledge of the ‘natural’ order, scientifically-informed activists and intellectuals sought to expose the illegitimacy of existing power relations based on ‘backward’ traditions and dangerous ‘superstition’, and to offer an alternative vision of social order. Importantly, this relationship between science and politics was an international phenomenon. While Thomas Huxley, John Tyndall, Herbert Spencer and other members of the ‘X-Club’ invoked science to contest the power of religion and the clergy in Britain during the 1870s, Rudolf Virchow, founder of the Progressive Party, played a leading role in defining and advancing the concurrent ‘Kulturkampf’ that pitted the Liberals’ secularizing policies against the authority of the Catholic Church following Germany’s unification.<sup>27</sup> Science thus informed a modern

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<sup>24</sup> See Dickinson, “Biopolitics,” 2-3. See also Anthony Giddens and Christopher Pierson, *Conversations with Anthony Giddens: Making Sense of Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998).

<sup>25</sup> Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 141-3. See also Weindling, *Health, Race, and German Politics*.

<sup>26</sup> See Lorraine Daston and Fernando Vidal, “Introduction: Doing What Comes Naturally,” in *The Moral Authority of Nature*, edited by Lorraine Daston and Fernando Vidal (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 1-20.

<sup>27</sup> Frank Turner, “Public Science in Britain, 1880-1919,” *Isis* 71 (December 1980): 591; Repp, *Reformers*, 40-41. On the ‘X-Club,’ see Ruth Barton, “Huxley, Lubbock, and Half a Dozen Others’: Professionals and Gentlemen in the Formation of the X Club, 1851-1864.” *Isis* 89 (September 1998): 410-444, J. Vernon Jensen, “The X Club: Fraternity of Victorian Scientists”, *The British Journal for the History of Science* 5 (June 1970): 63-72, Roy M. MacLeod, “The X-Club a Social Network of Science in Late-Victorian England,” *Notes and Records of the Royal Society of London* 24 (April 1970): 305-322.

politics of legitimacy among new social actors vying for greater power and authority—one that feminists readily seized upon.

By the turn of the century, scientifically-minded reformers had become less concerned with contesting the power of the church and aristocracy, though the former remained a favourite target. In both Germany and Britain, increased international competition for economic and geopolitical predominance focused attention upon an array of other perceived threats to collective progress—and especially threats to the health of domestic populations. The health and wellbeing of populations had been the object of sustained political and social concern throughout the nineteenth century, as they were considered the foundations of both individual and national wellbeing and prosperity.<sup>28</sup> Health also signified stability, cohesion, and strength in the individual body and the ‘body politic’. In the eyes of many fin-de-siècle scientists, social reformers, and state officials in Germany and Britain, rabid economic and political competition, and rapid social and demographic transformation, had ravaged the health of individuals and society, leaving them in precarious states. They insisted that any further decline in the health and wellbeing of individuals or society posed a serious threat to collective survival.

Wide-ranging concerns with individual and collective health gave rise to what Michel Foucault termed “biopolitics,” a vast discursive field that concerned, in Dickinson’s words, the “care, regulation, disciplining, improvement, and shaping of individual bodies and the collective ‘body’ of national populations.”<sup>29</sup> In stressing the

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<sup>28</sup> Weindling, *Health, Race and German Politics*, 1.

<sup>29</sup> Though Foucault developed the concept of “biopolitics,” here I draw upon Dickinson’s helpful discussion of biopolitics. According to Dickinson, biopolitics encompassed a range of ideas, practices, and institutions, including “medical practices from individual therapy and regimes of personal hygiene to the great public health campaigns and institutions; social welfare programs, again from individualized care for

fundamental interconnection between individual and collective wellbeing, biopolitical discourses sought to nurture social cohesion and collective progress. Indeed, as many historians have observed, scientifically-informed prescriptions for realizing such ends were construed as a means of overcoming the damaging divisions of partisan politics.<sup>30</sup> Like the interplay of science and politics generally, the emergence of biopolitics was an international phenomenon that assumed particular national manifestations. A variety of state officials, scientific experts, intellectuals, and activists interested in improving and regulating health constituted this discursive field through their vigorous debates over biopolitical ideas and reform measures.

Biopolitics was premised upon an inextricable connection between individual and collective health. Specifically, it conceived of collective life as organically interconnected and interdependent. As a result, the state of an individual's health was believed to have broad social repercussions. Participants in biopolitical discourses therefore broadly agreed that the improvement of individual and collective health must proceed from the body. Drawing upon innovations in the biological and biomedical sciences, they maintained that 'true' knowledge of bodies, their processes, and their 'natural' capacities and potentialities should inform social organization and governance. Consequently, as Edward Ross Dickinson has observed, all biopolitical discourses aimed to define "some characteristics and behaviours as healthy and natural," ergo 'normal,'

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particular populations to larger-scale and quasi-universal programs such as social insurance and tax policies intended to encourage particular demographic outcomes; the whole complex of racial science, from physical anthropology to the various racial theories; eugenics and the science of human heredity; demography; scientific management and occupational health; and at least potentially the full range of related disciplines and practices such as psychiatry and psychology, discourses of self-improvement (nudism, vegetarianism, fitness and nutrition fads, temperance), regimes of beauty, and the like." Dickinson, "Biopolitics," 3-4.

<sup>30</sup> See Repp, *Reformers*; Weindling, *Health, Race, and German Politics*; Turner, "Public Science in Britain."

and “others as diseased, unhealthy, unnatural, and in need of containment, stigmatization, treatment, or elimination.”<sup>31</sup> This tendency also extended to diagnoses of social and cultural phenomena, movements, and ideas—most notably feminism—as ‘unnatural,’ ‘perverse,’ or ‘diseased.’ Proponents of biopolitical aims and rationale therefore maintained that concerns for collective health ought to adjudicate individual rights and freedoms, particularly regarding bodily practices that risked the spread of infection and congenital debility. As I will demonstrate over the following chapters, such beliefs also pervaded feminist thought.

However, this belief posed the significant problem of how to govern individual acts, decisions, and behaviours that affected health. According to Foucault, this problem was addressed through new techniques of governance—namely, through the inculcation of new norms and ethics that would discipline individual behaviour—and through the deployment of a particularly intimate point of intervention: sex.<sup>32</sup> But why did sex constitute a focus of concern and locus of intervention for reformers at the turn of the century? Can biopolitics alone be held responsible? And what exactly did ‘sex’ mean?

#### The polysemy of sexual politics: Why and how sex mattered at the turn of the century

Foucault’s *History of Sexuality*, Volume I and feminist histories of sex, gender, and feminism provide some answers to these questions. Foucault’s account offers a broad historical narrative and key analytical tools through which to understand the emergence of sex as a concern for power, and the role of sexual science in this process. Feminist historians have drawn attention to the importance of sexual difference in

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<sup>31</sup> Dickinson, “Biopolitics,” 4.

<sup>32</sup> Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 141-3.

governing sexuality, and to first-wave feminists' critical role in politicizing sex. The Foucauldian and feminist histories of sex, I insist, must be viewed as complementary and interdependent analytics that together provide a comprehensive understanding of the importance of sex in modern Europe. Together, they clarify that "sex" simultaneously connoted gender and sexuality during the period under study, and that these vectors of identity were considered inextricably interconnected in dominant understandings of "sex" at the turn of the century.<sup>33</sup>

*Sex, Power, Science: Foucault's History of Sexuality*

In his influential *History of Sexuality*, Volume I, Michel Foucault offers historians a provocative and persuasive account of why and how sex became the target of power in late nineteenth and early twentieth century Europe. Foucault's account also illuminates the role a fledgling science of sex played in transforming sex into a locus for the intervention of power. According to Foucault, increasing preoccupation with sex reflects the emergence of a new governance system, associated with biopolitics, that was invested in holding a 'power over life' rather than a right to mete out death.<sup>34</sup> In Foucault's account, the emergence of this new system was bound up with broader historical transformations associated with modernity, namely the rise of the nation-state and its administrative institutions, the growth of capitalism, and the development of biological sciences beginning in the seventeenth century.<sup>35</sup> Foucault suggested that the emergence

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<sup>33</sup> This position has been argued by some feminist scholars such as Biddy Martin, and is increasingly embraced by historians of gender and sexuality. See, for example, Biddy Martin, "Extraordinary Homosexuals and the Fear of Being Ordinary," *differences* 6 (1994): 101-25, and Kevin P. Murphy and Jennifer M. Spear, "Historicizing Sexuality and Gender," *Gender and History* 22 (November 2010): 527-537.

<sup>34</sup> Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 137, 145-6.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*, 140-3.

of ‘life’ as an object of power marked a change in the way power legitimized itself. Rather than appeal to the juridical authority of a sovereign, in the age of biopolitics power insisted on its critical role in safeguarding the very biological existence of a population.<sup>36</sup>

Foucault further argued that assuming power over life provided a surer means of controlling and regulating vast populations than power over death because the modes of governing life were diffuse and personalized. As Foucault pointed out, power over life operated largely through the inculcation and internalization of norms that disciplined and regulated individual behaviour far more effectively than the law ever could. The power of norms stems from their conflated multiple meanings: as Michael Warner has noted, norms simultaneously connote ‘natural’ laws, statistical regularity, and value judgments. Citing the work of Foucault’s mentor, Georges Canguilhem, Warner observed that the multiple meanings of the norm and normal have long been embedded and conflated within the medical sciences.<sup>37</sup>

Foucault maintained that sex emerged as a particularly salient locus of intervention for actors seeking power over life for two reasons. First, the concept of sex yoked together “anatomical elements, biological functions, conducts, sensations, and pleasures”—disparate corporeal phenomena united in discourse.<sup>38</sup> Second, such a conceptualization of sex located it at the “junction of the ‘body’ and the ‘population’.” According to Foucault, sex therefore provided the “means of access both to the life of the

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 137.

<sup>37</sup> See Michael Warner *The Trouble with Normal: Sex, Politics, and the Ethics of Queer Life* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999), 55-59. Warner cites Georges Canguilhem, *The Normal and the Pathological* (trans Carolyn Fawcett, 1991).

<sup>38</sup> Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 154.

body and the life of the species,” and connected the public and private, the individual and the collective, and the personal and political.<sup>39</sup> Sex thus provided a way for individuals to become aware of the collective consequences of their personal actions—and potentially receptive to the reform of their behaviours and desires. As a result, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, sex emerged as “the source of an entire capital for the species to draw from,” one which could be “affected by its own diseases...transmit diseases or create others that would afflict future generations.”<sup>40</sup>

An emerging science of sex assumed a leading role in advancing such understandings of sex, and in transforming sex into a site for intellectual and political interventions. I use ‘sexual science,’ derived from the term *Sexualwissenschaft* coined by German dermatologist Iwan Bloch in 1907, to denote this omnibus field that asserted medical and scientific authority over sexual knowledge.<sup>41</sup> In my work, I draw exclusively upon German-language and British traditions of sexual science which, as Robert Nye has shown, differed from those of other nations, and were in fact uniquely and closely connected to one another through dense transfer networks of knowledge and personnel.<sup>42</sup> Sexual science developed over the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth century as a result of theoretical innovations, new discoveries, and various forms of institution-

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 146, 147.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, 118.

<sup>41</sup> For broad histories of sexual science, see Volkmar Sigusch, *Geschichte der Sexualwissenschaft* (Frankfurt; New York: Campus Verlag, 2008); Phillip Weber, *Der Trieb zum Erzählen. Sexualpathologie und Homosexualität, 1852-1914* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2008); Lucy Bland and Laura Doan, eds. *Sexology in Culture: Labeling Bodies and Desires* (London: Polity Press, 1998); Lucy Bland and Laura Doan, eds. *Sexology Uncensored: The Documents of Sexual Science* (London: Polity Press, 1998); Roy Porter and Lesley A. Hall, *The Facts of Life: The Creation of Sexual Knowledge in Britain, 1650-1950* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1995); Roy Porter and Mikulás Teich, eds. *Sexual Knowledge, Sexual Science: The History of Attitudes to Sexuality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

<sup>42</sup> See Robert Nye, “The History of Sexuality in Context: National Sexological Traditions,” *Science in Context* 4 (September 1991): 387-406.



building. Its practitioners sought to understand sex as comprehensively as possible; consequently, sexual science incorporated numerous bodies of knowledge, such as physiology, anthropology, philology, and ancient history.<sup>43</sup> However, within turn of the century sexual science, evolutionary biology and psychology—fields primarily concerned with developing what Foucault termed an “analytics of heredity” and a “medicine of perversions”—played an especially important role.

Sexual scientific knowledge remained diffuse across fields of expertise until its compilation into encyclopaedic volumes and “handbooks” of sexual science in the early years of the twentieth century. Examples of this genre include texts such as Havelock Ellis’ multivolume *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* (1897-1928), August Forel’s *The Sexual Question (Die sexuelle Frage)*, 1905), Iwan Bloch’s *The Sexual Life of Our Time (Das Sexuelleben unserer Zeit)*, 1907), and Albert Moll’s *Handbook of Sexual Science (Handbuch der Sexualwissenschaft)*, 1912). Although these texts were aimed at ‘expert audiences’ of—assumed male—physicians, scientists, and lawyers, they became increasingly accessible to educated laypeople, including women.

The painstaking work involved in compiling these reference texts reflects the considerable human labour required to constitute sexual science as a field. This labour extended to building networks and institutions, and was primarily undertaken by German-

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<sup>43</sup> As Iwan Bloch wrote in *The Sexual Life of Our Times*, “the purely medical consideration of the sexual life . . . is yet incapable of doing full justice to the many sided relationships between the sexual and all the other provinces of human life. To do justice to the whole importance of love in the life of the individual and in that of society, and in relation to the evolution of human civilization, this particular branch of inquiry must be treated in its proper subordination as a part of the general science of mankind, which is constituted by a union of all other sciences of general biology, anthropology and ethnology, philosophy and psychology, the history of literature, and the entire history of civilization.” See Iwan Bloch, *The Sexual Life of Our Time*, transl. by Eden Paul (New York: Allied Book Company 1908), xxi. See also Andreas Seeck, “Aufklärung oder Rückfall? Das Projekt der Etablierung einer ‘Sexualwissenschaft’ und deren Konzeption als Teil der Biologie,” *Mitteilungen der Magnus Hirschfeld Gesellschaft* no. 26/27 (July 1998).

speaking practitioners.<sup>44</sup> By the early twentieth century, practitioners were exchanging and disseminating their ideas on the pages of newly-formed journals, including the *Yearbook for Sexual Intermediaries* (*Jahrbuch für sexuelle Zwischenstufen*, est. 1899), *Monthly Journal for Urinary Diseases, Psychopathia Sexualis, and Sexual Hygiene* (*Monatsschrift für Harnkrankheiten, Psychopathia Sexualis und sexuelle Hygiene*, est. 1904), *Journal for Sexual Science* (*Zeitschrift für Sexualwissenschaft*, est. 1908, 1913), *Sexual Problems* (*Sexual-Probleme*, est. 1908), and the Archive for Gynecology and Eugenics (*Archiv für Frauenkunde und Eugenik*, est. 1914). Practitioners also formed national and international professional associations for the study of sex, such as the Medical Society for Sexual Science and Eugenics (*Ärztliche Gesellschaft für Sexualwissenschaft und Eugenik*), founded in 1913 by Iwan Bloch and Magnus Hirschfeld,<sup>45</sup> and the International Society for Sexual Research (*Internationale Gesellschaft für Sexualforschung*), also established in 1913 by Bloch and Hirschfeld's rival Albert Moll.<sup>46</sup> Beyond professional institution-building, practitioners also created organizations, such as the Scientific Humanitarian Committee and the German Society for the Suppression of Venereal Diseases, to advance their 'expert' prescriptions for sexual problems, such as venereal disease and prostitution. Here too, German-speakers were first to seize the initiative following Wilhelm II's declaration of a 'New Course' in

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<sup>44</sup> British experts seeking to develop sexual science into a field were fewer and rather isolated until the establishment of the British Society for the Study of Sex Psychology (BSSSP) in 1913. On the BSSSP, see Lesley Hall, "'Disinterested Enthusiasm for Sexual Misconduct': The British Society for the Study of Sex Psychology, 1913-1947," *Journal of Contemporary History* 30 (October 1995): 665-686.

<sup>45</sup>. On this organization see Andreas Pretzel, "Zur Geschichte der 'Ärztliche Gesellschaft für Sexualwissenschaft' (1913-1933). Dokumentation und Forschungsbericht," *Mitteilungen der Magnus Hirschfeld Gesellschaft*, Nr. 24/25 (Oktober 1997): 35-120.

<sup>46</sup> Havelock Ellis and Edward Carpenter were members of this organization.

1890, which proclaimed the state's greater, albeit short-lived, receptiveness to technocratic guidance.<sup>47</sup>

Although Foucault endowed sexual science with a great deal of power and authority in his narrative, it is important to qualify the power of sexual scientific practitioners. Most of the men who are recognized today as pioneering sexual scientists were professionally marginal, aside from Krafft-Ebing and Forel: they did not hold university posts, and tended to specialize in marginal medical fields such as dermatology.<sup>48</sup> Moreover, as I will argue shortly, sexual science at this time constituted a weak, not yet 'technical' or specialized field that was developed not only by trained and accredited physicians and scientists, but also by an array of social actors, including feminists.<sup>49</sup> While most of the contributors to and members of the aforementioned journals and organizations were male scientists and physicians, as I demonstrate in this dissertation, self-proclaimed male experts did not absolutely monopolize sexual scientific knowledge production, despite their structural and gendered privileges as men and scientists. Indeed, much sexual scientific knowledge production took place largely beyond the academy, as a product of the social and political activism of organizations

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<sup>47</sup> Paul Weindling has argued that this development should be understood as an attempt by physicians and scientists, marginalized by an antisemitic academy, to carve out a niche in an overcrowded medico-scientific professional market. While this may be true of figures such as Iwan Bloch, many leading sexual scientists, such as Richard Krafft-Ebing and August Forel, were well-respected within their fields. See Weindling, *Health, Race, and German Politics*.

<sup>48</sup> Krafft-Ebing held university posts in Strasbourg, Graz, and Vienna, and Forel held a post at the University of Zürich and ran the famous Burghölzli clinic.

<sup>49</sup> In characterizing sexual science as a 'weak' field, I draw on Pierre Bourdieu's "Some Properties of Fields," from Pierre Bourdieu, *Sociology in Question*, trans. Richard Nice (London: Sage Publications, 1993), 72-76. As Theodore M. Porter notes, scientific fields only became technical in the twentieth century. Before then, science was idealized as a resource for the inculcation of public reason. Practitioners thus sought the dissemination of scientific knowledge, rather than its obfuscation. See Theodore M. Porter, "How Science Became Technical," *Isis* 100 (June 2009): 292-309.

such as the Scientific Humanitarian Committee and the League for the Protection of Mothers and Sexual Reform.

Nevertheless, practitioners of sexual science claimed authority through their insistence that sex had a natural reality that pre-existed and transcended human constructs—and that this reality could only be accessed via scientific methods and ‘expert’ interpretations of natural and bodily phenomena.<sup>50</sup> Such assertions became increasingly axiomatic thanks in part to their repetition through dense professional and political networks. Practitioners of sexual science thus argued that human sexual life ought to be organized and governed according to the “true nature” of sex, as revealed by science. And yet, as I demonstrate in the following chapters, this ‘truth’ was itself subject to intense contestation during the period under investigation, and was claimed by various agents seeking to reform the governance of sexuality. Even in our own time, appeals to scientific ‘truths’ about sex remain powerful rhetorical weapons in contests for rights and freedoms.

Based on their studies of psychological and somatic phenomena, practitioners of sexual science sought to develop a “system of legitimate knowledge” about sex, one that was structured by adjudications of sexual ‘normality’ and ‘abnormality.’<sup>51</sup> These normative adjudications informed policy proposals for the regulation of sex at the level of the population, as well as discourses on the care and control of the sexed body. They also helped transform sex into a defining character of subjectivities, and a means of self-understanding. Sex became understood not only as something one does, but also as something one is. As Foucault observed, sex became that which “each individual has to

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<sup>50</sup> Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 53-54.

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid*, 72

pass in order to have access to his [sic] own intelligibility.”<sup>52</sup> Sexual scientists categorized subjectivities as either ‘normal’ or ‘abnormal’ based on an array of physical and psychological criteria—many of which, as I discuss later, had to do with gender and physiological sex rather than desire. They further asserted that an individual’s right to participate in sexual life ought to depend upon the ‘normality’ of his or her subjectivity. In this way, sexual subjectivity offered a quasi-material foundation for the norms and ethics that governed sexual life. Consequently, as I show in the following chapters, it constituted the fundamental object of debate regarding individuals’ and groups’ rights to participate in sexual life and its governance.

By defining and evaluating sexual subjectivities, sexual science also provided an increasingly epistemologically-privileged means through which an individual could come to know him or herself. Perhaps somewhat ironically, Foucault suggested that those subjects who were primarily defined through sex—and marginalized because of it—were most apt to turn to sexual science as a means of self-understanding. Though Foucault identified the ‘homosexual’ as the paradigmatic subject in this regard, in my dissertation I will demonstrate that this tendency was also true of feminists, regardless of their sexual orientation. Importantly, in Foucault’s view, this turn to science did not mark a form of ‘false consciousness.’ Foucault did not believe that sexual scientific discourse simply imposed its categories upon subjects—though he conceded that it certainly delimited the possibilities for identification. Rather, through the aforementioned concept of tactical polyvalence Foucault argued that sexual scientific discourses also provided conceptual and discursive resources that subjects could use to construct alternative, resistant

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid, 155-6.

formulations of sexual subjectivity. Through these alternative formulations, disempowered subjects such as women and homosexuals could “speak on [their] own behalf” and contest the ‘knowledge-power’ of sexual scientists.<sup>53</sup> Harry Oosterhuis and Lisa Duggan’s important studies of the role disempowered sexual subjects played in the creation of sexual scientific knowledge bolster Foucault’s assertions, and further demonstrate that these subjects played an important role in shaping hegemonic definitions of sexuality.<sup>54</sup>

As I noted earlier, the concept of tactical polyvalence suggests that while practitioners of sexual science such as physicians may have enjoyed certain structural and social powers, the power of sexual scientific discourses was much more fluid. In fact, as I demonstrate in this dissertation, the power and authority of sexual scientific discourse was contested among and claimed by differently-positioned actors who purported to possess ‘truer’ knowledge about sex. The link between power and knowledge, established by tactical polyvalence, helps explain how sexual science could enable disempowered actors to pose significant challenges not only to recognized and self-proclaimed experts, but also to the sexual status quo.

Foucault’s arguments regarding the importance of sex in modernizing Europe, the critical role of sexual science in facilitating sexual governance, and especially the potential of sexual scientific knowledge to undergird ‘resistant’ sexual politics, help clarify the appeal of scientific argumentation for feminists. Yet Foucault’s account is

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 101-2.

<sup>54</sup> See Harry Oosterhuis, *Stepchildren of Nature: Krafft-Ebing, Psychiatry, and the Making of Sexual Identity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000); and Lisa Duggan, *Sapphic Slashers: Sex, Violence, and American Modernity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000).

limited by the fact that he neglected the importance of sexual difference. Foucault did not investigate whether power targeted the sexes differently, or how the effects of interventions into men and women's sexual lives varied. Moreover, his definition of sex elided the fact that nineteenth and early twentieth century understandings of sex concomitantly connoted gender and sexuality as interdependent biological phenomena. Ultimately, Foucault did not fully deconstruct what sex meant at the turn of the century, and thus failed to consider the full range of reasons why sex became the object of power struggles during this period, aside from biopolitical concerns. Specifically, he did not acknowledge the critical role feminists played in politicizing sex.

Indeed, I argue that if one wants to fully understand why sex assumed such importance at the turn of the century, one must also consider the impact of first-wave feminism, and especially the widespread fears of 'sexual anarchy' it provoked through its attempts to transform gender roles and sexual relations. In the following section, I engage present-day feminist scholarship and the polysemic meanings of sex to explore why sex was of particular concern to feminists, and how feminists made sex a political problem.

*Sexual difference, sexual governance, and the feminist challenge: How first-wave feminists politicized sex*

Feminist historians have long argued that regimes of sexual governance are shaped by ideologies of sexual difference; furthermore, they have demonstrated that women's sexuality is more highly and strictly regulated than men's. Feminist historians of turn-of-the-century Germany and Britain have shown how biopolitical interventions disproportionately targeted women due to their potential for motherhood and their greater

dependence upon prostitution as a livelihood. In *Languages of Labour and Gender*, Kathleen Canning examined how working-class women's reproductive bodies became the objects of intense scientific scrutiny and political debates due to concerns that women's industrial work would imperil the 'Volkskörper.'<sup>55</sup> Likewise, in her essay "Imperialism and Motherhood," Anna Davin demonstrated how British women were subjected to interventions and pedagogical prescriptions as part of attempts to strengthen the imperial 'race' by improving standards of 'mothercraft.'<sup>56</sup> Meanwhile, in *Prostitution and Victorian Society*, Judith Walkowitz exposed how concerns with the spread of venereal diseases among male soldiers led to greater legal restrictions on female prostitutes—and women suspected of prostitution—that authorized invasive medical examinations and forcible confinement.<sup>57</sup> No equally restrictive regulatory measures—aside, perhaps, from the legal prohibition against sex acts between men—existed for men in either Germany or Britain. If anything, biopolitical regulations served to make sex safe for men.

The unequal treatment of male and female sexuality is, of course, not a product of biopolitics itself: sexual governance regimes in patriarchal societies have long been much more restrictive and punitive towards women. As Keith Thomas and Carole Pateman have demonstrated, the strict regulation of women's sexuality through moral codes and

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<sup>55</sup> Kathleen Canning, *Languages of Labor and Gender: Female Factory Work in Germany, 1850-1914* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1996), especially pages 170-217.

<sup>56</sup> Anna Davin, "Imperialism and Motherhood," *History Workshop Journal*, no. 5 (Spring, 1978): 9-65. The word race appears here in quotation marks as a means of signaling authorial and analytical distance from the ways my subjects invoked the term. I do not place race in quotation marks throughout the dissertation; it is my hope that the reader will keep in mind this distance, and recognize that I do not share their attitudes towards race and races. I use the term because it was the term they themselves used, for diverse meanings.

<sup>57</sup> Judith Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society: Women, Class and the State* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), especially pages 67-148.



legal contracts has been fundamental to the organization of European states and civil societies.<sup>58</sup> These regulations have been legitimized by claims regarding the ‘true nature’ of female sexuality. Indeed, Foucault’s claim that sex became central to individuals’ self-understanding over the nineteenth century had long been true for women.

Importantly, during the nineteenth and early twentieth century, gender and sexuality enjoyed no separate “social existence,” and ideas about women’s sexual subjectivity were repeatedly used to legitimize restrictions on women’s social, legal, economic, and political rights.<sup>59</sup> Both gender and sexual desires were viewed as natural properties emanating from a sexed, biological body; indeed, gender was believed to be inextricably linked to, and indicative of, sexuality. Thus, a ‘normal’ woman was a feminine woman ‘naturally’ attracted to a masculine man, her purported sexual complement. These attributes were considered pre-conscious and motivated by one’s congenital constitution. Evidence of rupture in the chain of gender-sexuality-sexed body consequently connoted an innate abnormality. The theory of ‘sexual inversion’ and the discourse on feminists as a ‘third sex,’ which I explore in Chapter Three, exemplify this belief. Sex thus permeated and conjoined gender and sexuality, as well as physical reality and social subjectivity at the turn of the century. Likewise, women’s purportedly ‘natural’ sexual passivity was represented as a distinctly ‘feminine’ attribute, one that inflected other characteristics, such as women’s intelligence. This passivity suggested a

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<sup>58</sup> See Keith Thomas, “The Double Standard,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 20 (April 1959): 195-216; Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1988).

<sup>59</sup> Here I am referring, albeit critically, to Gayle Rubin’s assertion that gender and sexuality enjoy a “separate social existence.” See Gayle Rubin, “Thinking Sex: Notes for a Radical Theory of the Politics of Sexuality,” in *Pleasure and Danger: Exploring Female Sexuality*, edited by Carole Vance (London: Routledge, Kegan and Paul, 1984), 308.

disinterest and an inability to participate in political and social life as autonomous agents, as well as a need for dependence upon a stronger male protector.

The political importance of beliefs regarding female sexuality were not lost on ‘first wave’ feminists. They recognized that these beliefs served to determine and justify limitations on women’s legal rights, social being, and access to public spaces—limitations which inhibited women’s broader self-determination. ‘First wave’ feminists further identified a consistent patriarchal sexual logic—a sexual double standard—that simultaneously authorized male dominance in the bedroom and male control over the state and civil society. Consequently, feminists maintained that women’s broader existential possibilities depended upon their sexual emancipation—and that, alongside demands for legal changes and civil rights, reforming sexual subjectivities, norms, and ethics were critical political endeavours.

In pursuit of these ends, feminists provoked and engaged in widespread public debates on sexual subjectivity, sexual relationships, and sexual governance during the later nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Germany and Britain.<sup>60</sup> Such themes

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<sup>60</sup> As feminism developed as a social movement and theoretical field over the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, sexual reform emerged as central focus of intellectual debate and activism. Indeed, sexual reform arguably provided the impetus behind the emergence of feminism as an organized mass movement: in Britain, the struggle against Contagious Diseases Acts (CDAs), beginning in 1869, arguably represents the first mass, broad-based, explicitly feminist campaign, ultimately inspiring the formation of an international federation and various national branches such as the German *Abolitionist* movement. See Judith Walkowitz, *Prostitution and Victorian Society*, and Anne Summers, “Which Women? What Europe? Josephine Butler and the International Abolitionist Federation,” *History Workshop Journal* 62 (Autumn 2006): 214-231. Importantly, the campaign against the CDAs notably predates the founding of the National Union of Women’s Suffrage Society by almost 30 years. Intriguingly, however, sexual politics would also pervade the suffrage movement. See Susan Kingsley Kent, *Sex and Suffrage in Britain 1860-1914* (London: Routledge, 1990). Drawing a link between the anti-CDA campaigns and the subsequent suffrage movement, Lucy Bland argues that, “The courageous actions of these feminist repealers became an important heritage for subsequent suffrage agitation.” Bland, *Banishing the Beast*, xiv. Similarly, historians such as Richard J. Evans and Theresa Wobbe have argued that the organization of German feminism was largely motivated by ‘moral’ questions addressing sexuality. See Evans, *The*

were at the heart of the so-called “Woman Question,” particularly in the 1880s and 1890s, as feminists began to turn their attention to the governance of sexual life.<sup>61</sup> In posing the Woman Question, feminists interrogated how reforming sex could produce conditions of greater social justice. They challenged existing arrangements of sexual governance by questioning male and female sexual subjectivities, and proposing recalibrated relations of power between men and women in social and intimate life.

Although feminists endeavouring to speak about sex had traditionally invoked religious discourses as a source of authority, by the turn of the century many feminists recognized that science was becoming the dominant ‘lingua franca’ of sexual politics.<sup>62</sup> Consequently, many feminists turned to sexual science to inform their demands for women’s sexual empowerment, and to challenge self-proclaimed male experts’ monopoly over what Lorraine Daston and Fernando Vidal have termed the ‘moral authority of nature.’<sup>63</sup> Furthermore, science helped feminists to frame sexual politics as a material politics; that is, science enabled feminists to conjoin claims regarding somatic sexual needs and evolutionary imperatives with demands for economic independence and legally-inscribed rights and freedoms.

Perhaps not surprisingly, feminists’ attempts to deploy sexual science for their own ends frequently provoked negative responses from male physicians and scientists

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*Feminist Movement*, and Theresa Wobbe, *Gleichheit und Differenz: Politische Strategien von Frauenrechtlerinnen um die Jahrhundertwende* (Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag, 1989).

<sup>61</sup> Importantly, although the Woman Question first emerged in the 1850s and 1860s, in this dissertation I engage the Woman Question as it was debated at the turn of the century. On this iteration of the Woman Question, see for example Bland, *Banishing the Beast*; Karen Hunt, *Equivocal Feminists: The Social Democratic Federation and the Woman Question, 1884-1911* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 1-2; Theresa De Francis, “The Woman Question: A Multi-Faceted Debate,” *American Transcendental Quarterly* 19 (September 2005): 165-185.

<sup>62</sup> This was especially true in the British case. See Bland, *Banishing the Beast*, and Frank Mort, *Dangerous Sexualities: Medico-Moral Politics in England since 1830* (London: Routledge, Kegan and Paul, 1987).

<sup>63</sup> See Daston and Vidal, *The Moral Authority of Nature*.

who insisted that feminists' challenges to the sexual order were 'unnatural' and indicative of growing 'sexual anarchy.'<sup>64</sup> As I demonstrate in Chapter Three, scientists accused feminists of becoming 'unsexed,' or even 're-sexed' as mannish (*Mann-Weiber*), because of their intellectualism, their activism, and their insistence on speaking about sex in public. Male scientists' insistence that sexual life ought to be organized according to the 'natural' necessities of reproduction—necessities which, they claimed, required women's social and sexual subordination—in fact grew louder as feminists became more vocal and influential. As Lucy Bland has argued, it is no historical coincidence that sexual science grew in strength and importance alongside the burgeoning women's movement.<sup>65</sup>

Feminists and male practitioners of sexual science thus often found themselves at odds in public debates over sex and sexual reform. Many feminists were unwilling to accept men's authority and expertise, particularly regarding female sexuality, or to concede that sexual science was an exclusively male preserve. However, the relationship between feminists and male practitioners of sexual science was not only and always oppositional. Despite their disagreements, many feminists and male 'experts' shared a common understanding of what defined the 'truth' of sex, and how it can be known. Many feminists also agreed with sexual scientists on the criteria used to adjudicate sexual normality and abnormality, and on the implications of sexual reform for the fate of the species. Moreover, not all male sexual scientists were wholly hostile towards feminist arguments and ambitions. Some in fact supported feminist causes—although their support was often equivocal and ambivalent. As I argue in the following section, these

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<sup>64</sup> On 'sexual anarchy,' see Elaine Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle* (New York: Viking, 1990).

<sup>65</sup> Lucy Bland, "Introduction: Gender and Sexual Difference," in *Sexology Uncensored*, 11.

points of agreement helped create political and epistemological affinities between certain feminists and sexual scientists.

### Which feminists? What networks? Defining epistemic communities

In order to identify which feminists embraced sexual science, one must first acknowledge the heterogeneity of ‘first wave’ feminism, particularly when it came to sexual politics. During the period under study, there was no singular, unified feminist sexual politics among either German-speaking or British feminists. Undoubtedly, feminists broadly agreed on women’s right to sexual self-determination, which they believed hinged upon women’s emancipation from male sexual domination. As Lucy Bland has argued, “Feminists wished for the eradication of women’s experience of sexual objectification, sexual violence, and lack of bodily autonomy, to be replaced instead by a new sexual morality in which men lived by the same ethical precepts as women.”<sup>66</sup> Feminists further agreed on the need to empower women to play a greater role in sexual governance. And yet, feminists disagreed amongst themselves regarding what a sexually-reformed social order should look like, what exactly sexual emancipation meant for women, and what role women should play in sexual governance. These disagreements stemmed largely from feminists’ divergent understandings of sex and its relationship to love, the ‘true’ nature of female sexuality, and the transformative potential—and even the desirability—of heterosexuality.

It is worth taking a moment to explore these internecine conflicts among feminists as they are represented historiographically in order to foreground broader claims regarding the role of sexual science in feminist thought. Within the historiography on

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<sup>66</sup> Bland, *Banishing the Beast*, xiii.

German feminist sexual politics, this division is characterized as one between so-called ‘bourgeois’ feminists, divided into ‘moderate’ and left-leaning ‘radical’ factions. The division between these groups is best exemplified by the heated debates over the ‘New Ethic’ promoted by Helene Stöcker and some members of the League for the Protection of Mothers and Sexual Reform.<sup>67</sup> Moderates rejected the dramatic overhaul of marriage, morality, and understandings of female sexuality promoted by the New Ethic (Neue Ethik). They were particularly enraged by the demand, put forward by many proponents of the New Ethic, that women should control their fertility through the use of contraceptives. Although moderates also believed that marriage was much in need of reform, and tentatively accepted representations of female sexuality as a ‘natural’ phenomenon, they nonetheless insisted that marriage and moral prohibitions against extramarital relations, or ‘free love’ unions, were necessary bulwarks against sexual anarchy. Conversely, so-called ‘radicals’ insisted that the ‘true nature’ of sex ought to inform sexual ethics and the organization of sexual life. They maintained that sexual intercourse expressed and affirmed of love, and, citing scientific evidence alongside Romantic and Nietzschean philosophy, argued that love was ‘naturally’ free. Above all, they insisted that women ought to have the right to determine their own sexual fate: they asserted that women should have the right to choose their sexual partners, and to exercise reproductive freedoms, particularly the “right to motherhood,” regardless of their marital or social status.

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<sup>67</sup> See Tracie Matysik, *Reforming the Moral Subject: Ethics and Sexuality in Central Europe, 1890-1933* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008); Kirsten Reinert, *Frauen und Sexual Reform 1897-1933* (Herbolzheim: Centaurus Verlag, 2000); Richard Evans, *The Feminist Movement*.

Within the historiography on British feminist sexual politics, this conflict is represented as one between the ‘social purity’ or ‘militant’ feminists and feminists who sought greater freedoms to express—and realize—their (hetero)sexual desires.<sup>68</sup> Generally, social purity or ‘militant’ feminists viewed sex as an animalistic drive inferior to and distinct from love. Religious beliefs ranging from Protestant Christianity to theosophy played an important though not exclusive role in their conceptualization of sex. These feminists also viewed women as less sexual, and thus morally superior, to men. Social purity feminists deployed this understanding of women’s sexuality to assert the need for women’s greater role in governing sex. Feminists seeking to express and realize their (hetero)sexual desires, on the other hand, believed that sex offered the possibility of simultaneous physical and emotional connection between men and women. They insisted that women’s physiological and psychological need for sex was equal to that of men, and that empowering women to act upon this ‘need’ would contribute to the eradication of prostitution, the transformation of marriage, and the improvement of sexual morality generally.

I elaborate these divisions among feminists not only to demonstrate the plurality of feminist sexual politics during the period under study, but also to set up my argument that these divisions do not help clarify which feminists engaged with sexual science. Rather, as I will demonstrate in the chapters that follow, feminists’ engagements with sexual science transcended these divisions, and informed a broad spectrum of feminist

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<sup>68</sup> Here I would refer the reader to a number of excellent comprehensive studies of British feminist sexual politics, each with its own argument regarding the character and trajectory of this politics. See especially Lucy Bland, *Banishing the Beast*; Margaret Jackson, *The Real Facts of Life: Feminism and the Politics of Sexuality c 1850-1940* (London: Taylor and Francis, 1994); Kent, *Sex and suffrage in Britain, 1860-1914*; and Sheila Jeffreys, *The Spinster and Her Enemies: Feminism and Sexuality 1880-1930* (London: Pandora, 1985). For a good overview of the diversity of feminist writing on sex during the period under study, see Lesley Hall, *Outspoken Women: Women Writing about Sex, 1870-1969* (London: Routledge, 2005).

analyses and demands. The work of Lucy Bland and especially of Lesley Hall has been critically important in highlighting this historical reality. Hall in particular has illuminated the multiple points of intersection between sexual science and feminists of varying ideological and organizational affiliations at the turn of the century.<sup>69</sup> She has also persuasively demonstrated that feminists have made important contributions to the creation of sexual scientific knowledge.<sup>70</sup> Though Bland and Hall both focus exclusively on British feminists, I demonstrate that the diffusion of sexual science across ideological and factional lines was not a nation-specific phenomenon. Indeed, taking full account of the range of feminists who engaged sexual science demonstrates the extent of sexual science's tactical polyvalency.

My dissertation explores the ideas of a diverse group of feminists. Though markedly middle-class, this group includes socialists and social democrats, imperialists, nationalists, liberals, Protestant Christians, Jews, theosophists, atheists, heterosexuals, lesbians, utopians and pragmatists. They were involved in a range of feminist causes, including campaigns for suffrage, marital reform, the abolition of state regulation of prostitution, and the rights of unwed mothers. The members of this group also span generations, with the earliest born in the 1830s and the latest in the 1880s. This group encompasses well-known and much-studied figures such as the 'radical' German-speaking feminists Henriette Fürth, Ruth Bre, Grete Meisel-Hess, and Marie Stritt; liberal individualists such as Austrian Rosa Mayreder; British suffragist turned nationalist

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<sup>69</sup> See Hall, "Hauling Down the Double Standard," and Lesley Hall, "Suffrage, Sex and Science," in *The Women's Suffrage Movement, New Feminist Perspectives*, edited by Maroula Joannou and June Purvis (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), 188-200.

<sup>70</sup> See Lesley Hall, *The Life and Times of Stella Browne: Feminist and Free Spirit* (London: I. B Tauris, 2011), and Hall, *Outspoken Women*.



Christabel Pankhurst; the British imperialist theosophist Frances Swiney; the Canadian-British socialist Stella Browne; and the feminists associated with the Men and Women's Club and *Freewoman* journal. This group also includes lesser-known figures whose provocative texts enrich our understanding of the diversity and complexity of feminist thought on sex and sexual politics at the turn of the century, such as the German homosexual rights proponents Johanna Elberskirchen and Anna Rüling, Austrian writers Helene von Druskowitz and Elsa Asenijeff, and British birth control champion Jane Hume Clapperton.

It is not my intention to homogenize the views of this disparate group by referring to them broadly as 'feminists.' All members of this group combined their commitments to science with their own political beliefs and socially-situated worldviews. Yet what unites them is their engagement with sexual scientific ideas for intellectual and strategic reasons. All believed that scientific investigation revealed and represented the 'true nature' of sexuality, and that it could establish a 'factual,' legitimate, rational basis for sexual reform. As Lesley Hall has argued, these disparate feminists used "the tools of rationality" and the findings of sexual science as a means of "investigat[ing] sexual phenomena in an (ideally, if not always actually) dispassionate manner."<sup>71</sup>

Feminists committed to scientific ways of knowing sex, whether for intellectual and/or strategic reasons, often found common ground with male practitioners of sexual science who sought to use their expertise to affect sexual reform. Feminists and male 'experts' exchanged ideas with each other via discussion and correspondence, and helped shape one another's ideas. Perhaps the most famous example of this dynamic is the

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<sup>71</sup> Hall, "Hauling Down the Double Standard," 37.

British Men and Women's Club, which brought together feminist women and male professionals to discuss 'sexual' problems. The Club aspired to establish a consensus among men and women on the 'true nature' of sex as a foundation for sexual reform.<sup>72</sup> However, the Men and Women's Club is not the only example of collaboration between feminists and male practitioners of sexual science. Especially in Germany during the years before the war, they also worked together in activist endeavours and sexual reform organizations.<sup>73</sup> Examples of such collaboration include feminists' participation in the German Society for the Suppression of Venereal Diseases<sup>74</sup> and the Scientific Humanitarian Committee,<sup>75</sup> and male physicians and scientists' involvement in the League for the Protection of Mothers and Sexual Reform.<sup>76</sup> Feminists and male practitioners of sexual science also worked together on an individual level. For example, Olive Schreiner befriended, influenced, and was influenced by Havelock Ellis, Karl Pearson, and Edward Carpenter.<sup>77</sup> Helene Stöcker collaborated with Magnus Hirschfeld

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<sup>72</sup> See Lucy Bland, "The Men and Women's Club," in *Banishing the Beast*, 3-47, and Judith Walkowitz, "The Men and Women's Club," in *City of Dreadful Delight*, 135-170.

<sup>73</sup> The two most obvious examples of collaboration between British feminists and sexual scientists are the Malthusian League and the British Society for the Study of Sex Psychology (BSSSP). Importantly, British feminists' involvement within the Malthusian League was highly circumscribed, largely because of the considerable taboo against public discussions of birth control during this period. Moreover, the BSSSP was established in 1913, and developed largely during the war years. On feminists' involvement in the Malthusian League, see J. Miriam Benn, *Predicaments of Love* (London: Pluto Press, 1992), and Rosanna Ledbetter, *A History of the Malthusian League, 1877-1927* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1976). On feminists' involvement in the BSSSP, see Hall, "Disinterested Enthusiasm."

<sup>74</sup> The diverse group of feminists involved in the Society included Helene Stöcker, Henriette Fürth, Anna Pappritz, Katharina Scheven, Hope Bridges Adams-Lehmann, Agnes Hacker, Lida Gustava Heymann, and Marie Stritt.

<sup>75</sup> Among the feminists involved as "Chairmen" of the Scientific Humanitarian Committee before the First World War were Helene Stöcker, Anna Rüling, Johanna Elberskirchen, and Toni Schwabe.

<sup>76</sup> Among the medical and scientific men who belonged to the League, and later to the International League, were Iwan Bloch, Alfred Blaschko, Havelock Ellis, Albert Eulenberg, Karl Federn (who translated Edward Carpenter's work into German), Max Fleisch, August Forel, Sigmund Freud, Alfred Hegar, Max Hirsch, Magnus Hirschfeld, Albert Neisser, and Eduard Westermarck. Socialists August Bebel, Eduard Bernstein, and Eduard David were also members.

<sup>77</sup> These friendships are evinced by letters among the Pearson Papers in the University College Special Collections, 840/1-6, 841; the Havelock Ellis manuscripts at the British Library, Add MSS 70752; and the

on numerous occasions.<sup>78</sup> Likewise, Henriette Fürth corresponded with Alfred Blaschko to organize the affairs and debate the platform of the German Society for the Suppression of Venereal Diseases.<sup>79</sup>

Whether or not they collaborated with each other in activist campaigns—and whether or not they agreed on proposals for sexual reform—I maintain that, by virtue of their shared commitment to science, the feminists I study belonged to a common “epistemic community” with male practitioners of sexual science. I have adopted the concept of the epistemic community from political scientist Peter Haas.<sup>80</sup> Haas defined epistemic communities as “networks of professionals with recognized expertise and competence in a particular domain and an authoritative claim to policy-relevant knowledge within that domain or issue-area.” What bonds members of an epistemic community, he maintained, is “their shared belief or faith in the verity and applicability of particular forms of knowledge.” Epistemic communities are further unified by shared normative and principled beliefs, shared ways of knowing, shared patterns of reasoning, shared discursive practices, and shared commitments to the application and production of knowledge. All of these shared traits, Haas argued, “provide a value-based rationale for the social action of community members.”<sup>81</sup> Although the feminists I study by and large lacked accreditation or recognition as scientific experts, they nonetheless shared with male practitioners of sexual science common ways of knowing, patterns of reasoning,

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Carpenter Collection in the Sheffield City Archive, MSS 359/1-110. See also Yaffa Draznin, ed., *“My other self”: the letters of Olive Schreiner and Havelock Ellis, 1884-1920* (New York: Peter Lang, 1992).

<sup>78</sup> Helene Stöcker was a member of the Scientific Humanitarian Committee, and worked with Hirschfeld to fight the proposed criminalization of female homosexuality.

<sup>79</sup> See the letters between Fürth and Blaschko in the Kollektion Fürth at the International Institute for Social History, Folder Five.

<sup>80</sup> Peter Haas, “Introduction: epistemic communities and international policy coordination,” *International Organization* 46 (Winter 1992): 18.

<sup>81</sup> Haas, “Introduction,” 3.

discursive practices, and commitments to the production and application of knowledge for shared socio-political ends. Where they disagreed was on the political implications of facts derived from shared ways of knowing. Indeed, feminists and male practitioners vigorously debated each other's ideas publicly, in print and on the platform.

Though I argue that the intellectual and political affinities between feminists and empathic male practitioners of sexual science are characteristic of an epistemic community, I do not mean to efface the power asymmetries between feminists and male “experts”. The structural advantages of gender, class, and status enjoyed by male scientists undoubtedly endowed their ideas with greater authority within the public sphere. My intentions in deploying the concept of an “epistemic community” are two-fold. First, I invoke it to challenge representations that place male ‘experts’ and feminists in fundamentally antagonistic and irreconcilable camps. In the age of biopolitics, the feminists and male practitioners of sexual science I study both looked to science as a means of informing and legitimizing new modes of sexual governance that would improve not only individual but also collective wellbeing. Second, I use it to draw attention to feminists’ important role in creating sexual scientific knowledge—and to the gender politics of the sexual scientific canon. Why, for example, is Edward Carpenter, a socialist with little scientific training, included in histories of sexual science, while Johanna Elberskirchen, a feminist who actually studied medicine at the University of Bern, is excluded?<sup>82</sup> Tellingly, within Volkmar Sigusch’s *Geschichte der Sexualwissenschaft*, only one woman—Helene Stöcker—figures among the pantheon of

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<sup>82</sup> Indeed, in her texts Elberskirchen frequently claimed for herself the title of “Medizinerin.” See, for example, Johanna Elberskirchen, *Feminismus und Wissenschaft*, Second Edition (Leipzig: Magazin Verlag Jacques Hegner, 1903): 22.

male sexual scientific ‘pioneers,’ despite the fact that it was an American woman, Elizabeth Osgood Goodrich Willard, who first coined the term “sexology” in her 1867 monograph, *Sexology as the Philosophy of Life: Implying Social Organization and Government*.<sup>83</sup> Unlike Sigursch, I maintain that the feminists I study were critical contributors to the emerging field of sexual science, and that their ideas were not merely derivative of male sexual scientific expertise.

In the preceding sections, I have discussed German-speaking and British feminists without accounting for why I focus on these groups, or why I examine the relationship between feminism and sexual science from a transnational perspective. In the following section, I explore the reasons underlying these choices.

#### Transnational ‘ways of seeing’ and the possibility of open-ended histories

The phenomenon I study transcended national boundaries, which were themselves in flux during the nineteenth century. Why then focus exclusively on German-speaking and British feminists and sexual science? And why study them in relation to one another? The answers lie in the particularities of German and British history and historiography, and in the uniqueness of the Anglo-German relationship. As I noted in footnote seven, although I reference “German-speaking” feminists and sexual science throughout my dissertation to include Austrian and Swiss feminists and male ‘experts,’ my project is rooted in the political, social, and cultural realities of turn-of-the-century Germany and Britain.

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<sup>83</sup> See Sigursch, *Geschichte der Sexualwissenschaft*, 48, 555.

Comparative historical research on Germany and Britain is not without precedent.<sup>84</sup> It played a particularly pivotal role in debates among German historians over the *Sonderweg* thesis, which accounted for the rise of the Nazis by claiming that Germany pursued a ‘special’—meaning incomplete and inadequate—path to modernity.<sup>85</sup> The initial *Sonderweg* thesis of the 1970s and 1980s was premised upon comparisons between Germany’s ‘aberrant’ process of modernization and nation-based examples of ‘ideal’ modernization. The purported paragon of liberal democratic modernization, Britain, featured prominently in such comparisons; in fact, the modernization model deployed by *Sonderweg* theorists was largely premised upon an idealized understanding of the British historical experience. Ironically, as demonstrated by David Blackbourn and Geoff Eley’s influential *Peculiarities of German History*, comparisons with Britain also served to undermine the *Sonderweg* thesis, along with the intellectual foundations of its modernization model.<sup>86</sup>

The questions and concerns that animated the *Sonderweg* debate—namely the connection between Wilhelmine Germany’s ‘moment of modernity’ and the subsequent rise of the Nazis—have long provided the analytic framework through which historians analysed fin-de-siècle German feminists’ engagements with sexual science. From the 1970s until at least the 1990s, historians were preoccupied with assessing turn of the century German feminists’ complicity in creating an intellectual foundation for Nazism. Historians argued that feminists’ deployment of science represented an ‘authoritarian’

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<sup>84</sup> Indeed, it is increasingly becoming the subject of scholarly interest. See the essays collected in Dominik Geppert and Robert Gerwarth, eds, *Wilhelmine Germany and Edwardian Britain: Essays on Cultural Affinity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

<sup>85</sup> The persistence of autocratic forms of elite rule in spite of economic modernization characterized this ‘special path.’

<sup>86</sup> See David Blackbourn and Geoff Eley, *The Peculiarities of German History: Bourgeois Society and Politics in Nineteenth-Century Germany* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984).

strategy that underwrote “[a]ll the ideas of fascist policy in this area.”<sup>87</sup> Claudia Koonz encapsulated the views of many when she famously argued that early German feminists’ biological arguments, which reified women’s role as mothers, prefigured the Nazis’ idealization of women’s domestic roles; in her view, the Nazis realized early feminists’ visions “in nightmare form.”<sup>88</sup> Such claims were bolstered by biopolitical narratives of German modernity, which, in Detlev Peukert’s famous formulation, linked the turn of the century ‘spirit of science’ to Nazi genocide.<sup>89</sup> Although more recent scholarship on German feminism has rejected these teleological claims, it too continually, almost ritualistically, confronts the *Sonderweg* question. Moreover, despite the important role national-historical comparison played in challenging the *Sonderweg* thesis, very few historians, aside from Ann Taylor Allen, have undertaken such comparative historical research on feminism and sexual science.<sup>90</sup>

And yet, in light of the international prevalence of this discursive practice, it seems highly questionable that the deployment of sexual science for feminists’ ends was itself a uniquely “German” phenomenon. Moreover, the historical fact that this discursive practice transcended national boundaries means that the outcomes of this practice were not predetermined. Studying fin-de-siècle feminists’ engagements with sexual science from a transnational perspective enables scholars to break with existing “ways of seeing” this phenomenon, and instead to take up Edward Ross Dickinson’s

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<sup>87</sup> Marie-Luise Janssen-Jurreit, “Sexualreform und Geburtenrückgang—Über die Zusammenhänge von Bevölkerungspolitik und Frauenbewegung um die Jahrhundertwende,” in *Frauen in der Geschichte*, edited by Annette Kuhn and Gerhard Schneider (Düsseldorf: Schwann, 1979), 56.

<sup>88</sup> Koonz, *Mothers in the Fatherland*, 31.

<sup>89</sup> See Detlev J. K. Peukert, “The Genesis of the ‘Final Solution’ from the Spirit of Science,” in *Re-evaluating the Third Reich*, edited by Thomas Childers and Jane Caplan (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1993), 234-252.

<sup>90</sup> See Ann Taylor Allen, “Feminism and Eugenics in Germany and Britain, 1900-1940: A Comparative Perspective,” *German Studies Review* 23 (October 2000): 477-505.

challenge to investigate what *else* biopolitics was doing, besides “manipulating people.” A transnational perspective therefore allows historians to be more attentive to the ways biopolitics and sexual science created opportunities for both human emancipation and oppression.<sup>91</sup>

By ‘transnational’ I refer not only to the concurrence of this discursive practice in different national polities, but also to the vast networks of ideas and individuals that facilitated the emergence of this way of thinking about sex and sexual politics. Transnational work implies comparison, but is not limited to comparison. Indeed, it is interested in understanding the circulation of individuals and ideas, and exploring points of interconnection.<sup>92</sup> As Margot Canaday and others have argued, histories of sexuality are well-positioned to undertake transnational work, given their interest in discourses and dynamics that transcend national boundaries. Importantly, as Canaday recently observed, Foucault’s *History of Sexuality* Volume I makes little reference to specific national contexts.<sup>93</sup>

Based on my research, I maintain that German-speaking and British feminists’ engagements with sexual science were parallel and interconnected phenomena: parallel in the sense that they were making similar arguments at the same time, and interconnected in the sense that these arguments were facilitated by the transnational circulation of ideas

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<sup>91</sup> Dickinson, “Biopolitics,” 21.

<sup>92</sup> On transnational history, see Jürgen Kocka and Heinz-Gerhard Haupt, “Comparison and Beyond: Traditions, Scope, and Perspectives of Comparative History,” in *Comparative and Transnational History: Central European Approaches and New Perspectives*, edited by Jürgen Kocka and Heinz Gerhard Haupt (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2010), 1-32; Philippe Ther, “Comparisons, Cultural Transfers, and the Study of Networks: Toward a Transnational History of Europe,” in *Comparative and Transnational History: Central European Approaches and New Perspectives*, 204-225.

<sup>93</sup> See Canaday, “Thinking Sex in the Transnational Turn.” See also Dagmar Herzog, “Syncopated Sex: Transforming Sexual Cultures,” *American Historical Review* 114 (December 2009): 1287-1308, and Judith Sirkus, “Sex, Sovereignty and Transnational Intimacies,” *American Historical Review* 115 (October 2010): 1089-1096.



and individuals. Though not all feminists read each other's work, feminists were intertextually connected through a common body of transnationally circulating sexual scientific ideas. Their engagement with this common body of knowledge led them to advance common arguments, conclusions, and political demands. Feminists' appeal to science thus presents a fascinating example of transnational 'equifinality,' that is, the principle that a shared conclusion can be reached by many potential means. Thanks to the transnational circulation of texts and ideas, and to commonly held national-cultural preoccupations and anxieties, feminists who had not met and did not read each other's work could nonetheless develop common analyses, arguments, and visions.

Yet the connections between Germany and Britain were not only intertextual, but also interpersonal. Through my archival research I also discovered numerous points of interconnection between individuals that suggested the kinds of networks involved in disseminating information. For example, I found evidence of personal correspondence between individuals such as Havelock Ellis and Iwan Bloch,<sup>94</sup> Edward Carpenter and Albert Moll,<sup>95</sup> and Edward Carpenter and Magnus Hirschfeld.<sup>96</sup> My archival work and readings of feminists and sexual scientific periodicals also revealed that the decades before the First World War saw an upsurge in international feminist, sex reform, and sexual scientific activism, evidenced by a proliferation of international congresses and organizations. Symptomatic of this tendency are the annual International Women's Congresses; the formation of groups such as the International Abolitionist Federation, the International Society for the Sanitary and Moral Prophylaxis of Syphilis and Other

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<sup>94</sup> See Havelock Ellis Papers, Add MSSS 70555, British Library Manuscripts and Archives.

<sup>95</sup> See Carpenter Collection, MSS 386, Sheffield City Archives.

<sup>96</sup> See Carpenter Collection, MSS 377, Sheffield City Archives.

Venereal Diseases, the International Federation for Human Regeneration, and the stillborn International League for the Protection of Mothers and Sexual Reform; and the organization of the International Eugenics Congress of 1912 and International Congress for Sexual Research scheduled for 1914. Aside from points of interconnection, I also discovered that many of the feminists I study, such as Helene Stöcker and Adele Schreiber, lived in Britain for brief periods of time.<sup>97</sup> I even found evidence of a British feminist, Dr. Hope Bridges Adams Lehmann, who moved from Britain to Germany, and settled there after marrying the German socialist Otto Walther (and subsequently Carl Lehmann).<sup>98</sup>

By investigating sexual scientific engagement among German-speaking and British feminists, I hope to shed light on the extent of this practice at the turn of the century, and to explore how sexual science served as a discourse of possibility and legitimacy for feminist ends. I also hope that it will encourage scholars to focus analytical attention on the lasting impact of this discursive practice for ‘modern’ sexual politics—and specifically on feminists’ role in shaping ‘modern’ sexual politics. Indeed, it seems that, when it comes to twenty-first century sexual politics, we still find ourselves relying upon—and contesting—the ‘laws of life.’

### Chapter Overview

Each of the following four chapters provides a case study of German-speaking and British feminists’ discursive engagements with sexual science during the period

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<sup>97</sup> See Adele Schreiber Nachlass, Bestand N 1173, Folder 1.1, Bundesarchiv Koblenz, and Christl Wickert, *Helene Stöcker: Frauenrechtlerin, Sexualreformerin, und Pacifistin. Eine Biographie* (Bonn: J. W. Dietz, 1991).

<sup>98</sup> See Marita Krauss, *Die Frau der Zukunft. Dr. Hope Bridges Adams Lehmann, 1855-1916. Ärztin und Reformerin* (Munich: Buchendorfer Verlag, 2002).

under study. In Chapter Two, entitled “An ‘Elusive’ Phenomenon: The ‘Normal’ Female Sex Drive,” I examine the wide-ranging debates among feminists regarding what constituted ‘normal’ female sexuality. I begin with this debate as it was foundational for feminist sexual politics. In light of the regulatory function of the norm, understandings of what constituted the ‘normal’ critically informed and legitimized feminists’ demands for sexual reform. I demonstrate how adjudications of ‘normal’ female sexuality proceeded from arguments regarding the true ‘nature’ of the female sex drive, and the physiological ‘need’ for (explicitly heterosexual) intercourse it produced in women. I further point out how feminists linked these arguments to a broad range of sexual reform demands. However, I also show how feminists’ attempts to establish a definition of the normal female sex drive raised more questions than it resolved, and provoked considerable internal debate among both German-speaking and British feminists. Indeed, the debate over the ‘normal’ female sex drive significantly exacerbated existing conflicts among feminists over what constituted a feminist program of sex reform—a debate that has yet to be resolved.

Whereas Chapter Two analyses debates over ‘normal’ female sexuality, Chapter Three examines formulations of non-normative female sexual subjectivities. The question of female sexual abnormality was a particularly fraught one for feminists, as many sexual scientists diagnosed feminism itself as a sexual abnormality using contemporaneous theories of homosexuality. Whereas many feminists attempted to distance themselves from associations with sexual abnormality, specifically homosexuality, some in fact embraced theories of female homosexuality to construct new subjectivities. Thus, in Chapter Three, “Permutations of the Third Sex: Feminism and

Alternative Sexualities,” I explore how feminists critically deployed sexual scientific theories of female homosexuality to formulate and espouse non-normative, non-heterosexual subjectivities as legitimate social identities with ‘natural’ needs for social rights and sexual freedoms. Through my analyses of speeches and texts by Anna Rüling, Johanna Elberskirchen, and Rosa Mayreder, I illustrate the diversity of alternative subjectivities that theories of homosexuality informed. I show how, despite their diversity, all of these authors represented their subjects as enjoying a special relationship with the feminist movement, and as superior to normal women, who were limited in their existential possibilities by virtue of their reproductive sexuality. As a result, the promotion of these new models of sexual subjectivity helped entrench the prevalent claim that ‘normal’ women neither wanted nor needed ‘masculine’ rights to education and the professions, as they were ‘naturally’ predestined for marriage and motherhood. Ultimately, I argue that these new subjectivities represented attempts to escape the limitations of the feminine body, and to realize a less physiologically-determined reality.

Though Chapters Two and Three explore feminists’ constructions of female sexual subjectivities, feminists were also interested in understanding—and criticizing—male sexuality. In Chapter Four, “The Trouble with ‘Normal’: Feminism, Science and the Critique of Male Sexuality,” I explore how feminists engaged scientific theories and facts to critique male sexuality. The feminists I study in this chapter insisted that human male sexuality contravened and exceeded nature, with negative implications for the future of humanity. They also insisted upon the superiority of female sexuality, and sought a greater place for women in the governance of sexual life. Yet while agreeing on these assessments of male and female sexuality, these feminists disagreed on what was

required to reform male sexuality, and to emancipate women from men's purportedly excessive sexual demands. Indeed, not all of the feminists explored in this chapter believed that male sexuality could be reformed. I attribute these differences to the kinds of scientific ideas and evidence feminists deployed. Specifically, I maintain that feminists who drew primarily upon evolutionary ideas tended to be more optimistic regarding the possibility of changing male sexual behaviour, and of reforming the status quo. Conversely, feminists who drew upon biological evidence that claimed sexual traits were innate and unchanging proved less hopeful about the possibility of change—and were consequently more likely to propose radical solutions.

Anxieties regarding 'racial degeneration' featured prominently in feminists' critiques of male sexuality; yet appeals to 'racial' considerations were not limited to critiques of male sexuality. Over the course of my dissertation race emerges as a central category of fin-de-siècle feminist thought, one that is reflective of their engagement with sexual science, as well as their broader biopolitical context. In Chapter Five, "The struggle for the rights of women are no more than a means to an end"? Women's sexual freedom and racial regeneration," I examine the attraction of racial thinking, and particularly eugenics, for feminists. I argue that eugenics' appeal can be attributed not only to its stress on women's critical role in racial regeneration, but also to the fact that eugenicists conceived of sexual ethics in ways parallel to feminists. In Chapter Five I also demonstrate that racial thinking did not produce only one kind of feminist sexual politics. Instead, I argue that feminists' racialized sexual reform demands depended upon their understandings of sex, and particularly women's sexuality. The feminists I examine in this chapter embraced new, scientific understandings of 'normal' female sexuality,

analyzed in Chapter Two, which held that women's sexuality was not exclusively reproductive, and that sexual activity was critical to women's physiological and psychological wellbeing. Based on their new understanding of the female sex drive, the feminists studied in this chapter maintained that empowering women to have sexual experiences—regardless of marital status or reproductive outcome—was essential to racial regeneration. Yet these arguments were certainly not unproblematic. In this chapter I demonstrate that while race may have proved helpful for emancipatory claims-making, it ultimately served to circumscribe the universal potential of feminists' sex reform visions.

## Chapter Two: An ‘Elusive’ Phenomenon<sup>1</sup>: The ‘Normal’ Female Sex Drive

In 1908, following five years of active involvement in the German Society for the Suppression of Venereal Diseases, German feminist and social democrat Henriette Fürth finally felt compelled to publicly criticize the organization’s advocacy of pre-marital chastity and medically regulated prostitution as the best measures to prevent venereal infection and ‘regenerate’ sexual life. In *The Sex Problem and Modern Morals* (*Das Geschlechtsproblem und die moderne Moral*, 1908), Fürth asserted that these measures were deeply flawed, and not merely because they supported men’s sexual privilege at women’s expense. More troubling for Fürth, particularly in light of the many “well-educated representatives of science” who populated the Society, was the fact that these proposals, she claimed, were premised upon ‘unscientific’ beliefs regarding female sexuality.<sup>2</sup>

Like many ‘radical’ German feminists, Fürth sought the abolition of the state regulation of prostitution—and indeed, of prostitution itself. However, widely-held beliefs regarding men’s greater sexual need—and women’s lesser sexual desire—helped to legitimize prostitution as a ‘necessary evil’. Fürth maintained that the prevailing consensus regarding “the lesser sexual activity of the female and her resulting lesser sexual needs” was not “based on biological facts”, but rather upon male bias and male-

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<sup>1</sup> Here I draw upon Havelock Ellis’ characterization of the female sexual impulse as ‘elusive’ in his essay “The Sexual Impulse in Women,” *American Journal of Dermatology* 6 (March 1902), 5.

<sup>2</sup> Henriette Fürth, *Das Geschlechtsproblem und die moderne Moral* (Gautsch b. Leipzig: Felix Dietrich, 1908), 4.

centred morality.<sup>3</sup> Drawing upon evolutionary theory, physiology, and anthropology, Fürth claimed that science had found no natural, essential difference between the male and female sex drive. Moreover, she insisted that science proved men and women experienced equal amounts of sexual ‘need.’<sup>4</sup> Based on her appeals to scientific evidence, Fürth argued that women therefore have as much right to sexual experience and pleasure as men.<sup>5</sup> She further asserted that empowering women to act upon their sex drive and sexual needs would help create conditions of sexual equality, and establish a new sexual ethic grounded upon mutual love, responsibility, self-determination, and self-control.<sup>6</sup>

Fürth’s tract was just one of many articles, monographs, and lectures written during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that interrogated the ‘true nature’ of female sexuality. Beginning in the 1880s, female sexuality became the subject of scientific, social, and political interest in both Germany and Britain as part of the Woman Question, inspired by feminists’ challenges to the regulation of prostitution and women’s unequal status in marriage. Reflecting the crucial role of Darwinian evolution, medicine and psychiatry, these investigations into female sexuality centered on the female sex ‘drive,’ alternately referred to as a sex instinct, sex need, sex impulse, sex feeling, and libido.<sup>7</sup> According to Magnus Hirschfeld, the sex drive was responsible for “the preservation of mankind, for the survival of the whole world”; in his view, it was the

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 4-5.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid, 6, 14, 21.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 14

<sup>6</sup> Ibid, 12, 17.

<sup>7</sup> In German, the terms were Geschlechts- or Sexualtrieb, Geschlechts- or Sexualempfindung, Geschlechtsgefühl, and Libido. I have chosen to use “sex drive” instead of other terms such as instinct, impulse, feeling, or libido, as it was the term most often used by both German (*Trieb*) and British commentators throughout the period under study.



“most important property of life” as “the happiness of the individual as well as the strength of society...are very closely connected to it.”<sup>8</sup> Analyses of the female sex drive questioned how it functioned, what it wanted, and what (and how much) it needed. To answer such questions, feminists and sexual scientists investigated not only the drive itself, but also the effects of its repression via celibacy on women’s physical and psychological health. Through their attempts to divine the ‘true nature’ of the female sex drive, both scientists and feminists sought to establish a standard, a norm, around which sex life could be more rationally and justly organized. As Fürth asserted, scientific knowledge provided a critical opportunity to “arrive at new ethical values as well as their practical realisation.”<sup>9</sup> Consequently, analyses of the female sex drive had profound implications for both women’s rights and sexual reform.

In this chapter, I examine how German-speaking and British feminists engaged sexual science to articulate a definition of a “normal” female sex drive. I focus in particular on the writings of German feminists Johanna Elberskirchen, Henriette Fürth, and Ruth Bre, Austrian feminist Grete Meisel-Hess, and British feminists Jane Hume Clapperton, Olive Schreiner and Stella Browne.<sup>10</sup> While most of these feminists were sympathetic to social democratic politics, Bre for example was committed to advancing the rights of women and mothers in the service of her nationalist-racialist utopian ideas. Despite their differences, for all of these feminists sexual emancipation meant sexual

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<sup>8</sup> Magnus Hirschfeld, “Sexualwissenschaft als Grundlage der Sexualreform,” in *Mutterschutz und Sexualreform: Referate und Leitsätze des I. Internationalen Kongresses für Mutterschutz und Sexualreform in Dresden 28./30. September 1911*, ed. Dr. Max Rosenthal (Breslau: Verlag von Preuss und Jünger, 1912), 76.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>10</sup> I have included Olive Schreiner who, although South African, was living in London in the 1880s. She was also actively involved and highly influential within British feminist and social reform circles, and represented herself as a “European” woman.

agency, autonomy and experience. Like Fürth, these feminists believed that establishing the female sex drive as ‘naturally’ autonomous, active, and needful would expose the misconceptions and male biases that informed the existing sexual order, and in turn would provide a new basis for sexual ethics. Representing the female sex drive in this way could also establish as normal a new female sexual subjectivity: that of the desiring, sexually autonomous woman who could engage in personally enriching (hetero)sexual experiences.

Importantly, these feminists engaged not only with scientific ideas emanating from their home country, but also with ideas imported from abroad. As I will demonstrate, the intercontinental traffic in scientific and feminist ideas profoundly shaped changing understandings of the female sex drive. British feminists debated German socialist August Bebel’s ideas regarding female sexuality—ideas which were themselves informed by medico-scientific studies—and drew upon the work of Iwan Bloch. Meanwhile, German-speaking feminists enthusiastically appropriated the theory of sexual selection, outlined in Charles Darwin’s *Descent of Man* (1871), as well as the ideas of Edward Carpenter and Havelock Ellis.

Ultimately, these feminists’ attempts to scientifically establish a new norm for the female sex drive raised more questions than it resolved. Their definition of the female sex drive as naturally desirous provoked considerable internal debate among both German-speaking and British feminists, and exacerbated existing conflicts among feminists over what constituted ‘feminist’ sexual politics. Moreover, the heterosexism of the scientific theories themselves, and the omnipresence of biopolitical concerns and eugenic rationale, meant that the attempt to define what was normal was a necessarily

exclusionary process. It is clear that, according to the feminists I study, the ‘normal’ sex drive was not a trait universally shared by all women, nor was it an impulse all women should act upon. Feminists’ definitions and debates surrounding the female sex drive thus illuminate both the potential and problems of engaging scientific theories and evidence in support of feminist sexual politics.

### Changing scientific understandings of the female sex drive

Over the course of the nineteenth century, understandings of female sexuality underwent significant changes. According to historians Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, these changes were prompted in large part by the consolidation of bourgeois class identity and power. Davidoff and Hall argued in their study *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Classes, 1780-1850* (1987; revised 2002) that whereas seventeenth and early eighteenth-century conceptualizations of female sexuality characterized it as “rampant and voracious,” the rise of Evangelicalism among the provincial English middle classes challenged this view. Evangelicals held modesty, particularly sexual modesty, to be a woman’s most valued characteristic, and moral influence her reward for its maintenance.<sup>11</sup> The middle class ideal of female sexuality involved chastity before, and continence within, marriage.<sup>12</sup> Lest one think this development was exclusively English, George Mosse similarly observed in *Nationalism and Sexuality: Respectability and Abnormal Sexuality in Modern Europe* (1985) that discipline and restraint regarding sex and sexuality was a key defining feature of the

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<sup>11</sup> Leonore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class 1780-1850*, Revised Edition (London; New York: Routledge, 2002), 170.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*, 26-27, 322.

German bourgeoisie as it ascended to hegemony.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, Mosse drew explicit comparisons between the “shared moral heritage” of England and Germany, particularly regarding sexuality and respectability.<sup>14</sup>

Predating Mosse by eighty years, in his 1902 essay “The Sexual Impulse in Woman” Havelock Ellis asserted that the middle class view of woman as ‘naturally’ passionless was culturally-specific to German and Anglo-American societies—and scientists.<sup>15</sup> Certainly, male medical and scientific authorities played a critical role in articulating and legitimizing this new bourgeois definition of female sexuality. Lucy Bland has suggested that medico-scientific experts were responsible for ‘somatizing’ the desired moral state of female sexuality.<sup>16</sup> From the mid- to late-nineteenth century, the prevailing view among German-speaking and British male physicians and scientists was that female sexuality was primarily meant for reproduction. Indeed, physicians and scientists insisted that the female sex drive was in fact a maternal drive. They further claimed that women were naturally ‘passionless,’ passive, and disinterested in sex.<sup>17</sup> Women’s sexuality could only be aroused—if at all—by her husband. In his *Functions and Disorders of the Reproductive Organs*,<sup>18</sup> British gynaecologist William Acton asserted that, women “are not very much troubled with sexual feeling of any kind”; the only passion they feel, he claimed, was a “[l]ove of home, of children, and of domestic

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<sup>13</sup> George L. Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality: Respectability and Abnormal Sexuality in Modern Europe* (New York : H. Fertig, 1985), 2, 4-5.

<sup>14</sup> Mosse, *Nationalism and Sexuality*, 21.

<sup>15</sup> Ellis, “The Sexual Impulse in Woman,” 2.

<sup>16</sup> Bland, *Banishing the Beast*, 113.

<sup>17</sup> Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, *Disorderly Conduct: Visions of Gender in Victorian America* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1985), 23.

<sup>18</sup> William Acton’s *Functions and Disorders of the Reproductive Organs* was first published in 1857, and was reprinted in 1858, 1862, 1865, 1871, and 1875. My citations come from the Sixth Edition of 1875.

duties.”<sup>19</sup> He further maintained that women’s sex drive was effectively annihilated by the physiological demands of maternity and nursing.<sup>20</sup> Women therefore did not—and often could not—seek sexual gratification, but rather submitted to their husbands’ embraces in order to “unselfishly” please their spouses.<sup>21</sup> Indeed, according to Acton, the presence of sexual excitement in a woman often hinted at the existence of an underlying pathology that, he maintained, gave men a very false idea of the ‘true nature’ of female sexual feeling.<sup>22</sup>

Like his British counterpart, German gynaecologist Alfred Hegar defined the female sex drive as chaste and exclusively maternal. In *The Sex Drive (Der Geschlechtstrieb)*, 1894), Hegar claimed that the human sex drive was composed of two distinct impulses, one directed towards copulation, the other towards reproduction.<sup>23</sup> He maintained that males exhibited a greater desire for copulation, whereas the females’ primary interest lay in reproduction. Hegar attributed this gendered difference to evolutionary factors, specifically to females’ purportedly innate modesty, her menstrual cycle—and the fact that females bear the reproductive consequences of copulation.<sup>24</sup> Hegar also insisted that women’s sexual sensibility is less than men’s, a ‘fact’ he claimed was demonstrated by frequent expressions of “disgust” among “strong and healthy” women towards sexual intercourse, even when it involved someone they loved.<sup>25</sup> Hegar

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<sup>19</sup> William Acton, *Functions and Disorders of the Reproductive Organs*, Sixth Edition (London: J & A Churchill, 1875), 212-3.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, 183.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, 214.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid*, 212.

<sup>23</sup> Alfred Hegar, *Der Geschlechtstrieb: Eine Social-Medicinische Studie* (Stuttgart: Verlag von Ferdinand Enke, 1894), 1.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, 5.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, 5-6.

further argued that too much sex and too frequent pregnancies caused anaemia, malnutrition, muscle deterioration, and nervous exhaustion in women.<sup>26</sup>

By defining the female sex drive as naturally passionless and exclusively maternal, these physicians posited a fundamental incommensurability between male and female sexuality. As Frank Mort observed, physicians such as Acton believed that active *male* sexuality was a “powerful, inevitable expression of basic physiological processes.” Acton represented male sexuality as an ‘instinct force’ essential to masculinity that required regular satisfaction for the good of men’s health. Indeed, Acton insisted that men could only achieve full physical and mental gratification by “discharging their semen in the act of copulation.”<sup>27</sup> Thus, as Lucy Bland noted, while physicians advocated pre-marital sexual abstinence for both sexes, many physicians viewed men’s frequent failure to remain chaste as understandable and indeed necessary; many even suggested that young men should keep a mistress or visit a prostitute before marriage. At the same time, they insisted that women’s engagement in premarital sex was “unforgivable.”<sup>28</sup> Physicians’ assertions of a gender-differentiated sex drive therefore helped legitimize the sexual double standard and the social institutions, such as prostitution, that depended upon it.

The medico-scientific definition of the female sex drive as naturally chaste and essentially maternal—hence fundamentally different from the male sex drive—persisted into the early twentieth century, and was reiterated in landmark sexual scientific texts such as Richard von Krafft-Ebing’s *Psychopathia Sexualis* and August Forel’s *The*

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid, 20, 46.

<sup>27</sup> Mort, *Dangerous Sexualities*, 78.

<sup>28</sup> Bland, *Banishing the Beast*, 60.

*Sexual Question*.<sup>29</sup> However, scientific conceptualizations of the female sex drive began to change in the 1870s, thanks not only to social influences such as feminism, but also to the impact of evolutionary theory and psychiatric studies of sexuality. Despite proceeding from a strictly reproductive framework, Darwinian sexual selection demonstrated the ‘active’ and autonomous character of the female sex drive, and highlighted the important role it plays in the life of the species. Although Darwin maintained that males take the lead in the mating process due to their “stronger passions” and greater “eagerness,” in *Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* (1871) he nonetheless argued that sexual intercourse ultimately depended upon “the powers of perception, taste, and will of the female.”<sup>30</sup> Darwin further attributed to female sexual choice the direction of the “character of the tribe” and the healthy reproduction of the species.<sup>31</sup> Meanwhile, psychiatric research on the locus and function of the sex drive, and the physical and psychological effects of prolonged celibacy upon women’s health, suggested that women have a ‘need’ for sex that exceeded reproductive purposes. In the remainder of this section, I focus on changing views specifically among male physicians and scientists in order to highlight the difference in feminists’ interpretations, which I explore in the next section.

During the period under study, scientific understandings of the ‘natural’ character of the female sex drive underwent significant changes, two of which would prove to be

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<sup>29</sup> See Richard von Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis. Mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der Conträren Sexualempfindung. Eine klinisch-forensische Studie*, Third Revised Edition (Stuttgart: Verlag von Ferdinand Enke, 1888), 9-10; August Forel, *The Sexual Question: A Scientific, Psychological, Hygienic and Sociological Study for the Cultured Classes*, trans. C. F Marshall M. D (London: Rebman Ltd, 1908), 93-95. See also Otto Adler, *Die mangelhafte Geschlechtsempfindung des Weibes* (Berlin: Fischers med. Buchandlung, 1911).

<sup>30</sup> Charles Darwin, *Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex*, Introduction by John Tyler Bonner and Robert B. May (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981), 296.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, 379.

particularly important for feminists. First, regardless of the gender of its bearer, the sex drive was increasingly understood as simultaneously physiological *and* psychological. Second, the female sex drive was established as an autonomous entity, distinguishable from a maternal drive. This latter development enabled contemporaries to think about female sexuality in terms of erotic passion and sexual pleasure. Together, these changes suggested that the male and female sex drives were not essentially or fundamentally different—and that a similar, more liberal sexual ethic may be appropriate for both sexes. Nevertheless, as I will demonstrate in what follows, despite finding commonalities between the male and female sex drives, male physicians and scientists continued to insist upon the ‘naturalness’ of gender differences in the drive, and distinctly gendered roles in sexual intercourse.

Beginning in the 1880s, physicians and scientists increasingly stressed the existence of a psychological, emotional component to the human sex drive alongside a physical one. The dual nature of the drive meant that, in seeking sex, humans simultaneously sought emotional intimacy and physical contact. Thus, whereas religious interpretations frequently represented love and intimacy as spiritual and notably distinct from brute ‘animalistic’ intercourse, physicians and scientists insisted that these emotions were an intrinsic element of sex and sexuality, and that they were materially rooted and inextricable from physical intercourse.<sup>32</sup> Such scientific arguments can be partially attributed to the emerging consensus in the late nineteenth century that the brain and the

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<sup>32</sup> This dichotomy between religious and scientific understandings ought to be tempered by Frank Mort’s observation that within the dissenting religious traditions of the Quakers, Unitarians, and Congregationalists, sexual pleasure was considered a god-given right to men and women, necessary for health and happiness. They believed morality was contravened only when pleasure was pursued as an end in itself. See Mort, *Dangerous Sexualities*, 80.



nervous system constituted the anatomical loci of the sex drive. In *Psychopathia Sexualis*, for example, psychiatrist Richard Krafft-Ebing claimed that the sex instinct is a function of the cerebral cortex, which serves as the ‘junction’ of paths leading to the sex organs and the nerve centres of visual and olfactory sensation. Citing British neurologist Henry Maudsley, he also declared the sex drive to be the root of all “ethics, poetry, and moral tendency.”<sup>33</sup> Krafft-Ebing thus represented the sex drive as connecting mind and body, sensations and emotions—although for him its function remained fundamentally reproductive.

Further elaborations of this understanding of the sex drive as simultaneously physiological and psychological increasingly decoupled sex and reproduction. Proceeding from German dermatologist Albert Moll’s *Research on the Libido Sexualis* (*Untersuchungen über die libido sexualis*, 1897), British physician Havelock Ellis claimed in his *Analysis of the Sexual Impulse* (1903) that the ‘sex impulse’ was comprised of two mutually-constitutive phenomena: namely, ‘tumescence,’ or physical sexual tension, and ‘contratection,’ an instinct to approach, touch and kiss another person, usually—but, notably, not necessarily—of the opposite sex.<sup>34</sup> Notably, an impulse to reproduce was not part of this definition of the ‘sex impulse’. Ellis (and Moll’s) rethinking of the sex drive thus distinguished the reproductive instinct from a more generally sexual one. Ellis was particularly emphatic in his insistence that the sex ‘impulse’ was not solely, or even primarily, a reproductive one. Pointing to the intellectual fallacy of defining an object through its ultimate end, Ellis cleverly averred,

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<sup>33</sup> See Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, 14-21.

<sup>34</sup> Havelock Ellis, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex, Volume 3: Analysis of the Sexual Impulse* (Philadelphia: F. A Davis Co., 1903), 17.

“We might as well say that the impulse by which young animals seize food is ‘an instinct of nutrition.’”<sup>35</sup> He further suggested that the term ‘reproductive instinct’ is “vaguely employed as a euphemism by those who wish to veil the facts of the sexual life; it is more precisely employed mainly by those who are unconsciously dominated by a superstitious repugnance to sex.”<sup>36</sup>

Similarly, in his privately-circulated pamphlet *Sex-Love* (1894), Edward Carpenter insisted that the primary object of sex was “personal union,” and that “generation” was but a secondary objective.<sup>37</sup> To illustrate the basic biological truth of his argument, specifically the primacy of the “drive to union,” Carpenter referred to “the lowest material expressions of Sex—as among the protozoic cells.” As he observed, the cells “unite together, two into one; and that, as a result of the nutrition that ensues, this joint cell after a time (but not always) breaks up by fission into a number of progeny cells.” Likewise, in the “very highest expression of Sex, in the sentiment of Love,” a “desire of union” constitutes the primary impulse; only in “lesser degree” does a “desire for race-propagation” emerge.<sup>38</sup>

Sigmund Freud took this conceptualization further in his *Three Contributions to the Theory of Sex* (*Drei Abhandlung zur Sexualtheorie*, 1905). Unlike Krafft-Ebing, Freud did not believe that the sex drive was determined in the first instance by inputs to the central nervous system. Instead, he maintained that the sexual impulse emanated

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid, 16.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 17.

<sup>37</sup> Edward Carpenter, *Sex-Love: And Its Place in a Free Society* (Manchester: Labour Press Society Limited, 1894), 22.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid, 22.

from “all organs of the body,” beginning as early as infancy.<sup>39</sup> More radically, in his essay “Modern Sexual Morality and Modern Nervousness” (“Die kulturelle Sexualmoral und die moderne Nervosität,” 1908), Freud argued that the sex drive’s fundamental, essential aim was not reproduction, but pleasure. In Freud’s own words, “Broad vistas open up for us when we bear in mind the fact that man’s [sic] sexual instinct is not at all primarily meant to serve the purposes of reproduction but is intended to furnish certain forms of gratification.”<sup>40</sup> Thus, like Ellis and Moll, Freud argued that the sex drive was distinct from reproduction. Importantly, his arguments implied that sexual pleasure was a physiological and psychological phenomenon, produced by physiological and psychological processes.

Swiss psychiatrist August Forel also recognized a ‘pleasure principle’ at work in the sex drive; however, he associated this tendency specifically with the female sex drive. In “normal’ women, Forel found “a certain sensual desire for caresses, connected more or less with unconscious and ill-defined sexual sensations”; intriguingly, he insisted this desire was “not limited to the male sex but extends to other women, to children, and even to animals.” As Forel noted in *The Sexual Question* (1905), “Young normal girls often like to sleep together in the same bed, to caress and kiss each other, which is not the case with normal young men.” While representing this impulse as a “peculiarity of the sexual

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<sup>39</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Three Contributions to the Theory of Sex*, Second Edition, trans. A. A Brill (New York; Washington: Nervous and Mental Disease Publishing Co., 1920), 77. To clarify, this text was originally published in German in 1905. See Sigmund Freud, *Drei Abhandlung zur Sexualtheorie* (Leipzig: Deutike, 1905).

<sup>40</sup> Sigmund Freud, “Modern Sexual Morality and Modern Nervousness,” *American Journal of Urology and Sexology* 11 (October 1915): 392. This essay was originally published before the First World War in German as “Die kulturelle Sexualmoral und die moderne Nervosität,” in *Sexual-Probleme* 4 (1908): 107-129.

sentiments of woman,” Forel, like Freud, recognized that the sex drive could compel non-reproductive sexual behaviour aimed at no purpose other than self-satisfaction.<sup>41</sup>

As Forel’s ideas suggest, these changing scientific paradigms of the sex drive clearly had implications for understandings of what constituted a ‘normal’ female sex drive. Importantly, it led physicians and scientists to suggest that the female and male sex drives may actually be similar in strength and intensity. Despite characterizing the female sex drive as a “mocking mystery” whose frustrating “elusiveness” led one to “question its very existence,” Havelock Ellis nonetheless argued in “The Sexual Impulse in Woman” that “the *relative strength* of sexual impulse in men and women is roughly equal.”<sup>42</sup> Ellis claimed that previous researchers had failed to grasp this fundamental truth because they had not understood that women’s “sexual mechanism” was less spontaneous, and more complex, variable, and diffuse than men’s.<sup>43</sup> To evince the ‘naturalness’ of the female sexual impulse, Ellis pointed to young women’s predilection for masturbation, and asserted that “all the more highly intelligent, energetic women... [are] those with strong sexual emotions.”<sup>44</sup> Quite radically, Ellis blamed men for women’s sexual unresponsiveness, insisting that “many women may never experience sexual gratification and relief, through no defect on their part, but through the failure of the husband to understand the lover’s part.”<sup>45</sup> In making this claim, however, he reaffirmed men’s leading role in arousing women’s sexual drive.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Forel, *The Sexual Question*, 94-95.

<sup>42</sup> Ellis, “The Sexual Impulse in Women,” 1, 5. Emphasis added.

<sup>43</sup> *Ibid*, 10-11.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid*, 5, 4.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid*, 8.

<sup>46</sup> Indeed, like his predecessors, Ellis maintained that, “In a very large number of women the sexual impulse remains latent until aroused by a lover’s caresses.” *Ibid*, 9.

Like Ellis, German dermatologist Iwan Bloch insisted in his influential *Sexual Life of Our Times* (1907) that, while “the sexual sensibility of woman” was “of quite a different nature from that of man,” its intensity was “at least as great as that of man.” Bloch claimed that he arrived at this view through consultation with “a great many cultured women” who, “[w]ithout exception...declared the theory of the lesser sexual sensibility of women to be erroneous.” Indeed, Bloch reported, “many [women] were even of the opinion that sexual sensibility was greater and more enduring in woman than man.”<sup>47</sup> Also like Ellis, Bloch maintained that the female sex drive was more diffuse, and that this trait inhibited the “spontaneous resolution of the libido.” Bloch thus concluded that, when it came to women’s true sexual nature, “behind the veil prescribed by conventional morality, behind the apparent coldness, there is concealed an ardent sexuality.” Yet, again like Ellis, Bloch insisted that women depended upon men to awaken their latent “erotic sensibilities.”<sup>48</sup>

Freud offered perhaps the most radical statement concerning the similarities of the male and female sex drive in *Three Contributions to the Theory of Sex* (1905). Freud maintained that both the male and female libidos were essentially “masculine”—a term he claimed meant “active”—as a result of humanity’s fundamental bisexuality.<sup>49</sup> Unlike Ellis and Bloch, Freud saw no inherent difference in the character, purpose, or strength of

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 83-84.

<sup>48</sup> Iwan Bloch, *The Sexual Life of Our Time in its relations to modern Civilization*, trans. M. Eden Paul, M.D. (London: Rebman, 1908), 83-86.

<sup>49</sup> During this period, ‘bisexuality’ denoted the presence of both female and male physiological properties in the body, rather than a sexual orientation towards both sexes. In Freud’s words, “there is no pure masculinity and femininity either in the biological or psychological sense. On the contrary every individual person shows a mixture of his own biological sex characteristics with the biological traits of the other sex and a union of activity and passivity.” Freud, *Three Contributions*, 79.

the male and female sex drives. Rather, Freud insisted that gendered differences in manifestations of the sex drive were a result of socialization.

Physicians and scientists' reconceptualization of the female sex drive as equal in strength and intensity to the male drive in turn enabled them to distinguish between a sex drive and a 'maternal drive' in women. Just as Ellis insisted on the distinction between reproductive and sex drives generally, he also distinguished between women's sexual and maternal instincts. According to Ellis, women's maternal instinct, their "longing to fulfill those functions for which their bodies are constituted," may be "urgent" and no less "imperative than the sexual impulse"—yet it was not the same as the sex drive. Interestingly, Ellis attributed greater importance to the maternal instinct, asserting that, "A woman may not want a lover, but may yet want a child."<sup>50</sup>

These new theories of the female sex drive were bolstered by psychiatric research on the effects of prolonged celibacy on women's physical and psychological health. Importantly, these studies suggested that the absolute insistence upon women's extramarital celibacy were potentially hazardous to women's mental and physical health. Whereas physicians such as Acton and Hegar claimed that celibacy was physiologically and psychologically beneficial, contributing to longer life and greater intellectual and creative activity, by the 1880s psychiatrists such as Krafft-Ebing began to argue that women's enforced celibacy caused a host of physical and psychological diseases, including hysteria and suicide.<sup>51</sup> Indeed, in the second edition of his *Textbook of*

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid, 16.

<sup>51</sup> Hegar, *Der Geschlechtstrieb*, 7-8.

*Psychiatry (Lehrbuch der Psychiatrie, 1883)*, Krafft-Ebing unambiguously stated that women are by nature as sexually needy as men.<sup>52</sup>

By the first decade of the twentieth century, growing claims that women had a physiological and psychological need for sex led many male physicians and scientists to become openly critical of women's enforced celibacy. Although he had previously insisted that women were 'naturally' passionless, by 1911 German physician Dr. Hermann Rohleder had become convinced that woman's sexual needs and feelings were equal to those of man; furthermore, he maintained that the diminishment of woman's sex drive was a product of culture, not nature.<sup>53</sup> In fact, Rohleder considered celibacy to be actually impossible, except among the truly perverse. Like neurologist Albert Eulenberg and dermatologist Dr. Max Marcuse, he maintained that celibacy could never be an absolute phenomenon because sex, he believed, permeated all realms of physical and psychological existence.<sup>54</sup> Sexual thoughts and longings therefore constituted for him a breach of celibacy.

Like Rohleder, Eulenberg, and Marcuse, Freud insisted in "Modern Sexual Morality and Modern Nervousness" (1908) that most people were "constitutionally incapable of abstinence."<sup>55</sup> He insisted that all humans, regardless of their gender, required not only sexual activity but also sexual gratification for the sake of their mental and physical wellbeing. Thus, he declared that existing social restrictions on the play of

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<sup>52</sup> Richard von Krafft-Ebing, *Lehrbuch der Psychiatrie auf klinischer Grundlage für praktische Ärzte und Studierende. Band I: Die Allgemeine Pathologie und Therapie des Irreseins*, Second Edition (Stuttgart: Ferdinand Enke, 1883), 80-90.

<sup>53</sup> Hermann Rohleder, "Die sexuelle Veranlagung der Frauen," *Die Neue Generation* 7 (14 Juli 1911): 266.

<sup>54</sup> For an exposition of this position, see Albert Eulenberg, "Leitsätze zu dem Referate: 'Die sexuelle Abstinenz und die moderne Kultur,'" in *Mutterschutz und Sexualreform: Referate und Leitsätze des I. Internationalen Kongresses für Mutterschutz und Sexualreform in Dresden 28./30. September 1911*, edited by Dr. Max Rosenthal (Breslau: Verlag von Preuss und Jünger, 1912), 112-114.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid*, 397, 394.

sexual instincts were primarily responsible for causing nervous disorders.<sup>56</sup> With respect to women, Freud argued that premarital abstinence, repression of girls' sensuality, and enforced sexual ignorance, all caused certain "functional disturbances" and inadequacies in women—including mental inferiority.<sup>57</sup> Freud was remarkably forthright in suggesting that society consciously repressed women's sexuality to serve its own ends.<sup>58</sup>

By identifying similarities in the male and female sex drives, as well as the potentially damaging health effects of celibacy, these male scientists and physicians fundamentally challenged the legitimacy of women's enforced premarital celibacy, and the sexual double standard itself. Claims that the sex drive is not simply reproductive, but also geared towards pleasure and intimacy, opened "broad vistas" for the potential reform of sexual life. And yet, Freud for one nonetheless insisted that female sexuality *must* be repressed to facilitate the development of the male sex drive. According to Freud, "The re-enforcement of the sexual inhibitions produced in the woman...causes a stimulus in the libido of the man and forces it to increase its capacity." Thus, Freud suggested that if the female sex drive were liberated, it would undermine the power and potency of male sexuality.<sup>59</sup> Like many male scientists who deplored women's enforced celibacy, Freud proved markedly hesitant to publicly support women's unrestricted pursuit of sexual satisfaction. Although some of these scientists, including members of

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<sup>56</sup> Freud, "Modern Sexual Morality and Modern Nervousness," 392, 398.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, 402.

<sup>58</sup> According to Freud, "The double standard which obtains in present day society is the frankest admission that society, much as it may issue decrees, does not believe that its decrees can be enforced." *Ibid.*, 398.

<sup>59</sup> Indeed, within the developmental schema outlined in *Three Contributions*, sexual repression is represented as fundamental to both normal female and male sexual subjectivity. While defining all childhood sexuality as diffuse, or "polymorphously perverse", and recognizing the clitoris as the girl's central erogenous zone, Freud states that during the course of sexual maturation, the female youth must effectively abandon the clitoris, or the "male element", as the central erogenous zone, and transfer this sexual excitation to the vagina in preparation for her future maternal role. Freud, *Three Contributions*, 80.



the German Society for the Suppression of Venereal Diseases, framed their support of extramarital celibacy in terms of ‘social hygiene,’ one cannot help but question the degree to which this position was, as suggested by Freud, a product of concerns for male sexuality.

Thus, despite these changes in scientific definitions of the female sex drive, male scientists continued to insist on women’s sexual subordination. Some went as far as to claim that women’s subordination within sexual relations was ‘natural.’ In *The Sexual Question* (1905), August Forel argued that the female sex drive is not only subordinate to the male, but in fact seeks out and delights in its subordination. According to Forel, when a woman finds the man she loves and with whom she wishes to have children, she is driven “to give herself to him as a slave...to play the part of the one who devotes herself, who is conquered, mastered, and subjugated.” Forel even insisted that these “negative aspirations form part of the normal sexual appetite of women.”<sup>60</sup>

Perhaps more disturbingly, the naturalization of women’s sexual drive and attendant needs had the effect of imputing alternative meanings and motives to women’s sexual behaviour. In particular, women’s purportedly innate passivity, once held as evidence of her passionlessness, became redefined as a form of ‘coquetry’ designed to facilitate sexual activity—even to the point of inviting male sexual domination.<sup>61</sup> In upholding this interpretation of women’s passivity, many sexual scientists referenced Darwinian sexual selection, and the evolutionary role he attributed to female modesty. Ellis, Forel and Bloch all insisted that women’s sexual passivity was only “apparent” or

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<sup>60</sup> Forel, *The Sexual Question*, 93-94.

<sup>61</sup> See, for example, Ellis, “The Sexual Impulse in Woman,” 7.

superficial.<sup>62</sup> According to Ellis, “The true nature of the passivity of the female is revealed by the ease with which it is thrown off whenever the male refuses to accept his cue.”<sup>63</sup>

Finally, male scientists’ recognition of the ‘naturalness’ of female sexual need had the effect of stigmatizing women’s sexual disinterest—in men—as ‘frigidity.’ Ellis, Bloch and Freud all claimed that women’s ‘frigidity’ was “abnormal.”<sup>64</sup> Echoing Eulenberg, Bloch further argued that female frigidity constituted a form of sexual “infantilism” that he attributed to multiple causes including heredity, masturbation, and, intriguingly, women’s experience of male sexual violence.<sup>65</sup> Thus, while at one time a virtue, female passionless increasingly became redefined as evidence of underlying pathology.

In this section, I charted changing conceptualizations of the ‘normal’ female sex drive during the period under study among German-speaking and British male sexual scientific ‘experts.’ I demonstrated that the female sex drive was increasingly understood as active, distinct from maternal longings, and equal in intensity and need to the male drive. As the following sections will demonstrate, feminists would further elaborate this understanding of the ‘true nature’ of the female sex drive, and link it to their demands for women’s sexual emancipation. However, the pathologization of female sexual ‘frigidity’ and disinterest in heterosexual relations that accompanied this new definition would also inform feminist understandings, and profoundly impact feminist sexual politics.

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<sup>62</sup> Forel, *The Sexual Question*, 74.

<sup>63</sup> Ellis, “The Sexual Impulse in Woman,” 7.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 2.

<sup>65</sup> Bloch, *The Sexual Life of Our Times*, 86, 430-1.

Gaining “clearer insight into the sex life of the female”: Feminists define the female sex drive<sup>66</sup>

Beginning in the 1880s, in connection with feminist agitation against the regulation of prostitution and debates on the Woman Question more broadly, German-speaking and British feminists began to engage with new scientific conceptualizations of the female sex drive. This was particularly true of feminists interested in creating greater opportunities for women to participate in freely-chosen (hetero)sexual encounters. Arguably, these feminists recognized that new scientific understandings of female sexuality had sweeping implications for prevailing views of women’s sexual subjectivity, sexual ethics, and the laws and social institutions that governed women’s sexuality. In this section, I explore these feminists’ conceptualization of what constituted the ‘true nature’ of female sex drive, which they represented as grounding ‘normal’ female sexuality. These feminists’ ideas clearly resemble those of the male sexual scientists described earlier, and indeed, feminists often explicitly drew upon theories and texts developed by male experts. However, feminists did not uncritically reiterate men’s views. Moreover, unlike their male counterparts, these feminists wanted the implications of this new understanding to be carried through to their logical conclusions in terms of sex reform.

Intriguingly, turn-of-the-century feminist discussions of the female sex drive were not initially sparked by scientific texts alone: programmatic socialist texts on the Woman

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<sup>66</sup> The phrase is taken from Johanna Elberskirchen’s essay, “Das Geschlechtsleben des Weibes,” in *Mann und Weib: Ihre Beziehungen zueinander und zum Kulturleben der Gegenwart*, edited by Dr. R. Kossmann and Dr. Julius Weiss (Stuttgart; Berlin: Union Deutsche Verlagsgesellschaft, 1908), 187.

Question, such as Friedrich Engels' *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State* (*Der Ursprung der Familie, des Privateigentums und des Staats*, 1884) also played a particularly important and influential role. Importantly, such socialist texts helped to disseminate scientific ideas to a broader reading public, and to link scientific evidence to demands for sweeping social changes. In this regard, no socialist text was more influential than August Bebel's *Woman and Socialism* (*Die Frau und der Sozialismus*).

First published in 1879 and translated into 15 languages by 1913, Bebel's *Woman and Socialism* exercised an immense transnational influence, thanks in large part to the publicity efforts of socialist activists across Europe.<sup>67</sup> Bebel drew upon medico-scientific knowledge to argue not only that the female sex drive was a natural human instinct akin to eating, drinking, and sleeping, but also that both the male and female drives required regular satisfaction to ensure physical and mental wellbeing.<sup>68</sup> Bebel insisted that the repression of the female sex drive led to suicide, madness, criminality, and, notably, sexual inversion.<sup>69</sup> In subsequent editions of his text he amplified these claims by referencing Krafft-Ebing's assertion that women's involuntary sexual abstinence caused madness, and gynaecologist Heinrich Ploss' claim that regular sexual intercourse could cure illnesses commonly suffered by "old maids." Additionally, Bebel began citing Prussian state statistics, which he insisted demonstrated the higher incidence of madness and suicide among unmarried, thus presumably celibate, women.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>67</sup> See, for example, Eleanor Marx Aveling and Edward Aveling, "The Woman Question," and Eleanor Marx-Aveling, "Review: Woman in the Past, Present and Future by August Bebel (From the German by H. B Adams-Walther)," *Supplement to the Commonwealth* (August 1885): 63-4.

<sup>68</sup> August Bebel, *Die Frau und der Sozialismus* (Zürich-Hottingen: Verlag der Volksbuchhandlung, 1879), 1, 17-19, 21.

<sup>69</sup> Bebel *Die Frau und der Sozialismus*, 18-19.

<sup>70</sup> Bebel began citing Krafft-Ebing's *Lehrbuch der Psychiatrie* (1883) and Heinrich Ploss' *Das Weib in Natur und Völkerkunde* (1887) in the 1891 major revised edition. Intriguingly, by 1909, Bebel was also

According to Bebel, science's revelation of the 'true nature' of the female sex drive had implications for the reform of sexual life. Bebel maintained that men and women have a right to sexual education, and that women had a right to non-reproductive sexual experiences. Yet because he blamed capitalism for creating conditions that oppressed women's sexuality, Bebel insisted that meaningful reforms of sexual life could only come following a socialist revolution. Most feminists, however, were unwilling to wait, and sought to realize Bebel's vision in the present.

Bebel's text was translated into English in 1885 by his friend and colleague, the British ex-patriot, socialist, and gynaecologist Hope Bridges Adams Lehmann.<sup>71</sup> Yet even before its translation, this text sparked debate among British feminists and sex reformers associated with the Men and Women's Club.<sup>72</sup> It would have a similarly important impact upon German-speaking feminists, particularly women associated with the League for the Protection of Mothers and Sexual Reform, such as Ruth Bre, Helene Stöcker, and Adele Schreiber.<sup>73</sup> Arguably, it was Bebel's yoking together of scientifically-informed arguments regarding the true nature of the female sex drive and the effects of enforced celibacy to proposals for sexual reform that proved most influential for feminists seeking to empower women as (hetero)sexual agents. Like Bebel, German-speaking and British feminists stressed the naturalness of the female sex drive and its innate needs, and claimed that sexual activity was necessary for women's health. They also distinguished

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citing Dr. Elizabeth Blackwell, Havelock Ellis, Ernst Haeckel, Karl Pearson, and Cesare Lombroso. For the most detailed exposition of these claims and related statistics, see Bebel's 1909 edition, pages 82-84.

<sup>71</sup> See August Bebel, *Woman in the Past, Present and Future*, trans. H. B Adams-Walther (London: Modern Press, 1885).

<sup>72</sup> See Men and Women's Club Minute Book, 10/1 Pearson Papers, Special Collections, University College London.

<sup>73</sup> See Helene Stöcker, "Ein Freund der Frauen," *Die Neue Generation* 9, no. 9 (September 1913): 479-484; August Bebel Nachlass, IISG, Folders 72 and 164; Adele Schreiber Nachlass, Bestand N 1173, Folder 1. 1, Bundesarchiv (Koblenz).

the sex drive from the maternal instinct, insisting that the former was directed primarily towards physical and emotional intimacy, as well as the pursuit of pleasure. Many feminists even insisted that sexual experience was women's biological right, and that sweeping sexual reforms were required to empower women to act on this right.

Much in the vein of contemporaneous sexual science, these feminists conceived of the female sex drive as a biological reality, whose needs, like those of the male, were material, real, and wholly natural. Like Bebel, feminists such as Ruth Bre and Johanna Elberskirchen represented the sex drive as a natural function akin to eating, drinking, and sleeping.<sup>74</sup> Naturalizing the sex drive thusly enabled feminists to argue that the satisfaction of the female sex drive was a natural necessity. Just as eating required food, the sex drive required sex. As Johanna Elberskirchen argued in *Sex Life and Sexual Abstinence of Woman (Geschlechtsleben und Geschlechtsenthaltbarkeit des Weibes*, 1905), forcing sexual abstinence upon the unwilling constituted a form of unnatural deprivation.<sup>75</sup>

These feminists also embraced the view that the male and female sex drives did not differ significantly with regard to strength, need, or function. In *The Sex Problem and Modern Morals* (1908), Henriette Fürth insisted that the male and female sex drives were the same in their essential features, and equal in their intensity. She argued that a thorough examination of natural scientific writings on the subject found that, "neither in biology nor zoology can one find evidence to support the view of gender-differentiated

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<sup>74</sup> See Ruth Bre, *Das Recht auf die Mutterschaft. Eine Forderung zur Bekämpfung der Prostitution, der Frauen- und Geschlechtskrankheiten* (Leipzig: Verlag der Frauen-Rundschau, 1903), 28; Johanna Elberskirchen, *Geschlechtsleben und Geschlechtsenthaltbarkeit des Weibes* (Munich: Seitz & Schauer, 1905), 3.

<sup>75</sup> Johanna Elberskirchen, *Geschlechtsleben und Geschlechtsenthaltbarkeit des Weibes* (Munich: Seitz & Schauer, 1905), 3.

sex drives.”<sup>76</sup> Similarly, in *The Sexual Feeling in Man and Woman (Die Sexualempfindung bei Weib und Mann, 1903)*, Elberskirchen argued that any claims of women’s diminished sex drive lacked scientific foundation, and that both the male and female sex drives were motivated by biological need.<sup>77</sup> In Britain, some feminists questioned the degree to which “false modesty” played a role in obscuring the true extent of women’s natural sexual needs. “A Would-Be Freewoman” wrote to the British feminist journal *The Freewoman* to assert that women “are in reality much the same as men in regard to physical desires.” She further stated that she “agree[d] with what Dr. Iwan Bloch says in *The Sexual Life of Our Time*: ‘Speaking generally, the sexual sensibility of woman is...of quite a different nature than of man; but in intensity, it is at least as great as that of man.’”<sup>78</sup>

These feminists further distinguished between the sex drive and maternal instinct as distinct phenomena. In *The Sexual Feeling of Woman and Man (1903)*, Elberskirchen directly challenged gynaecologist Max Fleisch’s assertion that woman’s sex drive was nothing more than a physiological impetus to motherhood. Allowing herself “weapons from the scientific armoury of male intellectuals” including zoologist Oscar Hertwig, Elberskirchen argued that motherhood must be viewed as a physiological effect of sex.<sup>79</sup> Like Ellis, she asserted that the effects of sex cannot also constitute its origin.<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> Fürth, *Das Geschlechtsproblem und die moderne Moral*, 6.

<sup>77</sup> Johanna Elberskirchen, *Die Sexualempfindung bei Weib und Mann. Betrachtet vom physiologisch-soziologischen Standpunkte* (Berlin: R. Jacobsthal Verlag, 1903), 13. Elberskirchen went as far as to argue that the normal woman was so “sexually hungry” that her sex drive led her to ignore all social prohibitions against extramarital sex. Ibid, 28.

<sup>78</sup> See 10/1 Pearson Papers, Special Collections, University College London; ‘A Would-Be Freewoman’, “The Individualism of Motherhood and the ‘Normal’ Woman,” *The Freewoman* 1, no. 18 (21 March 1912): 353.

<sup>79</sup> Elberskirchen, *Die Sexualempfindung bei Weib und Mann*, 13.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid, 6-7.

Moreover, she pointed out that if the female sex drive was merely a desire for children, there would be no abortion, infanticide, or suicide in the face of unwanted pregnancy or unwed motherhood—and that women would be less discriminating in terms of their mates.<sup>81</sup> Fürth too maintained that women’s sex drive was distinct from any maternal longing. Reversing Havelock Ellis’ ranking, she asserted that sexual desire is primary in women, and motherhood secondary. Indeed, according to Fürth, the desire for a child sometimes only emerges after a woman holds her child in her arms for the first time.<sup>82</sup> Similarly, in Britain *Freewoman* editor Dora Marsden deemed the conflation of the female sex drive and the maternal instinct a “vulgar instrumentalization of sexuality.” According to Marsden, “It is impossible to have a passion for the procreation of offspring.”<sup>83</sup>

Feminists drew upon representations of the sex drive as simultaneously physical and psychological to stress that physical and emotional intimacy—and sexual pleasure—were all ‘natural’ phenomena. Like Moll and Ellis, these feminists conceived of the sex drive as in part a ‘drive to union.’ In “The Sex Life of the Female” (“Das Geschlechtsleben des Weibes,” 1908), Elberskirchen explicitly drew upon Albert Moll’s division of the sex drive into impulses of ‘tumescence’ and ‘contraction’ to define the normal female sex drive as comprised of innate impulses to physical and emotional union.<sup>84</sup> Elberskirchen further argued that the drive was comprised of a

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<sup>81</sup> Ibid, 26.

<sup>82</sup> Fürth, *Das Geschlechtsproblem und die moderne Moral*, 14.

<sup>83</sup> Dora Marsden, “Interpretations of Sex III,” *The Freewoman* 1, no. 26 (16 May 1912): 501.

<sup>84</sup> Elberskirchen, “Das Geschlechtsleben des Weibes,” 194.



“Begattungskraft,” a drive to copulation originating from the sexual organs and nervous system, and a “Liebeskraft,” a drive to physical intimacy originating in the brain.<sup>85</sup>

In the eyes of many feminists, recognizing the degree to which the sex drive was primarily a ‘drive to union’ helped illuminate the potential of sexual intercourse not only to produce individual sexual pleasure, but also to enhance intimacy and empathy between women and men. In a letter to British eugenicist Karl Pearson, the South African novelist Olive Schreiner maintained that both evolutionary and natural historical evidence suggested that the drive to union was overtaking reproductive impulses as the sole purpose of sex. She further contended that the continued evolution of civilization would result in a declining rate of sexual reproduction—and perhaps even produce an asexual mode of reproduction. This development would, in turn, produce surplus sexuality in both men and women that could be dedicated to artistic creation, erotic pleasure, and the creation of ‘sympathy’ between human beings.<sup>86</sup> Indeed, she asserted that this development held the greatest potential for sexual regeneration, writing that “sex relationships without the distinct aim of reproduction...[are] possibly, not so much a degeneration as the final evolution of a universal law working always in the evolution of the senses!”<sup>87</sup> Decades later, Grete Meisel-Hess similarly proclaimed in *The Sexual Crisis* (*Die sexuelle Krise*, 1909) that sexually “ardent” women were leaders in art and research—while disparaging their “antitypes, frigid women” as “inapt also for social and

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid, 188-192.

<sup>86</sup> In discussions within the London-based Men and Women’s Club organized by Pearson, Olive Schreiner suggested that the sex instinct was ennobling, and claimed that “there is something sexual at the root of all intellectual and artistic inspiration.” See 10/1 Pearson Papers, Special Collections, University College London.

<sup>87</sup> Letter from Olive Schreiner to Karl Pearson, 7 July 1886. 840/2 Pearson Papers, Special Collections, University College London.

artistic work” because they lacked “the fire of love.”<sup>88</sup> As Schreiner and Meisel-Hess’ comments suggest, representations of the female sex drive as a natural, simultaneously physical and psychological phenomenon that emanated from the needs of the body enabled feminists to ennoble sex and sexual pleasure. According to Meisel-Hess, the sex drive must be considered in its “essential nature not evil, but good”; likewise, she insisted that sexual pleasure was naturally “preordained.”<sup>89</sup>

According to feminists such as Elberskirchen, Fürth, Bre, Meisel-Hess, and Schreiner, science’s revelations of the ‘true’ character, function, and needs of the female sex drive established what Elberskirchen called women’s “biological right” to sexual experience and sexual pleasure.<sup>90</sup> British socialist feminist Stella Browne asserted that *some* sexual experience” was the “*right* of every human being not hopelessly afflicted in mind or body.”<sup>91</sup> According to Grete Meisel-Hess, however, sexual experience represented not only a biological right, but also a form of “erotic enfranchisement” for women that would “go far to restore her independence and self-respect,” and thus free women from “emotional and erotic dependence upon men.”<sup>92</sup>

Feminists bolstered their representations of the female sex drive and claims regarding its biological “rights” by referencing the damaging effects of celibacy on

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<sup>88</sup> Grete Meisel-Hess, *The Sexual Crisis: A Critique of Our Sex Life*, trans. Eden and Cedar Paul (New York: Critic and Guide Company, 1917), 225. This text was originally published in German in 1909; see Grete Meisel-Hess, *Die sexuelle Krise: Eine sozialpsychologische Untersuchung* (Jena: Diedrichs, 1909). I cite from the translated English version.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 322.

<sup>90</sup> Elberskirchen invoked the term “biological right” in *Geschlechtsleben und Geschlechtsenthaltbarkeit*, 3; see also *Idem, Mutter! II*, 39-49.

<sup>91</sup> ‘A New Subscriber [Stella Browne]’, “Experience and Understanding,” *The Freewoman* 1, no. 18 (21 March 1912): 312. Henriette Fürth refers to sexual activity as a “human right” in *Staat und Sittlichkeit* (Leipzig: Hans Wehner, 1912), 62.

<sup>92</sup> Meisel-Hess, *The Sexual Crisis*, 199. See also Grete Meisel-Hess’s aptly titled “Sexuelle Rechte” in *Die Neue Generation* 8 (April 1912): 185-6.

women's physical and psychological health. In *The Right to Motherhood (Das Recht auf Mutterschaft*, 1903), Ruth Bre insisted that celibacy causes cancers of the ovaries, uterus, and breast, in addition to sleeplessness, depression, hysteria, epilepsy, madness, and even suicide. Bre declared such afflictions "nature's revenge" for denying the sex drive's innate needs.<sup>93</sup> Such claims were echoed by feminists such as Helene Stöcker<sup>94</sup> and Grete Meisel-Hess, who like Bebel, cited Krafft-Ebing's finding of a high rate of insanity among single women between the ages of 25 and 35, that is, during the years when most women marry and presumably become sexually active.<sup>95</sup>

Citing Freud, Meisel-Hess further stressed the negative effects of celibacy on women's intellectual development. She argued that women's "artificial desexualisation" caused a conflict between their "impulse life" and their reason, which in turn disturbed women's "psychic unity."<sup>96</sup> Meisel-Hess further insisted that the repression of women's sexuality was the cause of women's purported lack of objectivity.<sup>97</sup> Similar arguments were made in Britain. In a contribution to the *Freewoman*, a self-proclaimed "Spinster" wrote that denying the "rightful ordained fulfillment" of the sex drive "diffuse[s]" the instinct, causing consciousness to become "charged with an all-pervasive unrest and sickness" that "queers all judgment" and leads "sentimentality" to dominate "reason and

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<sup>93</sup> Bre, *Das Recht auf die Mutterschaft*, 23, 32-33, 51.

<sup>94</sup> See Helene Stöcker, "Die sexuelle Abstinenz und die Gesundheit," (manuscript, 1911) Sign. Autogr I/4009-7, Handschriftabteilung der Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin. See also Meisel-Hess, *The Sexual Crisis*.

<sup>95</sup> Meisel-Hess, *The Sexual Crisis*, 306, 323, 331.

<sup>96</sup> Meisel-Hess, *The Sexual Crisis*, 321. Helene Stöcker also invoked Freud to make similar arguments. See "Zur Jahresversammlung der DGBG, Dresden 9. u. 10 September 1911," (manuscript, 1911) Autogr I/4009-9, Handschriftabteilung der Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin.

<sup>97</sup> According to Meisel-Hess, "Those who have lived out their sexual experiences can use things according to their nature, objectively, that is to say, freely, independently, and capably; whereas those whose sexual life is in a state of continuous repression must always remain dependent, enslaved to themselves and others...The incessant and heavy oppression of [woman's] sexual sphere disorders her critical faculties, weakens her power of resistance, obscures her whole intelligence." See Meisel-Hess, *The Sexual Crisis*, 320.

intelligence.”<sup>98</sup> Another contributor, E. S. P Haynes, accused celibacy of causing “sexual irregularities on an enormous scale.”<sup>99</sup>

Some feminists went so far as to argue that sexual activity was necessary not merely to prevent health problems, but also to ensure for women’s proper physical and psychological development. As early as 1885, Scottish-born socialist and utilitarian Jane Hume Clapperton argued in *Scientific Meliorism* that sexual activity was essential to woman’s physiological development. Drawing on scientific writings from Herbert Spencer to Francis Galton, Clapperton made the radical claim that “early moderate stimulation of the female sexual organs (after puberty is reached) tends, by the law of exercise promoting development of structure, to make parturition in mature life easy and safe.”<sup>100</sup> Over twenty years later, Grete Meisel-Hess would advance similar claims, and insist that sexual activity represents the fulfillment of an elemental physical and mental need, one that contributes to the development of a balanced and whole personality.<sup>101</sup>

Feminists thus claimed that recognizing women as ‘naturally’ desiring sexual subjects would have important effects upon women’s health. They further insisted that continuing to deny women their biological right would have disastrous implications for the future of the human race. According to the German feminist writer Ida Boy-Ed, “The natural, healthy sensuality of the normally developed female must be liberated for biological reasons or the decline of the race will become unavoidable.”<sup>102</sup> Grete Meisel-

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<sup>98</sup> “The Spinster, by One,” *The Freewoman* 1, no. 1 (November 23, 1911): 10-11.

<sup>99</sup> E. S. P Haynes, “Sex and Civilisation,” *The Freewoman* 1, no. 13 (15 February 1912): 247.

<sup>100</sup> Jane Hume Clapperton, *Scientific Meliorism and the Evolution of Happiness* (London: Kegan Paul, French & Co., 1885), 321.

<sup>101</sup> Meisel-Hess, *The Sexual Crisis*, 117. See also Helene Stöcker, “Zur Jahresversammlung der DGBG, Dresden . u. 10. September 1911.”

<sup>102</sup> Ida Boy-Ed, “Zwischen Scylla and Charybdis,” in *Ehe? Zur Reform der sexuellen Moral*, ed. Hedwig Dohm (Berlin: International Verlagsanstalt, 1911), 117.

Hess cautioned specifically against the celibacy of the New Woman, warning that “If these intellectual and fearless women die without leaving bodily offspring, if they fail to reproduce their forcible individualities, the race necessarily suffers.”<sup>103</sup>

Based upon their understanding of the ‘normal’ female sex drive, and their claims regarding its rights and the detrimental effects of its repression, these feminists demanded a number of sexual reforms. Above all, they wanted to end the sexual double standard. If the male and female drives were equal, and if sex was distinct from reproduction, feminists insisted that there was no reason why men and women should not be sexual equals, entitled to equal sexual rights and privileges. However, rather than demand an ethical standard for men and women based on pre-marital sexual abstinence, these feminists maintained that women should share men’s socially-recognized and medically-legitimized right to sexual experience and sexual pleasure, before, within, and independent of marriage. These feminists thus called for the abolition of prostitution, and the creation instead of conditions that would facilitate early marriage. Indeed, Fürth maintained in *Prostitution: Its Origins and the Way to a Remedy (Die Prostitution. Ursachen und Wege zur Abshilfe*, n.d.) that early marriages would enable men and women at the height of their sexual maturity to satisfy their sexual needs within the (supposedly) disease free zone of monogamous matrimony.<sup>104</sup> Feminists such as Bre and Meisel-Hess went further, calling for the recognition of non-marital relations of intimacy often referred to as ‘free love unions,’ as well as the legal recognition of children born to

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<sup>103</sup> Meisel-Hess, *The Sexual Crisis*, 324.

<sup>104</sup> Henriette Fürth, *Die Prostitution. Ursachen und Wege zur Abshilfe* (n.p, n.d), 10. Henriette Fürth Nachlass, International Institute for Social History, Folder 49. See also Clapperton, *Scientific Meliorism*, 241, 304, 311, 321-2; Hope Bridges Adams Lehmann, “Sexuelle Pädagogik,” *Sozialistische Monatshefte* 11 (1907): 749-760.

unmarried women.<sup>105</sup> For German feminists, the recognition of women's "biological right" to sex also required nationally-specific legal reforms, specifically an end to the legal prohibition against the marriage of female civil servants in Prussia—and the celibacy it consequently enforced upon them.<sup>106</sup> To ensure the healthy and 'responsible' use of the sex drive, feminists demanded sexual education, particularly among the young. They insisted that sex education represent sex as a natural fact of life, undifferentiated from other human functions and drives, and sexual activity as the right of all sexually mature adults.<sup>107</sup>

For feminists seeking to strengthen women's sexual agency, and to expand women's opportunities for (hetero)sexual experience, the changing scientific paradigm of female sexuality was of considerable political significance. New conceptualizations of the female sex drive that stressed its distinct needs, its autonomy from the maternal drive, and its innate impulse towards physiological and psychological 'union' enabled women to claim a 'biological right' to sexual experiences of their own choosing. According to these feminists, empowering women to realize this 'biological right' required recognition of women as independent, 'naturally' desiring sexual subjects, in addition to sweeping ethical and institutional reforms. Such reforms, these feminists argued, were essential for the health and wellbeing not only of individual women, but also for the human race itself.

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<sup>105</sup> See, for example, Bre, *Das Recht auf die Mutterschaft*; Meisel-Hess, *The Sexual Crisis*.

<sup>106</sup> Trained teachers such as Helene Stöcker and Maria Lischnewska led this campaign. See for example Landesverein Preußischer Volksschullehrerinnen, *Die verheiratete Lehrerin: Verhandlungen der ersten Internationalen Lehrerinnen-Versammlung in Deutschland, berufen im Anschluss an den Internationalen Frauenkongreß im Juni 1904* (Berlin: Walther, 1905).

<sup>107</sup> See Lehmann, "Sexuelle Pädagogik"; Lischnewska, "Die geschlechtliche Belehrung der Kinder"; and Henriette Fürth, "Der Aufklärungsunterricht: ein Beitrag zur Sexualpädagogik," *Sozialistische Monatshefte* 12, no. 14 (1908): 243-6, and *Idem*, "Sexualpädagogik und Sexualethik," *Sozialistische Monatshefte* 12, no. 14 (1908): 564-568.

However, these feminists were not representative of the majority. Many feminists disagreed with such representations of what constituted ‘normal’ female sexuality. Others questioned whether the liberalization of sexual life supported by this understanding of female sexuality was actually good for women. Moreover, given uncertainties concerning whether the ‘normal’ connoted the average or an ideal, even feminists who supported this new understanding of the ‘normal’ sex drive did not agree regarding who could or should realize the biological ‘rights’ they espoused. Indeed, as I will demonstrate in the following sections, the definition of the normal female sex drive described above—and the liberalized sex reform demands to which it gave rise—initiated and exacerbated conflicts within the feminist movement.

“Nature is a hopeless spendthrift and a reckless sower of discord”: Internal feminist debates on the limits and limitations of the ‘normal’<sup>108</sup>

In the preceding section, I demonstrated how feminists seeking greater sexual freedoms for women represented the normal female sex drive as ‘naturally’ active and animated by innate desires for intimate, non-reproductive sexual union. Within their conceptualizations of the female sex drive, these feminists also refused gendered differences between the male and female sex drives. For these feminists, sex was a powerful biological force that, when practiced by social and political equals in accordance with ‘nature,’ held the potential for personal fulfillment and collective regeneration. These feminists considered their demands for the recognition of women’s ‘biological right’ to sexual autonomy and experience as part of a broader feminist program to enhance women’s social, legal, and economic agency. Indeed, as I will

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<sup>108</sup> A Grandmother, “Clearing the Ground,” *The Freewoman* 1, no. 14 (22 February 1912): 270.

demonstrate more fully in Chapters Three and Four, they insisted that women's ability to make autonomous decisions about their sexual lives—to initiate or reject sexual encounters, to choose their sexual partners, to have children (or not) within (or outside) marriage—had implications for decision-making in other realms of life, including education, labour, and citizenship. In making such claims these feminists elevated sexual experience to a position of incredible importance. Meisel-Hess went as far as to argue that sexual life ought to be “the focal point of every healthy being whose instincts have not undergone partial or complete atrophy.”<sup>109</sup>

Such arguments and demands were highly controversial within the feminist movement. Many German-speaking and British feminists rejected the emerging understanding of the ‘normal’ female sex drive, as well as the broader turn to ‘nature’ as the arbiter of sexual life. They further disputed the liberalized sexual politics the new understandings of the normal supported, and seriously doubted that these innovations would ultimately be good for women. And yet, as I will demonstrate in what follows, these feminists did not necessarily eschew scientific evidence in their critiques, but rather appealed to facts and theories that supported their positions.

In the eyes of many feminists, the problem with the new definition of the normal female sex drive, whether articulated by male scientists or fellow feminists, was its denial of sexual difference. Many continued to insist that male and female sexuality were profoundly different, and maintained that women were naturally disinterested in sexual intercourse. In discussions of Bebel's *Woman and Socialism* within the Men and Women's Club, British feminist Henriette Müller deemed his representation of the female

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<sup>109</sup> Meisel-Hess, *The Sexual Crisis*, 117.



sex drive a self-serving male myth designed to make women instruments of men's lust. According to Müller, men "assume in woman a need for sexual intercourse...To many women sexual intercourse is an unpleasant and fatiguing obligation." In her view, men would not admit that "that which is necessary to them is repugnant to women."<sup>110</sup> German feminist Anna Pappritz expressed similar suspicion of male scientists' pronouncements upon female sexuality in her famous pamphlet *Men's Morals* (*Herrenmoral*, n.d.), and also suggested that men's gender bias made it impossible for them to truly grasp the character and needs of the female sex drive.<sup>111</sup>

More provocative and upsetting for feminists like Müller and Pappritz was the claim that prolonged celibacy was bad for women's health and wellbeing. Some feminists rejected this claim by pointing to medical evidence that suggested the physiological and psychological threats posed by sex. The debate over celibacy played out among feminists publicly in both Germany and Britain. In a fascinating exchange on the pages of the *German Medical Press* (*Deutsche Medizinische Presse*) in 1904, gynaecologist and eugenicist Dr. Agnes Bluhm, a member of the moderate Federation of German Women's Associations (Bund Deutscher Frauenvereine) and the Society for Racial Hygiene (Gesellschaft für Rassenhygiene), rejected Ruth Bre's scientifically-referenced argument that celibacy contributed to physical and mental health problems in women, including pelvic diseases, hysteria, and suicide. Contrary to Bre, Bluhm cited Emil Kraepelin's *Textbook of Psychiatry* (*Lehrbuch der Psychiatrie*) to prove that sexual intercourse itself, not celibacy, was responsible for mental illness in women. Moreover,

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<sup>110</sup> 10/1Pearson Papers, Special Collections, University College London.

<sup>111</sup> Anna Pappritz, *Herrenmoral*, Eighth Edition (Leipzig: Verlag der Frauen Rundschau, n.d.), 7-8, 13-15. B Rep 235-01, MF Nr 3433-3441, Bund Deutscher Frauenvereine, Helene Lange Archiv, Landesarchiv Berlin.

like her colleague Alfred Hegar, Bluhm maintained that women who had given birth (and had therefore had sex) suffered a higher incidence of cancers of the reproductive system, particularly uterine and ovarian cancer. Throughout her critique, Bluhm ridiculed Bre's ignorance of gynaecological and pathological anatomy, asserted her superior expertise, and assured the reader that her views were based on cutting edge research and scientific fact. And yet, rather ambivalently, Bluhm concluded that motherhood, despite its perils, was inevitable for most women.<sup>112</sup>

Eight years later on the pages of the *Freewoman*, British feminists took up the celibacy question explicitly in relation to the definition of 'normal' female sexuality—and to the proper direction of feminist sexual politics. Within these exchanges, German sexual science played a key role. The primary debate took place between Stella Browne, who supported the liberalization of sexual life, and Kathlyn Oliver, who defended celibacy. Citing authorities such as August Forel and Havelock Ellis, Stella Browne, writing as "A New Subscriber," asserted that, "the health, the happiness, the social usefulness, and the mental capacity of many women have been seriously impaired and sometimes totally ruined by the unnatural conditions of their lives." Like Rohleder and Eulenberg, Browne insisted that absolute celibacy did not exist, and, citing Forel, declared women who lacked sexual feeling "sexual anaesthetic." According to Browne, women who did not enjoy sex were free "by all means" to "abstain from what affords

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<sup>112</sup> See Agnes Bluhm, "Zur Erwiderung auf den Artikel von Ruth Bre: 'Ist erzwungene unfreiwillige Enthaltbarkeit und Kinderlosigkeit für das gesunde, normale Weib schädlich?'" *Deutsche Medizinische Presse* 5 (1904): 34-35. Bluhm's article responded to Ruth Bre's article, "Ist erzwungene, unfreiwillige Enthaltbarkeit und Kinderlosigkeit für das gesunde, normale Weib schädlich?" *Deutsche Medizinische Presse* 4 (1904): 27-29. Bre's article, in turn, was a response to Bluhm's article, "Geschlechtliche Enthaltbarkeit und Frauenleiden," *Frauenbewegung* 10, no. 3 (1 February 1904), which was itself a review of Bre's *Das Recht auf die Mutterschaft* (1903).

them no pleasure.” She nonetheless demanded that they should not “make their temperamental coldness into a rigid standard for others.”<sup>113</sup>

Conversely, Kathlyn Oliver insisted that celibacy had had no bad effect on her health, and that her experience was ‘normal.’ Drawing on her personal observations of unmarried women and girls, she insisted that, “there is not the least ground to suppose that they are in any way troubled or affected diversely by complete chastity.” Indeed, she maintained that, for most women, “until they love, the idea of the sex relationship seldom enters their thoughts, but if it does it appears repulsive rather than attractive.” Oliver boasted that her “intellect and reason” ruled her “lower instincts and desires,” and that this fact raised her “above the lower animals (including man).”<sup>114</sup> In her final letter, she cited the weekly biology lectures she attended, which informed her that “the more advanced and the more civilised and intellectual [humans] become, the less physical and the less dominated by animal instincts and appetites we are.”<sup>115</sup>

The use of nature as an arbiter of sexuality and sexual governance was particularly contentious among feminists. Feminists supporting the liberalization of sexual life expressed a benevolent and expansive view of nature, wherein material and spiritual phenomena were united. Such an understanding of the world, characteristic of Monism, was quite popular during the period under study.<sup>116</sup> However, many feminists insisted upon the separation of the material and spiritual worlds, and specifically of ‘animal’ sex from ‘spiritual’ love. They further rejected ‘the natural’ as providing a foundation for sexual ethics, sexual governance, and sexual subjectivity. In Britain,

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<sup>113</sup> A New Subscriber, “The Chastity of Continence?” *The Freewoman* 1, no. 14 (22 February 1912): 270.

<sup>114</sup> Kathlyn Oliver, “Chastity and Normality,” *The Freewoman* 1, no. 15 (29 February 1912): 290.

<sup>115</sup> Kathlyn Oliver, “More Plain-Speaking,” *The Freewoman* 1, no. 17 (14 March 1912): 332.

<sup>116</sup> On Monism and its appeal for feminists, see Dickinson, “Reflections.”

*Freewoman* correspondent “A Grandmother” vividly characterized “Nature” as a “hopeless spendthrift and a reckless sower of discord” that was “thoroughly immoral, inconsiderate, ‘red in tooth and claw,’ careless of everything except the permanence of her species.” Consequently, she maintained that feminists must be careful not to allow “the more prosaic animal side of the sex-relationship to eclipse the...human and spiritual” elements of sex, which she claimed constituted the “driving force of progress.”<sup>117</sup> Taking a more nuanced view, in her essay “Sexual-ethical Principal Questions” (*Sexual-ethische Prinzipienfragen*, 1909) Marianne Weber argued that while many feminists framed their reform proposals as attempts to “return to nature,” they were in a position to determine what constitutes the natural. She also criticized these feminists’ one-sided definition of the natural as good. As she pointed out, nature is also responsible for bad phenomena. Somewhat ironically, she echoed evolutionary thinkers such as Darwin by noting that nature itself is not an agent, and does not assign moral meaning or value to its works. Weber thus insisted upon a distinction between the physical and the spiritual, alleging that these two elements have never been in agreement. Only culture and its stress on the spiritual and chaste elements of love could elevate human sexuality, she claimed. Weber further suggested that sexual liberalization was a purely masculine goal, because women bore more burdens than benefits in sexual life. To elevate the animal element of sexual life, she insisted, would only further “brutalize” sexual feeling.<sup>118</sup>

In challenging the role of nature, and insisting upon distinctions between the ‘animal’ and the spiritual in sexual life, feminists such as Weber called for sexual reforms

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<sup>117</sup> A Grandmother, “Clearing the Ground,” 270.

<sup>118</sup> See Marianne Weber, “Sexual-ethische Prinzipienfragen,” in *Frauenbewegung und Sexualethik. Beiträge zur modernen Ehekritik*, eds. Helene Lange and Gertrud Bäumer (Heilbronn: Verlag von Eugen Salzer, 1909), 27-29, 33, 41-42.

that de-emphasized the role of sex and sexuality within conceptualizations of women's subjectivity. In her essay "The Women's Movement and the Modern Critique of Marriage" ("Die Frauenbewegung und die modern Ehekritik," 1909), Helene Lange, leader of the 'moderate' German feminists, lamented the vaunted place of sexuality among some of her fellow feminists, namely the feminists involved in the League for the Protection of Mothers and Sexual Reform. Lange insisted that the sex drive be placed within the broader context of women's total personality. She argued that over-emphasizing any one drive throws health and personality out of balance. Lange insisted that the extent of sexual need varies according to the individual, regardless of their sex. She therefore demanded a more comprehensive view of sex's place in women's lives and in society, one that recognized that sexual questions do not exist apart from larger social questions. According to Lange, treating sex independent of other socio-political considerations only supported efforts to reorient sexual ethics towards individual pleasures and away from collective needs.<sup>119</sup>

As Weber, *Freewoman* correspondent "A Grandmother," and Lange's critiques suggest, some feminists feared that new understandings of what constituted the 'normal' female sex drive would inculcate a licentious sexual ethics more favourable to men's interests, and unduly stress the sexual within definitions of womanhood. So doing, they believed, would have profound implications for the orientation of feminist politics, sexual or otherwise. Anna Pappritz articulated these concerns forthrightly in a 1908 letter to Magnus Hirschfeld. Pappritz informed Hirschfeld that his views on female sexuality

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<sup>119</sup> Helene Lange, "Die Frauenbewegung und die modern Ehekritik," in *Frauenbewegung und Sexualethik. Beiträge zur modernen Ehekritik*, eds. Helene Lange and Gertrud Bäumer (Heilbronn: Verlag von Eugen Salzer, 1909), 79-82.

were fatally mistaken, as they were based exclusively upon “those softened and sensitive types of women, raised in the big city.” Pappritz insisted that such women did not constitute the norm, and that they artificially inflated the importance of sexuality for women. She also attacked Hirschfeld’s assessment of “healthy, strong types of women” who were more interested in “intellectual matters or healthy movement” than in sex as “abnormal” and “masculine.” Pappritz alleged that Hirschfeld’s conceptualization of the normal—and his support of feminists such as Helene Stöcker—inhibited women’s progress because it shamed them from developing intellectually and physically. In Pappritz’s view, it was absolutely essential for women’s progress that their interests broaden beyond sex.<sup>120</sup>

"[O]nly the natural drive which is innate in a healthy individual was referred to..."<sup>121</sup>: The limits of the normal female sex drive

Pappritz’s letter highlights two further points of contention: namely, which women were sexually ‘normal,’ and which women should be sexually free. According to the definitions of the female sex drive articulated by feminists such as Fürth, Meisel-Hess, Bre, and Browne, the normal could only ever be heterosexual. Although they had uprooted the normal female sex drive from its reproductive moorings, central to their definition of the drive was the claim that it represented a ‘drive to union’ that would strengthen monogamous heterosexual unions between companionate lovers. In Elberskirchen’s view, the normal female drive is directed towards “very specific male

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<sup>120</sup>Notably, this letter constituted a rejection of Hirschfeld’s request that Pappritz write an article on Josephine Butler for his *Zeitschrift für Sexualwissenschaft*. Pappritz rejected Hirschfeld’s request explicitly because of her vehement disagreement with his views on women’s sexuality. Letter from Anna Pappritz to Magnus Hirschfeld, 29 February 1908. B Rep 235-13 MF-Nr. 3448-53, Anna Pappritz Nachlass, Helene Lange Archiv, Landesarchiv Berlin.

<sup>121</sup> Quote is taken from Marie Stritt, “Nachschrift” (response to Elsbeth Krukenberg’s “Normales Empfindung”), *Centralblatt des Bundes deutscher Frauenvereine* 9, no. 16 (15 November 1907): 123.

individuals” to whom a woman gives herself, “body and soul.”<sup>122</sup> Consequently, they excluded as ‘abnormal’ and ‘sick’ all sexual practices and forms of desire that did not seek sexual intercourse with men. Homosexuality and masturbation were frequently and explicitly named as abnormal; in fact, many feminists such as Ruth Bre maintained that these phenomena were the consequences of denying women’s natural sexual needs and drives.<sup>123</sup> Feminists’ disavowal of these practices and subjectivities were expressed in tones that exceeded scientific rationality, and instead suggested visceral revulsion. For example, although Marie Stritt began her definition of the “natural” sex drive as that which “attracts the male to the female, the female to the male—the drive that is neither good nor evil but simply necessary,” she insisted that, “[a]n opposite sexual feeling on the other hand signifies sickness that must cause shudder in a healthy mind at the thought of it.”<sup>124</sup>

In addition to expounding the heterosexism of the norm, these feminists participated in stigmatizing women who were not interested in sex—at least with men—as ‘frigid’ or ‘sexual anaesthetic.’ Meisel-Hess referenced Freud’s research on women’s anxiety neuroses to argue that the ‘sexually frigid’ woman was a particularly infrequent and abnormal specimen of womanhood.<sup>125</sup> At the same time, these feminists also stigmatized women they viewed as sexually uncontrolled and uncontrollable, often invoking Krafft-Ebing’s concept of the ‘nymphomaniac.’<sup>126</sup> Indeed, despite their enthusiasm for sexual liberalization, they feared that encouraging the realization of

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<sup>122</sup> Elberskirchen, “Das Geschlechtsleben des Weibes,” 196.

<sup>123</sup> Bre, *Das Recht auf die Mutterschaft*, 57.

<sup>124</sup> Marie Stritt, “Nachschrift,” *Centralblatt des Bundes deutscher Frauenvereine* 9, no. 16 (15 November 1907): 123.

<sup>125</sup> Meisel-Hess, *The Sexual Question*, 334-7

<sup>126</sup> See, for example, Elberskirchen, *Geschlechtsleben und Geschlechtsenthaltbarkeit*, 5.

women's "biological rights" would lead to hedonistic sexual indulgence at the expense of larger, 'racial' concerns. What these feminists shared with their critics was a loathing of untrammled sexual freedom, which they considered, in Henriette Fürth's phrasing, a "masculine standard" that purportedly threatened racial degeneration.<sup>127</sup>

The invocation of 'degeneration' heralds the presence of eugenic ideas and rationale in feminist sexual thought. I explore the role of eugenic ideas in feminist thought more fully in Chapters Three and Four, particularly their influence upon feminists' understanding of the relationship between individual rights and collective wellbeing. Yet it is worth noting here that, despite espousing a more expansive definition of the normal female sex drive, feminists' eugenic considerations undermined the universal potential of their commitments to sexual liberalization. Though these feminists believed that the sex drive was not reproductively motivated, reproduction always remained a possible outcome of sex. 'Conscious' decision-making regarding sexual practices was therefore critically important for sexually free women. Thus, although these feminists wanted greater sexual freedoms for women, they nonetheless stressed moderation, self-control—and consideration of 'racial' consequences.<sup>128</sup>

Feminists' concern that women's pursuit of their 'biological right' would lead to sexual hedonism—and potentially racial degeneration—raised a further question: who could handle the responsibility of the freedoms accruing to the normal sex drive? In the eyes of some feminists, only 'superior,' highly evolved, modern women could act on a drive that purportedly belonged to all 'normal' women. According to Dr. Hope Bridges

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<sup>127</sup> Fürth, "Das Geschlechtsproblem und die moderne Moral," 11-12.

<sup>128</sup> See Carpenter, *Sex-Love*, 5, 8; Elberskirchen, *Geschlechtsleben und Geschlechtsehaltsamkeit*, 16-17, 22, 31.



Adams Lehmann, only the truly evolved woman was capable of choosing a monogamous, ‘appropriate’ sexual partner, and of delaying sexual gratification. Therefore, Lehmann argued, only the evolved woman should enjoy expanded rights and freedoms.<sup>129</sup> Likewise, Meisel-Hess insisted that the ‘exceptional’ woman should serve as the standard-bearer for ‘normal’ female sexuality. In her view, only the superior woman could responsibly and consciously make sexual choices. She further asserted that for all other women, their sex drives represented a danger, not only to themselves, but also to the race.<sup>130</sup> Thus, for feminists like Lehmann and Meisel-Hess, ‘the normal’ was normative: it was an ideal towards which all ought to aspire, but only a few could attain.

Yet not all feminists believed that the normal constituted an ideal. For Elberskirchen, the normal was a statistical and descriptive category, synonymous with the ‘average.’ In *Sex Life and Sexual Abstinence of Woman* (1905), Elberskirchen explicitly stated that her analysis pertained specifically to women of ‘middling sexuality,’ who, neither ‘frigid’ nor ‘hyper-sexual,’ constituted the majority.<sup>131</sup> According to Elberskirchen, the superior, intellectual (*geistige*) woman was meant for other, ‘higher’ pursuits, leaving little energy for sex. Within Elberskirchen’s understanding, the heterosexual woman of ‘middling sexuality’ was incapable of the sexual restraint required for intellectual pursuits; the ‘normal’ woman therefore needed sex to give her personality, and to provide her life with some sense of purpose. Conversely, Elberskirchen believed that sexual fulfillment was a matter of indifference for the superior woman, as she is predestined to develop a personality independent of her sex

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<sup>129</sup> Lehmann, “Sexuelle Pädagogik,” 756.

<sup>130</sup> Meisel-Hess, *The Sexual Crisis*, 200-1.

<sup>131</sup> Elberskirchen, *Geschlechtsleben und Geschlechtsenthaltbarkeit*, 6.

instinct.<sup>132</sup> In fact, Elberskirchen, a rare vocal supporter of homosexual rights, claimed lesbian love represented the ideal because it was “necessarily” more chaste and “soulful.”<sup>133</sup>

As I will show in the following chapter, Elberskirchen was not alone in representing the homosexual woman as a superior type of womanhood. However, her praise of lesbian love as superior because it was chaste and spiritual suggests some ambivalence towards her own definition of the normal. Whereas on the one hand Elberskirchen expounded the naturalness of the ‘normal’ female sex drive and insisted upon its realization as a biological right, on the other hand, she maintained that such demands were only really relevant for average women incapable of intellectual or spiritual pursuits. The conflicts and contradictions within Elberskirchen’s writings are arguably symptomatic of feminists’ complicated and ambivalent views regarding ‘normal’ female sexuality.

### Conclusion

In this chapter, I examined German-speaking and British feminists’ conceptualizations of the female sexual drive. I focused on the writings of feminists seeking to enhance women’s (hetero)sexual agency, and the ways in which their appeals to nature and scientific evidence served to underwrite a new definition of ‘normal’ female sexuality. Feminists drew upon changing scientific definitions of the ‘normal’ female sex drive which distinguished it from the so-called ‘maternal’ drive, represented it as equal to the male drive in its sexual need and strength, and asserted that it was biologically

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>133</sup> Elberskirchen, “Das Geschlechtsleben des Weibes,” 209.

oriented towards the pursuit of physical and emotional ‘union.’ Conceiving of female sexuality in this way naturalized women’s sexual desires and legitimized claims that sexual activity was essential to women’s health and the creation of sympathy between the sexes. The ‘new normal’ further supported feminists’ claims for ethical, legal, and social reforms that would sanction and facilitate women’s independent pursuits of freely-chosen sexual experiences.

Yet in many ways, the ‘new normal’ provoked more questions and conflicts than it resolved. It exacerbated tensions among feminists regarding the true nature of female sexuality and the proper aims of a feminist sexual politics. Moreover, the definition of the normal itself—along with the eugenic thinking that informed it—undercut and circumscribed feminists’ sexual reform demands. Specifically, it led feminists to stigmatize as abnormal all forms of sexual desire and practice that did not seek satisfaction in intercourse with men, especially homosexuality. Furthermore, feminists feared that many women were insufficiently ‘evolved’ intellectually and ethically to make conscious, ‘racially’ responsible sexual choices. Still others saw the sex drive and the rights it implied as valuable only to the average, heterosexual woman, who was incapable of intellectual or spiritual self-realization. Clearly, the liberalizing potential of the ‘normal’ was actually quite limited in its envisaged application and meanings.

According to historians such as Sheila Jeffreys, Margaret Jackson, and Jonathan Ned Katz, the turn of the twentieth century marked the decisive moment when heterosexuality became aligned with both sexual normality and sexual liberation.<sup>134</sup> Not only male scientists but also feminists played a critical role in creating and propagating

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<sup>134</sup> See Jackson, *The Real Facts of Life*, Jeffreys, *The Spinster and her Enemies*, Katz, *The Invention of Heterosexuality*.

this new constellation by defining the normal sex drive as one seeking heterosexual union and by explicitly stigmatizing frigidity and homosexuality. And yet, over the course of this chapter, I have included citations that suggest scientists' and feminists' hesitancy to declare that heterosexuality alone constituted the only 'natural' form of sexual subjectivity. Havelock Ellis was careful to stress that the sex drive was usually inclined towards someone of the opposite sex. August Forel believed that girls' and women's desires for same-sex intimacy were natural phenomena, connected to the feminine constitution. Freud considered the libido the product of human's fundamentally bisexual constitution, one which did not necessarily have a pre-determined orientation or object. Johanna Elberskirchen devalued heterosexuality and considered it inferior to same-sex love and desire. These examples further indicate that scientific understandings and evaluations of what constituted natural, normal, and desirable sexual subjectivities at this time were less fixed and stable than one may assume. Indeed, in the next chapter, I examine how some feminists engaged theories of female homosexuality to articulate non-heterosexual subjectivities as desirable and superior alternatives to 'normal' female (hetero)sexual subjectivity.

### **Chapter Three: Permutations of the Third Sex: Feminism and Alternative Sexualities**

Perhaps feminists' interest in defining 'normal' female sexuality assumed greater urgency in light of the growing association, both within sexual science and the broader culture, of feminism with sexual abnormality. In both Germany and Britain, the feminist, as a social identity, was frequently conflated with another disruptive sexual subject newly identified around the turn of the century: namely, the female homosexual.<sup>1</sup> Both the feminist and the female homosexual were considered transgressive figures who would not—perhaps could not—conform to the expectations of 'normal' womanhood. Indeed, both the feminist and the female homosexual were accused of betraying 'masculine' traits, such as intellectualism and assertiveness, and of harboring 'masculine' desires, specifically economic, legal and sexual autonomy. As a result of their gender nonconformity, both the feminist and the female homosexual were diagnosed as evincing sexual 'inversion.' Some sexual scientists even suggested that both feminists and female homosexuals belonged to a third sex that was neither 'fully' male nor female.

Ultimately, whether sexually inverted or belonging to a third sex, many experts believed that the apparently growing prevalence of these subjects signaled nothing less

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<sup>1</sup> Terminology is a problem when dealing with turn of the century theories of homosexuality. At this time, individuals believed to be "born" with same-sex desires and/or non-conforming gender identities were referred to variously as Uranians, inverters, contra-sexuals, homosexuals, and members of the third sex. I have used the term 'homosexual' as an umbrella term to embrace all of these nomenclatures, as it is most familiar to contemporary readers. Likewise, I have not invoked 'the lesbian' or 'lesbianism,' as these terms referred to individuals who, as I demonstrate in the text, were believed to engage in homosexual acts as a matter of choice.

than the coming of sexual anarchy. Dr. Wilhelm Hammer, the so-called “Dirnenarzt”<sup>2</sup> who referred to the women’s movement itself as an “Urnindenbewegung,”<sup>3</sup> insisted that the feminist and the female homosexual threatened to “sacrifice” normal, “man-loving” women in pursuit of their ends.<sup>4</sup> Likewise, Iwan Bloch accused them of undermining the “cultural and evolutionary achievement” of sexual dimorphism.<sup>5</sup> Linking feminism with sexual abnormality and sexual anarchy in this way helped represent feminists’ demands as not only improper, but in fact pathological and thus illegitimate.

Given the stigmatizing effects of this association, it is perhaps not surprising that most German-speaking and British feminists responded to imputations of homosexuality with denials, attempts at distancing, and vigorous assertions of their femininity and heterosexual propriety. However, not all feminists responded in this manner. For some feminists, particularly German-speaking feminists, sexual scientific theories of female homosexuality represented a resource for challenging and rethinking sexual subjectivities, particularly that of ‘woman,’ and for espousing alternatives. The decade between 1895 and 1905 saw the publication of a number of non-fiction German-language texts, written by women, which described and championed non-heterosexual, non-normative sexual subjectivities. Within these texts, scientific theory and evidence helped substantiate, naturalize, and legitimize these subjects.

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<sup>2</sup> The term referred to a doctor who dealt with prostitutes under the German system of state regulated prostitution. For biographical information on Dr. Hammer, see Dietmar Jazbinsek, “Lebensgeschichte und Eigensinn: Über die Biographie und die Biographieforschung des Dirnenarztes Wilhelm Hammer,” *Mitteilungen der Magnus Hirschfeld Gesellschaft*, Nr. 37/38 (2007): 32-57.

<sup>3</sup> The term translates to “homosexual women’s movement.”

<sup>4</sup> Wilhelm Hammer, “Über gleichgeschlechtliche Frauenliebe mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der Frauenbewegung,” *Monatsschrift für Harnkrankheiten und sexuelle Hygiene* 4 (Leipzig, 1907): 442

<sup>5</sup> Iwan Bloch, *Das Sexualleben unserer Zeit in seinen Beziehungen zur modernen Kultur* (Berlin: Louis Marcus Verlagsbuchhandlung, 1907), 64.

As I will demonstrate in what follows, the subjects described in these texts transgressed the existing sexual binary, and thus evaded the strictures of women's public and private roles. Because of the particularities of their sexual constitution, they were represented as possessing 'natural' rights to access education and the professions, as well as negative sexual freedoms, specifically freedom from marriage and motherhood. As a result of these 'natural' rights claims, these subjects were represented as exemplary feminists. Intriguingly, however, the authors of these texts did not attempt to 'normalize' their subjects; rather, they insisted on their specialness—and indeed, on their superiority over 'normal' women.

In this chapter, I examine how feminists deployed sexual scientific theories of female homosexuality to articulate non-normative, non-heterosexual female subjectivities that broke with the expectations—and limitations—of normal womanhood. I focus specifically on the models articulated by three German-speaking feminists, Anna Rüling, Johanna Elberskirchen, and Rosa Mayreder. I decided to collectively refer to the subjectivities they espoused as 'non-heterosexual' and 'non-normative' in order to encompass the variety of sexual subjectivities these feminists proposed. In her now famous speech, "What Interest Does the Women's Movement Have in Solving the Homosexual Problem?" (1904).<sup>6</sup> Anna Rüling articulated a vision of female homosexuality that Heike Bauer has aptly termed a 'rational' female masculinity.<sup>7</sup> Conversely, in *The Love of the Third Sex (Die Liebe des dritten Geschlechts, 1904)* and

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<sup>6</sup> Anna Rüling, "Welches Interesse hat die Frauenbewegung an der Lösung des homosexuellen Problems?" *Jahrbuch für sexuelle Zwischenstufen* 7 (1905), 131-151.

<sup>7</sup> Though Bauer never explicitly defines rational female masculinity, she invokes the term to characterize the way New Women authors strategically engaged the concept of sexual inversion to stress the 'masculine' traits of the mind, specifically rationality, as a means of overcoming the limitations of the female body. See Heike Bauer, "Theorizing Female Inversion: Sexology, Discipline, and gender at the Fin-de-Siècle," *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 18 (January 2009): 89, 99-102.

*Revolution* (1904) Johanna Elberskirchen represented the female homosexual as the most feminine of subjectivities, a ‘Woman-identified Woman’<sup>8</sup> *avant la lettre*. However, in Rosa Mayreder’s *Towards a Critique of Femininity* (*Zur Kritik der Weiblichkeit*, 1905), the reader does not encounter a positive articulation of a female homosexual subjectivity, but rather the ideal of the ‘synthetic’ human, a subject that psychically transcends the physiological limits of sex—yet retains femininity or masculinity as a stylized performance of the body.

Importantly, while the subjectivities described by Rüling, Elberskirchen, and Mayreder all profoundly challenged a social order premised on binary sexual difference, they did not seek to fundamentally revolutionize existing modes of sexual governance. Specifically, they did not want to undo patriarchal structures, but rather sought to claim a greater share of patriarchy’s powers and privileges for their proposed subjects. In fact, within the writings of all three feminists, their subjects’ rights claims are made at the expense of the normal heterosexual woman, whom they portray as a subject incapable of the rights and freedoms feminists demanded for her. Rüling, Elberskirchen, and Mayreder all reinforced the widespread belief that real, normal women did not want or need expanded rights and freedoms. They instead insisted that the normal heterosexual woman was severely limited in her existential possibilities, primarily because of her reproductive sexuality. Their arguments regarding the normal woman and the existential limitations created by reproductive sexuality are particularly intriguing given the vaunted role and value of mothers and motherhood at the turn of the twentieth century, particularly within the German feminist movement.

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<sup>8</sup> The term “Woman-Identified Woman” comes from the eponymous manifesto written in 1970 by the Radicalesbians for dissemination at the Second Congress to Unite Women.



Nevertheless, these proposed non-heterosexual subjects were also existentially limited. To reinforce their demands for freedom from marriage and particularly motherhood, both Rüling and Elberskirchen drew upon eugenic rationale latent within sexual scientific theory to stress the negative hereditary consequences of ‘forcing’ sexually abnormal individuals to physically reproduce. By appropriating biopolitical rationale to insist upon the broader, ‘racial’ consequences of denying these subjects their rights and freedoms, Rüling and Elberskirchen further entrenched representations of homosexual men and women as pathological and degenerate, thereby circumscribing their subjects’ existential possibilities.

Feminists’ engagements with sexual scientific theories of homosexuality clearly depended upon the transnational traffic of texts and ideas, especially between Germany and Britain. However, in this chapter, I focus on German-speaking feminists exclusively. Why exclude British feminists? This exclusion may seem strange in light of my transnational project, and in light of the similarities between German and British histories of homosexuality during this period. Sexual acts between men were criminal offences in both countries during the period under study.<sup>9</sup> Likewise, homosexual scandals, such as

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<sup>9</sup> Anal intercourse had long been a crime in both Britain and Germany, but the legal prohibition applied to all individuals who engaged in this act, regardless of the sex (or species) of their partner. Sex acts between men were specifically criminalized in both Germany and Britain in the later nineteenth century. Following unification of the German empire in 1871, paragraph 175 was introduced into the Criminal Code to prohibit “unnatural fornication.” The paragraph stated that, “Unnatural fornication, whether between persons of the male sex or of humans with beasts, is to be punished by imprisonment; a sentence of loss of civil rights may also be passed.” While undergoing different formulations over the course of the twentieth century, the paragraph was only removed from the Criminal Code in 1990. The adoption of a specific law against sex acts between men was introduced into British law almost by accident in 1885, as part of the Criminal Law Amendment Act. Section 11 of the Act, the so-called “Labouchere Amendment” after its sponsor, Henry Labouchere, created the offence of ‘gross indecency’ between men. The Amendment stated that, “*Any male person who, in public or private, commits, or is a party to the commission of, or procures, or attempts to procure the commission by any male person of, any act of gross indecency shall be guilty of a misdemeanour, and being convicted shall be liable at the discretion of the Court to be imprisoned for any term not exceeding two years, with or without hard labour.*” Somewhat ironically, the Criminal Law

the 1889 Cleveland Street Scandal and the 1895 Oscar Wilde trials in Britain,<sup>10</sup> and the 1906-1908 Harden-Eulenberg Affair in Germany,<sup>11</sup> captivated the attention of their respective national audiences and helped incite public homophobic hysteria. Furthermore, feminists in both Germany and Britain were discursively linked to female homosexuality.

Yet there are good reasons for singling out German-speaking feminists for exclusive attention. The feminists I study in this chapter explicitly engaged with sexual scientific theory in non-fiction genres, often invoking scientists by name, and did so to formulate new sexual subjectivities as alternative possible feminist identities that differed from ‘normal’ women physiologically and psychologically. Such representations, I maintain, were made possible by the fact that Germany constituted the center of sexual scientific research on homosexuality at this time, and because of the existence of the Berlin-based Scientific Humanitarian Committee (est. 1897), the world’s first organization to publicly advocate the decriminalization of homosexual acts between men

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Amendment Act itself was introduced to strike down the Contagious Diseases Act, which had long been the target of feminist sex reform agitation. Homosexual Acts between men were partly decriminalized in England and Wales by the Sexual Offences Act of 1967. The Sexual Offences Act 2003 finally removed the offences of gross indecency and buggery from statutory law.

<sup>10</sup> The Cleveland Street Scandal of 1889 concerned the discovery of a homosexual male brothel in upscale London district of Fitzrovia. In addition to the intrinsic scandal of the story, it became all the more shocking as rumours circulated claiming that Prince Albert Victor, second-in-line to the British throne, was among its clients. It further cemented the link in the public consciousness between homosexuality and aristocratic decadence. The three trials of Oscar Wilde in 1895 were, tragically, initiated by Wilde’s suit of criminal libel against the Marquis of Queensbury, the father of his lover Lord Alfred Douglas, who referred to Wilde as a sodomite. The Marquis’ defence lawyer fought the case by providing evidence of Wilde’s sexual affairs. Wilde was eventually tried under the provisions of the Labouchere Amendment, and sentenced to two years’ hard labour. He moved to Paris following his release where he died, bankrupt, in 1900.

<sup>11</sup> The Harden-Eulenberg affair refers to the controversy that followed journalist Maximilian Harden’s accusations of homosexual conduct between Philipp, Prince of Eulenburg-Hertefeld, and General Kuno, Graf von Moltke. Eulenburg and von Moltke were key members of Kaiser Wilhelm II’s cabinet and entourage. Harden’s accusations sparked a series of courtmartial and civil trials between 1907 and 1909. See James Steakley, “Iconography of a Scandal: Political Cartoons and the Eulenberg Affair in Wilhelmine Germany,” in *Hidden From History: Reclaiming the Gay and Lesbian Past*, edited by Martin Bauml Duberman, Martha Vicinus and George Chauncey (New York: Penguin, 1990), 223-263.

on the basis of scientific evidence.<sup>12</sup> Although the Wilhelmine public sphere was not necessarily more disposed to embrace and accept homosexuality than its late-Victorian and Edwardian counterparts, the amount of sexual scientific and socio-political attention paid to homosexuality in Germany provided these feminists with a point of intervention. I therefore argue that sexual science and sexual science-based activism provided these feminists a crucial discursive context for their articulations of non-normative, non-heterosexual subjectivities.

I begin this chapter by exploring the sexual scientific theories of female homosexuality that informed feminist analyses. In this section, I draw particular attention to the connection sexual scientists posited between feminism and female homosexuality. I then discuss feminists' reactions to imputations of homosexuality. Within this section I undertake a detailed examination of Rüling, Elberskirchen, and Mayreder's ideas. In addition to highlighting their use of sexual scientific ideas, I also point out the differences in the subjectivities they espoused, the similarities in their analytic logic, and the relationships they envisioned between their subjects, the feminist movement, and the normal woman. By way of conclusion, I discuss the limitations inherent within their analyses, and identify their consequences for feminism.

### Inverts, Intermediaries, and Instigators: Female Homosexuality and Feminism in Sexual Scientific Theory

Sexual scientific theories of female homosexuality were developed in a cultural context marked by rising anti-feminist reaction and fears of sexual anarchy. These

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<sup>12</sup> Though Britons Havelock Ellis and Edward Carpenter made important contributions to sexual scientific theories of homosexuality, they lacked the national scholarly community, professional credentials, and public authority and respect of these figures—and indeed, lamented the lack of appetite for sexual science in Britain, especially compared with Germany. See Havelock Ellis to Edward Carpenter, letters dated 24 April 1896 and 8 April 1907, Carpenter Collection, MSS 358, Sheffield City Archives.

interconnected developments contributed to the conflation of the feminist and the female homosexual as figures that threatened the social order. By demanding—and in fact demonstrating—women’s independence from men, both feminists and female homosexuals undermined existing ideas regarding ‘natural’ sexual roles and relations in both the public and private spheres. They therefore posed a significant challenge to the system of unequal powers and privileges accorded to the sexes—powers and privileges legitimized by a belief in absolute, ‘natural,’ binary sexual difference.

Sexual scientists’ conjunction of the feminist and the female homosexual was not merely strategic or developed with the exclusive intent of undermining women’s rights. Rather, it must also be understood as a consequence of their understanding of ‘sex.’ During the period under study, sex was a holistic category that both connoted one’s gender and denoted the nature and direction of one’s sexual desires. This understanding of sex therefore posited a ‘natural’ unity between sexed physiology, gendered performance, and sexual orientation. Above all, sexual scientists insisted that masculinity and femininity, as physiological properties of men and women, were responsible for determining individuals’ behaviour, appearance, and erotic inclination. As Iwan Bloch asserted, “The difference between the sexes is an original fact of human sexual life, the original condition of all human culture. It manifests itself in physically and psychologically in the elementary phenomenon of human love, where it appears most prominently, because here the relationship is simple and uncomplicated.”<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> “Der Unterschied der Geschlechter ist eine Urtatsache des menschlichen Sexuallebens, die ursprüngliche Voraussetzung aller menschlichen Kultur. Er läßt sich in physischer als auch psychischer Beziehung bereits in dem Elementarphänomen der menschlichen Liebe nachweisen, wo er, weil hier die Verhältnisse noch einfach und unkompliziert sind, auch am anschaulichsten hervortritt.” Iwan Bloch, *Das Sexualleben unserer Zeit*, 59.

For sexual scientists, the unity of gender and sexuality under the sign of “sex” meant that the sex drive itself was gendered and ‘naturally’ geared toward the opposite sex. Sexual difference thus defined the ‘natural’ direction of sexual drives. As Magnus Hirschfeld declared in *The Uranian Being (Der urnische Mensch)*, “the sex drive possesses a masculine form, that is directed towards the female, and a feminine, that is inclined to the man.”<sup>14</sup> Sexual scientists’ belief in a natural, heterosexual unity among sexual desire, sexed physiology, and gendered performance thus meant that any rupture in this chain was viewed as evidence of underlying sexual abnormality—specifically, homosexuality.

During the period under study, three interdependent sexual scientific theories seeking to account for homosexuality prevailed, namely those of sexual inversion, the ‘third sex,’ and sexual intermediaries. The first two theories, sexual inversion and the ‘third sex,’ emerged in the decades before the turn of the century, whereas the theory of sexual intermediaries was developed in the early twentieth century theory. Nevertheless, all of these theories co-existed and were used rather interchangeably during the period under study. Before briefly describing each in turn, I want to highlight two of their significant shared analytic features.

First, all theories represented the homosexual as a subject who repudiated heterosexuality by subverting gender norms and/or desiring someone of the same sex. Significantly, at the turn of the century the latter need not necessarily be present to ‘diagnose’ homosexuality. In all theories, gender performance, and not sexual

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<sup>14</sup> “[D]er Geschlechtstrieb besitzt eine männliche, also auf das Weib gerichtete und eine weibliche, also dem Manne zugeneigte Form.” Magnus Hirschfeld, *Der urnische Mensch* (Leipzig: Max Spohr, 1903), 129.

orientation, constituted the crucial criterion for deducing homosexuality.<sup>15</sup> As Dr. Magnus Hirschfeld wrote, “The homosexual should be understood and researched not only in regards to his sexuality, but also in regards to his total individuality. His sexual likes and dislikes are only symptoms, secondary consequences; the primary is his psyche and his habits in their entirety.”<sup>16</sup> The focus on gender was particularly prevalent within theories of female homosexuality, arguably in part because male scientists found it very difficult to induce their female subjects—often brought to scientific attention against their will—to discuss their sex lives and sexual desires.<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Both Bauer and Gert Hekma also make this point strongly. See Bauer, “Theorizing Female Inversion,” and Gert Hekma, “‘A Female Soul in a Male body’: Sexual Inversion as Gender Inversion in Nineteenth-Century Sexology,” in *Third Sex, Third Gender: Beyond Sexual Dimorphism in Culture and History*, edited by Gilbert Herdt (New York: Zone Books, 1994), 213–39. See also David Halperin, *How To Do The History of Homosexuality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

<sup>16</sup> “Der homosexuelle Mensch darf nicht allein in seiner Sexualität, er muss in seiner gesamten Individualität aufgefasst und erforscht werden. Seine geschlechtlichen Neigungen und Abneigungen sind nur Symptome, sekundäre Folge Erscheinungen, das primäre ist seine Psyche und sein Habitus in ihrer Gesamtheit.” Dr. Magnus Hirschfeld, “Die objective Diagnose der Homosexualität,” *Jahrbuch für sexuelle Zwischenstufen* 1 (1899): 4. In this same text, Hirschfeld provides a 10-page questionnaire for diagnosing homosexuality, including anatomical and psychological features that would distinguish the homosexual man or woman from the ‘normal.’

<sup>17</sup> Krafft-Ebing expressed the prevailing view among many male sexual scientists that it was exceedingly difficult to gain “the confidence of the sexually perverse woman.” See Richard von Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis: With Especial Reference to the Antipathic Sexual Instinct. A Medico-Forensic Study*, trans. Franklin S. Klaf (New York: Stein and Day, 1965), 262. However, some sexual scientists opined that part of the problem was due to women’s own sexual ignorance. Havelock Ellis asserted that women were highly ignorant of the fact that their attraction to other women is sexual and, in his view, abnormal. Curiously, though, Ellis believed that, “a slight degree of homosexuality is commoner in women than in men.” See Havelock Ellis and John Addington Symonds, *Sexual Inversion: A Critical Edition*, edited by Ivan Crozier (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), 61. Yet this ignorance regarding women’s sexuality was not limited to women themselves. As Tracie Matsysik has demonstrated, sexual scientists found it exceedingly difficult not only to distinguish between normal and abnormal manifestations of sexuality, but also to define ‘the sexual’ itself in women’s behaviour and desires. See Tracie Matsysik, “Moral Laws and Impossible Laws: The ‘Female Homosexual’ and the Criminal Code,” in *Reforming the Moral Subject: Ethics and Sexuality in Central Europe, 1890-1930* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2008), 152-172. Moreover, sexual scientific theories of female homosexuality were based on a small number of cases, as very few women sought medical guidance regarding their sexual ‘abnormality’ at the turn of the century. Sexual scientists therefore based their theories upon three sources: first, hypotheses regarding male homosexuality; second, subjective observations of socio-cultural phenomena such as the rise of the women’s movement and New Woman; and third, voluntarily-provided testimony by individuals who saw themselves reflected in the new identity category of the homosexual.

Second, all three theories sought an underlying somatic cause of homosexuality. Though initially scientists framed this quest as a search for the roots of pathology, by the turn of the century it was increasingly represented in more neutral terms, as the pursuit of physiological and psychological origins. Scientists pursuing the latter tack insisted—albeit, as I will demonstrate, inconsistently—that sexual ‘abnormality’ implied not pathology, but rather statistical infrequency. In their view, ‘true’ homosexuality was a congenital phenomenon, that is, something ‘naturally’ present at birth. Such representations ultimately helped decrease the power and legitimacy of assertions that homosexuality marked a form of degeneration or atavism, claims that were particularly prominent during the 1880s and 1890s. Richard Krafft-Ebing, an early proponent of the claim that homosexuality was a product of degeneration, came to the conclusion shortly before his death in 1902 that “contrary sexuality” was a natural phenomenon that arose through no “fault” of one's own—one that, he claimed, deserved “pity” rather than scorn.<sup>18</sup>

Krafft-Ebing’s comments are suggestive of the ways in which congenital theories of homosexuality became linked to social and political value judgments, arguments, and claims. Indeed, the notion that scientific knowledge of homosexuality could help produce social and legal justice inspired the formation of the Scientific Humanitarian Committee in 1897, led by Magnus Hirschfeld. The Committee specifically sought the removal of paragraph 175 from the German criminal code, which criminalized homosexual acts between men, but aspired more broadly to reform existing preconceptions about homosexual men and women. According to Hirschfeld and the

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<sup>18</sup> Richard von Krafft-Ebing, “Neuen Studien auf dem Gebiete der Homosexualität,” *Jahrbuch für sexuelle Zwischenstufen* 3 (1901): 7.

Committee's founders, science revealed that homosexual men and women had "certain human rights, duties, and special interests" that sprang from their "inborn natures."<sup>19</sup> In Hirschfeld's words, the Committee existed to make the homosexual's inborn "deviance" more comprehensible to "their happier fellow beings."<sup>20</sup> Yet despite his mobilization of science to support rights-claims, Hirschfeld's last statement make clear a significant limitation in his political use of scientific knowledge: namely, he demanded understanding (*Verständnis*)—not full acceptance—of homosexual subjects, and in so doing, accepted limitations on the homosexual subject's full participation within collective life.

Although used to support rights-claims, congenital theories of homosexuality were imbued with eugenic beliefs regarding the hereditary dangers of homosexual parentage, and thus preserved the link between homosexuality and degeneration. Many theorists insisted that homosexual men and women were not meant for physical reproduction, asserting that they tended to produce 'sickly' offspring. More sympathetic researchers like Hirschfeld gave such views a different valence, arguing instead that homosexual men and women had no interest in establishing a family as it would confine them to an inauthentic gender roles and involve them in undesirable sexual practices. Hirschfeld even claimed that many married homosexual women who become pregnant entertain thoughts of suicide.<sup>21</sup> It is possible that such eugenic assertions, particularly on the part of sympathetic researchers, were advanced for strategic reasons, that is, to free self-understood homosexual subjects from marriage and heterosexual intercourse.

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<sup>19</sup> Magnus Hirschfeld, "Vorwort," *Jahrbuch für sexuelle Zwischenstufen* 1 (1899): 2.

<sup>20</sup> Hirschfeld (1899): 1.

<sup>21</sup> Hirschfeld, *Der unrische Mensch*, 86-87.



Indeed, Hirschfeld and Edward Carpenter both stressed that homosexual men and women were meant by nature to perform the ‘humanitarian’ work of cultural reproduction, and that their sex drives were geared primarily towards love, not physical sex.<sup>22</sup> Such arguments led some theorists to claim that homosexual men and women were “superior” to their heterosexual counterparts. Feminists would take up such claims for their ends, with ambivalent implications.

Importantly, the understanding sought by groups such as the Scientific Humanitarian Committee was limited to those ‘born’ homosexual. Turn of the century theories of homosexuality sharply distinguished between congenital homosexuality, considered worthy of toleration, and so-called ‘acquired’ homosexuality, which scientists maintained required prevention or eradication.<sup>23</sup> This division is reflected in theories of female homosexuality, for example, in the use of terminology to differentiate the congenital ‘Urninde’ from the volitional ‘Sapphist’ or ‘Lesbian (Lesbierin)’.<sup>24</sup> Acquired tendencies were attributed to a number of environmental factors, including lack of heterosexual contact, male impotence, misandry, innate nervous debility, sexual decadence, and masturbation. Although notions of congenital sexual subjectivity helped open realms of legitimacy, it is important to note that this development actually

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<sup>22</sup> Curiously, Hirschfeld is particularly insistent upon the ‘inappropriateness’ of physical reproduction for the ‘Uranian’ of either sex, and instead insists upon his/her role in cultural reproduction. See Hirschfeld, *Der urnische Mensch*, 5, 87, 93, 157. Edward Carpenter made similar arguments in *The Intermediate Sex. A Study of Some Transitional Types of Men and Women* (London: Swan Sonnenschein, 1908), 70, 122.

<sup>23</sup> See Krafft-Ebing, “Neuen Studien”; Hammer “Über gleichgeschlechtliche Frauenliebe”; Bloch, *Das Sexualeben unserer Zeit*, 536, 575-9, 590-9; Dr. med. [Christopher] Hartung, *Homosexualität und Frauenemanzipation: Ein Beitrag zur Lösung der Frage* (Leipzig: Max Spohr Verlag, 1910), 7-19; 47-55; Albert Moll, *Handbuch der Sexualwissenschaft* (Leipzig: Verlag von F. C. W. Vogel, 1912), 656-673. Hirschfeld challenged such views in *Der urnische Mensch* (1903).

<sup>24</sup> Hammer, “Über gleichgeschlechtliche Frauenliebe,” 395. Hartung distinguished between the ‘homosexual’ (acquired) and ‘contrasexual’ (defined as an “invert with masculine personality and secondary sex characteristics” due to a “masculine cerebrum”). See Hartung, *Homosexualität und Frauenemanzipation*, 52-53.

contributed to the minimization of female homosexuality, as most sexual scientists maintained that the actual number of Urninde, compared to Lesbierinnen, was quite small.<sup>25</sup> Despite its potentially negative implications, this distinction would be taken up by many feminist proponents of female homosexuality.

The earliest and most popular understanding of congenital homosexuality was the theory of sexual inversion. This theory attributed homosexuality to a ‘mismatch’ between one’s physiological sex, as read on the surface of the body, and one’s gender performance. It is perhaps best encapsulated in the maxim formulated by its earliest theorist, Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, to account for male homosexuality: “Anima muliebris in corpore virile inclusa,” literally “a female spirit in a masculine body.” This understanding can be found in the earliest medico-scientific study of female ‘contrasexuality’, Carl Westphal’s “Contrary Sexual feeling. Symptom of a neuropathic (psychopathic) condition” “Die conträre Sexualempfindung. Symptom eines neuropathischen (psychopathischen) Zustandes,” 1870),<sup>26</sup> as well as in later studies, such as Albert Moll’s *Handbook of Sexual Science* (1912).<sup>27</sup> In *Sexual Inversion* (1897), Havelock Ellis identified the female ‘invert’ by her deep voice, firm muscles, absent soft connective tissue, her predilections for male attire, athletics, and smoking, and her

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<sup>25</sup> Hammer “Über gleichgeschlechtliche Frauenliebe,” 442-4. In Krafft-Ebing’s words, “In der Mehrzahl der Fälle scheint es sich aber nur um Perversität, nicht um perversion zu handeln. Es kann nicht genug betont werden, dass geschlechtliche Akte an Personen desselben Geschlechts an und für sich durchaus nicht konträre Sexualität verbürgen. Von dieser kann nur die Rede sein, wenn die physischen und psychischen sekundären Geschlechtscharaktere einer Person des eigenen Geschlechts Anziehungskraft für eine andere haben und bei deiser den Impuls zu geschlechtlichen Akten an jener hervorrufen.” Krafft-Ebing, “Neuen Studien,” 23.

<sup>26</sup> See Carl Westphal, “Die conträre Sexualempfindung. Symptom eines neuropathischen (psychopathischen) Zustandes,” *Archiv für Psychiatrie und Nervenkrankheiten* 2 (1870): 73-108.

<sup>27</sup> According to Moll, “Bei männlichen Homosexuellen besteht häufig eine Neigung zur Annäherung an den weiblichen Typus und bei homosexuellen Frauen an den männlichen. Dies bezieht sich sowohl auf physische wie auf psychische Symptome...Bei den weiblichen Homosexuellen besteht gewöhnlich eine Annäherung an die männliche Haltung und das männliche Temperament,” although he includes the caveat, “obwohl dies keineswegs immer deutlich ist.” See Albert Moll, *Handbuch der Sexualwissenschaft*, 654.

“disdain” for domestic work.<sup>28</sup> Krafft-Ebing similarly associated female homosexuality with sartorial and psychological masculinity, along with features such as a masculine physique (a muscular body, narrow hips, and short hair), masculine behaviour (smoking and drinking), and a predilection for same-sex companionship (exclusive involvement in ‘female society’).<sup>29</sup> Although claims that homosexuality was caused by physical hermaphroditism had largely been abandoned by the fin-de-siècle, as late as 1912 figures such as Havelock Ellis and Albert Moll continued to suggest that one could find evidence of masculine physical traits such as hypertrichosis, or excessive hair growth, among female homosexuals.<sup>30</sup>

Above all other signifiers, psychological features, namely higher degrees of intelligence, rationality, and intellectuality, were considered the most consistent evidence of female homosexuality within sexual inversion theory.<sup>31</sup> According to Edward Carpenter and Krafft-Ebing, the mind of the female homosexual was “more logical, scientific, and precise than usual with the normal woman.”<sup>32</sup> Intelligence and intellectualism were considered resolutely masculine traits; thus, female homosexuals’ greater intelligence was attributable to their greater masculinity. Such assertions led Otto Weininger and Albert Moll to claim that all women’s intellectual and artistic

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<sup>28</sup> See Ellis, *Sexual Inversion*, 173-176.

<sup>29</sup> Krafft-Ebing “Neue Studien,” 25-26. See also August Forel, *Die sexuelle Frage. Eine naturwissenschaftliche, psychologische, hygienische und soziologische Studie für Gebildete* (Munich: Ernst Reinhardt, 1905): 256-9. Forel considered horseback riding symptomatic of inversion; Wilhelm Hammer, “Über Gleichgeschlechtliche Frauenliebe,” 396-400.

<sup>30</sup> Moll, *Handbuch*, 654.

<sup>31</sup> See Ellis *Sexual Inversion*, 178; Hartung, *Homosexualität und Frauenemanzipation*, 23. See also Margaret Gibson, “The Masculine Degenerate: American Doctors’ Portrayals of the Lesbian Intellect, 1880-1949,” *Journal of Women’s History* 9 (Winter 1998): 78-103.

<sup>32</sup> Edward Carpenter, *The Intermediate Sex*, 27, 36-7; see also Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, Fourteenth Edition (Stuttgart: Enke, 1912), 302.

achievements had been realized by “extremely virile specimens of their sex.”<sup>33</sup> It was simply unthinkable to them that femininity or femaleness could be capable of anything other than inspiring greatness. Despite the inherent misogyny of such views, the link between higher intelligence, intellectualism, and female sexual abnormality would inform Rüling, Elberskirchen, and Mayreder’s envisioned alternative sexual subjectivities.

Associated with the idea of sexual inversion was the claim that congenitally inverted individuals constituted a distinct ‘third’ sex between man and woman. Though the term ‘third sex’ referred to both male and female homosexuals, it is a bit of a misnomer, as theorists actually recognized four sexes. Karl-Heinrich Ulrichs referred to all members of the third (and fourth) sex as ‘Uranians’, a classification that persisted up until the First World War.<sup>34</sup> Males were referred to as ‘Urnings’, and females as ‘Urninde’. Magnus Hirschfeld asserted that ‘uranism’ is evident even in early childhood, often apprehended by onlookers before the individual him or herself.<sup>35</sup> The concept of a ‘third sex’ is significant because it enabled individuals to imagine sexual subjectivities beyond the sexual binary, and thus suggested the need to expand the sexual repertoire. It would prove incredibly important to feminist thinkers like Rüling, Elberskirchen, and Mayreder.

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<sup>33</sup> Otto Weininger, *Sex and Character: An Investigation of Fundamental Principles*, trans. Ladislaus Löb (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2005), 58; Moll, *Handbuch*, 316.

<sup>34</sup> Ulrichs derived the term “Uranian” from Plato’s *Symposium*. In *Symposium*, Plato describes two different loves, and claims them to be ruled by two different goddesses of love—Aphrodite, daughter of Uranus, and Aphrodite, daughter of Zeus and Dione. The second Aphrodite rules opposite sex love, while the daughter of Uranus rules same sex love. Thus, Ulrichs named those who loved members of the opposite sex ‘Dionings’, and those who loved members of the same sex ‘Uranians’. Those who loved both males and females were called ‘Uranodionings’, a precursor to ‘bisexual.’ See Karl Heinrich Ulrichs, *The Riddle of ‘Man-Manly’ Love: The Pioneering Work on Male Homosexuality I*, trans. Michael A. Lombardi-Nash (Buffalo, NY: Prometheus Books, 1994), 34-35.

<sup>35</sup> Hirschfeld, *Der urnische Mensch*, 48.

Eventually, by the early twentieth century, theorists came to believe that sexual variety could not be contained even within four sexes. Sexual science's increasing recognition of diverse combinations of sexual preferences and performances gave rise to the theory of sexual intermediaries (*Zwischenstufen*), associated primarily with Magnus Hirschfeld, Otto Weininger and Edward Carpenter. This theory held that one's sexual identity existed on a continuum between the ideal types of (heterosexual) Male and (heterosexual) Female. In Weininger's words, between these ideal types, "there are *innumerable gradations*, or 'intermediate sexual forms'."<sup>36</sup> According to the theory of sexual intermediaries, homosexuality was the product of a fundamental physiological 'bisexuality.' Proponents of this theory believed all humans possessed both feminine and masculine physical and psychological traits, developed to varying degrees. Hirschfeld and Carpenter understood gender diversity to be a product of embryonic development,<sup>37</sup> and Otto Weininger asserted that both male and female characteristics could both be found at the level of the cell. Such theories ultimately led to the radical claim that 'absolute' manhood and womanhood were physiological impossibilities.<sup>38</sup>

The aforementioned theories of homosexuality demonstrate that, during the period under study, scientists increasingly viewed sexual variety as a natural phenomenon. Yet variety is not the same as fluidity. Ultimately, these theories made it difficult for scientists to view normal women as anything but feminine, and thus predestined by nature to become wives and mothers. Likewise, these theories made it difficult for

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid, 127-128; Weininger, *Sex and Character*, 13. See also Carpenter, *The Intermediate Sex*, 10.

<sup>37</sup> Carpenter, *The Intermediate Sex*, 66-7

<sup>38</sup> According to Hirschfeld, "Der Vollmann und das Vollweib sind in Wirklichkeit nur imaginäre Gebilde, die wir nur zu Hilfe nehmen müssen, um für die Zwischenstufen Ausgangspunkte zu besitzen." See Hirschfeld, *Der uralte Mensch*, 127. See also Bloch, *Das Sexualeben unsere Zeit*, 44.

scientists to view feminists as anything but ‘masculinized’ and thus sexually inverted. Even sympathetic figures such as Edward Carpenter asserted that the emergence of the women’s movement could be attributed to a new sex, “like the feminine neuters of Ants and Bees—not adapted for child-bearing, but with a marvellous and perfect instinct of social service, indispensable for the maintenance of the common life.”<sup>39</sup>

Thus, perhaps not surprisingly, feminists and female homosexuality were linked within sexual scientific theories of homosexuality. According to Dr. Wilhelm Hammer, the women’s movement constituted “a true treasure trove for researchers of female homosexuals and homosexuality.”<sup>40</sup> Scientists conflated feminism with homosexuality based on feminist women’s supposed ‘masculinity,’ that is, their intellectualism and their desires for rights and freedoms. Curiously, virtually no mention was made of the fact that, particularly in Germany, many leaders and members of the feminist movement lived with other women, and maintained intimate relationships with them throughout their lives. Scientists’ elision of this lived reality within the feminist movement indicates that it was the challenge feminists and female homosexuals posed to binary sexual difference and women’s dependence upon men that was most threatening. Perhaps even more surprising, many male scientists found support for their assertions within the writings of women themselves. Both Anna Rüling’s speech and Johanna Elberskirchen’s texts from 1904 would be subsequently cited by Iwan Bloch, Wilhelm Hammer and Magnus

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<sup>39</sup> Edward Carpenter, *Love’s Coming of Age: a Series of Papers on the Relations of the Sexes* (Manchester: The Labour Press, 1896), 87-88.

<sup>40</sup> “eine wahre Fundgrube für Urnindenforscher und der Uranismus.” See Hammer, “Über gleichgeschlechtliche Frauenliebe,” 440.

Hirschfeld.<sup>41</sup> Although the conflation of feminism and homosexuality pre-dated Rüling and Elberskirchen's texts, their writing helped to strengthen and prove this connection, as the feminist movement grew in numbers and influence during the early years of the twentieth century.

In addition to attributing feminism to homosexuality, many scientists also accused feminism of inciting homosexuality. Havelock Ellis maintained that feminism provoked underlying hereditary tendencies towards inversion, and inspired 'spurious' imitations.<sup>42</sup> Albert Moll similarly accused the women's movement of provoking a "virilisation" of the female sex by diverting women from their supposedly natural destiny of performing reproductive labour in the home.<sup>43</sup> Citing the 1904 International Women's Congress in Berlin, Moll insisted that this "fact" was evident in feminists' appearance. "Whether in nature or art," he wrote, "the fact that the women's movement cannot be separated entirely from the masculinization of women is manifested through pictures. In any case more virile types can be found in the women's movement than in the rest of the female population."<sup>44</sup> Similarly, writing in the Scientific Humanitarian Committee's *Yearbook for Sexual Intermediaries*,<sup>45</sup> a Dr. Arduin asserted that homosexual women led the women's movement; however, he argued that this relationship was natural because these

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<sup>41</sup> See Bloch, *Das Sexualeben unsere Zeit*, 580; Hammer "Über gleichgeschlechtliche Frauenliebe," 439; Hirschfeld *Die Homosexualität des Mannes und Weibes* (Berlin: L. Marcus, 1914), 500.

<sup>42</sup> Ellis, *Sexual Inversion*, 178.

<sup>43</sup> Moll *Handbuch*, 316, 345. Albert Moll was especially alarmist not only in his representations of the connection between homosexuality and the women's movement, but also in his condemnation of the women's movement itself. Moll dedicated at least two chapters of his *Handbook of Sexual Science* to feminism and its future consequences, and additional chapters to the phenomenon of female homosexuality. See Section Four, Chapters Two and Three, and Section Seven, Chapter Four.

<sup>44</sup> Moll *Handbuch*, 335-6. Indeed, according to Moll, "Das soll kein Vorwurf sein, sondern nur eine Tatsache hervorheben."

<sup>45</sup> *Jahrbuch für sexuelle Zwischenstufen*

subjects desired a man's life course.<sup>46</sup> Although Magnus Hirschfeld rejected the claim that homosexual women exclusively led the women's movement, he nonetheless believed that homosexual women "possess characteristics which enable them to become very active champions for women's rights." Indeed, while repudiating the notion that feminism caused homosexuality, Hirschfeld maintained that homosexual women were attracted to the movement because of the opportunity it offered them to realize their true selves.<sup>47</sup> Claims such as Arduin's and Hirschfeld's would be echoed in the writings of Rüling, Elberskirchen and Mayreder.

Attributing feminist agitation to female homosexuals led some scientists to declare that the Woman Question was itself, in Iwan Bloch's words, "actually the question of the fate of virile homosexual beings."<sup>48</sup> Arduin shared such a view, yet believed that homosexual women should be granted rights and freedoms in accordance with their degree of masculinity. In his view, the natural life course of full womanhood—that is, marriage and motherhood—would not constitute a complete life for these individuals. According to Arduin, 'masculine' work constituted an innate requirement for homosexual women, and that to bar them access to such occupations would constitute an injustice. They needed to be "productive like man...physically or intellectually."<sup>49</sup> While remarkably sympathetic to the assumed demands of homosexual

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<sup>46</sup> According to Arduin, the masculine element had developed itself so strongly among the leaders of the women's movement that it "nach einer Bethätigung und Befriedigung verlangt, wie sie den Männern selbst zuteil wird oder doch offensteht." Dr. phil Arduin, "Die Frauenfrage und die sexuellen Zwischenstufen," *Jahrbuch für sexuelle Zwischenstufen* 2 (1900): 215, 220.

<sup>47</sup> Hirschfeld, *Der unrische Mensch*, 124.

<sup>48</sup> Bloch *Das Sexualeben unsere Zeit*, 580. See also Arduin, "Die Frauenfrage und die sexuellen Zwischenstufen," 222.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid*, 220. According to Arduin, "[Dies ist] eine unbedingte Forderung der menschlichen Gerechtigkeit...wird jeder zugeben müssen, der erkannt hat, dass es Weiber giebt, die eben nicht reine Weiber sind, sondern in die Sphäre Männlichen hineinragen, an ihr partizipieren."



women in the feminist movement, Arduin's position led him to assert that rights to 'masculine' work be denied to 'normal,' that is, feminine and heterosexual, women who were meant by nature to become wives and mothers.<sup>50</sup> As I will demonstrate shortly, Arduin's correlation between rights and masculinity would be adopted by feminists such as Rüling.

In this section, I have described the theories of homosexuality that prevailed within turn of the century sexual science. I have explored the ways in which they conflated gender and sexuality through their understanding of sex, and suggested that the capaciousness of 'sex' led scientists to conflate feminism and female homosexuality as sexually abnormal phenomena. However, I have also shown how scientists' understanding of sex as a somatic quality led them to seek the origins of homosexuality in the body and its biological processes. By representing homosexuality as a somatic phenomenon, these theories in turn enabled serious consideration of the possibility that homosexuality is a 'natural,' thus legitimate, subjectivity that deserves social and legal rights and recognition.

And yet, while these views may have created an opening for the articulation of alternative subjectivities and social and political claims-making, associations between feminism, homosexuality, and sexual abnormality served on the whole to stigmatize feminists in the public eye. How did feminists respond to these imputations? As I demonstrate in the following section, though most feminists vehemently denied this connection, others embraced the opportunity to creatively rethink sexual subjectivities, and to advance demands for social rights and sexual freedoms.

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<sup>50</sup> Ibid, 223.

## Outrage or Opportunity? Feminists' Varied Engagements with Homosexuality

During the period under study, most British and German-speaking feminists reacted negatively to imputations of homosexuality. They believed that the association of their movement with sexual abnormality would delegitimize their goals and demands. They also recognized that this conflation would undermine their respectability—an invaluable commodity for actors lacking significant legal rights and political resources. As Margit Göttert and Tracie Matysik have demonstrated, the conflation of feminism and homosexuality became a particularly fraught topic in Germany in 1911, when legislators proposed to criminalize female homosexuality as part of broader reforms to the Criminal Code.<sup>51</sup> Consequently, German-speaking and British feminists responded to accusations of homosexuality with attempts at distancing themselves from homosexuality, or vehement denials bolstered by expressions of disgust.

Feminists' distancing strategies varied. Some feminists avoided association with individuals known either to be homosexual or to support homosexual rights. British suffragist Millicent Garrett Fawcett, for example, refused to be seated on the same stage as Edward Carpenter.<sup>52</sup> Others pursued textual strategies of distancing, often by citing homosexuality as a consequence of the denial of women's social rights and sexual

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<sup>51</sup> See Matysik, *Reforming the Moral Subject*, 152-172; Margit Göttert, "Zwischen Betroffenheit, Abscheu und Sympathie. Die alte Frauenbewegung und das 'heike' Thema Homosexualität," *Ariadne. Almanach des Archivs der deutschen Frauenbewegung* 29 (May 1996): 29-33. For examples of feminist responses to the Criminal Code reform, see Camilla Jellinek, "Der Vorentwurf zu einem Deutschen Strafgesetzbuch: Vom Standpunkte der Frauen aus betrachtet," *Centralblatt des BDF* 11, nos. 20-1 (1 Feb 1910); Käthe Schirmacher, "Zum §175 des Deutschen Strafgesetzes," *Der Abolitionist* 10 (1. Jan 1911); Elisabeth Krukenberg, "§175," *Monatsschrift für Kriminalpsychologie und Strafrechtsreform* 7, no. 10 (1911); Anna Pappritz, "Der §175 im Vorentwurf zum neuen Strafgesetzbuch," *Die Frauenbewegung* (1. März 1911); Anna Pappritz, "Zum §175," *Der Abolitionist* 10 (1911); Anna Pappritz, "Die Strafrechtsreform," *Der Abolitionist* 9, no. 1 (1910); Helene Stöcker, "Die beabsichtigte Ausdehnung des §175 auf die Frau," *Die neue Generation* 7 (14 März 1911).

<sup>52</sup> See Bland, *Banishing the Beast*, 265.

freedoms. Indeed, as I demonstrated in the previous chapter, many feminists such as Ruth Bre attributed female homosexuality to the frustration of heterosexual desire.<sup>53</sup> Many feminists, especially in Germany, directly confronted accusations of homosexuality to refute them. According to Göttert, the President of the Federation of German Women's Associations, Marie Stritt reacted angrily to Anna Rüling's assertion that homosexual women led the women's movement, describing Rüling's remarks on the pages of the *Central Paper of the Federation of German Women's Associations* (*Centralblatt des BDF*) as "shamelessly cheeky agitations."<sup>54</sup> Johanna Elberskirchen's earlier opponent, Ella Mensch, asserted in *Iconoclasts in the Berlin Women's Movement* (*Bilderstürmer in der Berliner Frauenbewegung*, 1906) that only 'normal-feeling' women can be leaders of the feminist movement because of the "passivity" of the third sex, as well as their "tendency to loneliness," their nervousness, and their disinclination to be part of collective life.<sup>55</sup>

Although the majority of feminists either shrank from engagement with imputations of homosexuality, or confronted them only to aggressively deny any such connection, not all feminists disavowed this link. Indeed, in the eyes of some feminists, scientific theories of female homosexuality helpfully unmoored sex from a strict binary, and in so doing naturalized sexual variety. Sexual science therefore offered these feminists both conceptual resources and a lexicon through which to imagine and articulate new models of sexual subjectivity. Between 1895 and 1906, numerous German-language texts, written by women, engaged with sexual scientific ideas to either

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<sup>53</sup> See for example Ruth Bre, *Das Recht auf Mutterschutz*, 57.

<sup>54</sup> Göttert, "Zwischen Betroffenheit, Abscheu und Sympathie," 16ff.

<sup>55</sup> Ella Mensch, *Bilderstürmer in der Berliner Frauenbewegung* (Berlin: Hermann Seemann, 1906), 75.

positively represent female homosexuality, or to posit altogether new forms of sexual subjectivity. In the process of articulating these new subjectivities, these authors also questioned the relationship between feminism and non-heterosexual subjectivities.<sup>56</sup>

Feminists put forward diverse alternatives to normal heterosexual womanhood. In the following sections, I analyse three visions, namely those articulated by Anna Rüling, Johanna Elberskirchen, and Rosa Mayreder. Whereas Rüling stressed the ‘rational’ masculinity of her non-normative subject, Elberskirchen insisted upon the superior femininity of hers. Conversely, Rosa Mayreder advanced a ‘psychically hermaphroditic’ ideal that encapsulated the traits of both genders at the level of the psyche.

*‘Rational Female Masculinity’: Anna Rüling’s Urninde*

Though Anna Rüling’s speech, “What Interest Does the Women’s Movement Have in Solving the Homosexual Problem?” (1904), has received considerable scholarly attention in recent years,<sup>57</sup> the author’s biography remains mysterious. Based on Christiane Leidinger’s painstaking research,<sup>58</sup> historians now know that Rüling was a pseudonym for the writer and journalist Theo Anna Sprüngli. For the sake of clarity, I

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<sup>56</sup> See, for example, Anne v. den Eken, *Mannweiber-Weibmänner und der §175. Eine Schrift für denkende Frauen* (Leipzig: Verlag von Max Spohr, 1906); Anna Rüling, *Welcher unter Euch ohne Sünde ist... Bücher von der Schattenseite* (Leipzig: Max Spohr, 1906); E. Krause, “Die Wahrheit über mich,” *Jahrbuch für sexuelle Zwischenstufen* 3 (1901): 292-307; M. F. “Wie ich es sehe,” *Jahrbuch für sexuelle Zwischenstufen* 3 (1901): 308-312; Aimee Duc, *Sind es Frauen?* (Berlin: Amazonen Frauenverlag, 1976); Elisabeth Dauthendey, *Vom neuen Weibe und seiner Liebe. Ein Buch für reife Geister* (Berlin: Schuster u. Loeffler, 1900); [Emma Trosse], *Der Konträrsexualismus inbezug auf Ehe und Frauenfrage* (Leipzig: Verlag von Max Spohr, 1895).

<sup>57</sup> See, for example, Bauer, “Theorizing Female Deviance”; Martin, “Extraordinary Homosexuals,” 101-25.

<sup>58</sup> See Christiane Leidinger, “Anna Rüling: A Problematic Foremother of Lesbian Herstory,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 13 (October 2004): 477-499. Originally published as Christiane Leidinger, “Theo A[nna] Sprüngli (1880-1953) alias Anna Rüling/Th. Rüling/Th. A. Rüling - erste biographische Mosaiksteine zu einer zwiespältigen Ahnin lesbischer herstory,” *Mitteilungen der Magnus Hirschfeld Gesellschaft*, no. 35/36 (Dezember 2003).

will continue to refer to her as Anna Rüling. At the time Rüling delivered her now famous speech, she supported anarchist and feminist causes, as well as the performing arts, although she later became quite conservative and nationalist in her convictions.<sup>59</sup>

Rüling delivered her speech on October 9, 1904, at an annual meeting of the Scientific Humanitarian Committee in Berlin, before an audience of 300 people, including feminists Minna Cauer and Dr. Agnes Hacker.<sup>60</sup> Rüling herself was one of the few woman members of the Scientific Humanitarian Committee. Along with Johanna Elberskirchen, Helene Stöcker, and the poet Toni Schwabe, she became a ‘Chairman’ of the Committee in 1911.<sup>61</sup> In her speech, Rüling publicly articulated a positive female homosexual identity, and explored this subject’s relationship with the feminist movement. Remarkably, over the course of her speech, Rüling openly, albeit obliquely, identified herself as homosexual.<sup>62</sup> Drawing upon scientific theories, she represented female homosexuality as a form of what Heike Bauer termed rational female masculinity.

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<sup>59</sup> According to Leidinger, she wrote the short story collection, *Welcher unter Euch ohne Sünde ist... Bücher von der Schattenseite*, under the pseudonym Th. Rüling in 1906. The stories uniquely offered their lesbian protagonists a happy ending (in that they did not die). Before 1914, Rüling wrote for a number of ‘moderate’ feminist newspapers, including *Neue Deutsche Frauen-Zeitung*, *Rheinischen Frauenklub*, and *Freiburger Hausfrauenbund*. However, as Leidinger observes, during and after the war Rüling became involved in conservative and right-wing movements, including women’s movements such as the *Flottenbund deutscher Frauenverein* and the *Reichsverband Deutscher Hausfrauenvereine*. Though she never formally joined the Nazi party, she became a member of Reichsverband der Deutschen Presse and the Reichsmusikkammer in 1933, and the Reichsverband Deutscher Schriftsteller in 1934. Yet interestingly, during the Weimar period, she also joined the Bund für Menschenrechte, the largest homosexual rights organization of the Weimar Republic. See Leidinger, “Theo A[nna] Sprüngli,” 29-34.

<sup>60</sup> Leidinger “Theo A[nna] Sprüngli,” 39. A few weeks later, on October 27, 1904, she gave the paper again at a meeting of the Bund für Menschenrechte, before an audience of 130 people, including 60 women. See Christiane Leidinger, “Eine zwiespältige Ahnin: Die Journalistin Theo Anna Sprüngli (1880-1953) - besser bekannt als Rednerin Anna Rüling,” at [lesbengeschichte.de](http://lesbengeschichte.de).

<sup>61</sup> Leidinger, “Theo A[nna] Sprüngli,” 38.

<sup>62</sup> Rüling revealed her self-identification as homosexual in the following passage: “Now, I personally want to reiterate a point frequently made by Dr. Hirschfeld, and that is that homosexuals do not belong exclusively to any particular social class; that is, homosexuality does not occur more frequently in the upper class than the lower class, or vice versa. No father or mother—not even those among you—can safely assume that there is no Uranian child among his or her offspring. There is a strange belief prevalent in the middle class that homosexuality does not exist in their circles, and from this group comes the

In her articulation of female homosexual subjectivity, Rüling drew upon all three of the aforementioned theories of homosexuality. However, she especially deployed the concepts of sexual inversion and the third sex. While stressing that there exist “innumerable gradations of the sexed personality,” she nonetheless asserted that the female homosexual constitutes a distinct sex, “the natural and obvious link between men and women.”<sup>63</sup> Rüling’s appropriation of third sex theory is apparent in her use of Ulrich’s term ‘Urninde’ to designate the female homosexual as a third sex. Her engagement with the concept of sexual inversion is evident in her characterization of the Urninde as a subject who is “inherently similar” to the “average man.”<sup>64</sup> Indeed, it is the Urninde’s innate masculinity that distinguishes this subject from—and elevates her above—the normal woman.

According to Rüling, the Urninde’s ‘inherent’ similarity to man could manifest itself in behaviour and appearance. Rüling observed that in many cases “homosexual proclivities express themselves often unconsciously and unintentionally in appearance, speech, deportment, movement, dress, etc,” and are visible to a degree that is “obvious to all onlookers.” However, she particularly stressed the Urninde’s mental masculinity,

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greatest opposition to Uranian liberation. I myself remember that once in my parents’ home. When homosexuality became a topic of conversation, my father declared with conviction: ‘This sort of thing can’t happen in my family!’ The facts prove the opposite! Nothing else need be said!” See Anna Rüling, “What Interest Does the Women’s Movement Have in the Homosexual Question?” (1904), in *We Are Everywhere: A Historical Sourcebook of Gay and Lesbian Politics*, eds. Mark Blasius and Shane Phelan (London: Routledge, 1997), 146. I note here that, although my analysis of Rüling’s speech is based on the German transcript of the speech, published in the *Jahrbuch für sexuelle Zwischenstufen*, I cite from the English translation already provided in Blasius and Phelan’s volume. For the original, see Anna Rüling, “Welches Interesse hat die Frauenbewegung an der Lösung des homosexuellen Problems?” *Jahrbuch für sexuelle Zwischenstufen* 7 (1905), 129-152.

<sup>63</sup> According to Rüling, between the poles of man and woman, “we can differentiate between a feminine personality in which feminine characteristics dominate; a masculine one, in which masculine characteristics dominate; and finally, a feminine-masculine or a masculine-feminine personality with equally masculine and feminine qualities. See Rüling, “What Interest Does the Women’s Movement Have in the Homosexual Question?”, 147.

<sup>63</sup> Rüling, “What Interest,” 143.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid*, 144.

arguably due to the fact, as RÜling herself noted, superficial signifiers of inversion were not always present. Consequently, as a result of physiological affinities with normal women, the Urninde could potentially be mistaken for a feminine, heterosexual woman. RÜling noted that, “Of course not all homosexual women show masculine exteriors that harmonize with their inner selves. There are many Uranian women with completely feminine appearance which they accentuate with very feminine behaviour in order to escape being detected as homosexuals.”<sup>65</sup> Yet according to RÜling, despite a shared corporeality with woman and the potential confusion it could engender, the Urninde’s psyche would betray her true sexual subjectivity.

RÜling’s anxiety that the Urninde not be mistaken for the normal woman is evident in her persistent contrasts between the Urninde and the normal woman. RÜling argued that the “predominant and deciding trait” of the heterosexual woman is emotionality, whereas “clear reason rules the Urninde.” Like the “average man,” the Urninde is “more objective, energetic, and goal oriented than the feminine Woman.”<sup>66</sup> The Urninde too is “*physically* more suited for a rugged life’s struggle than a Woman.” In this way too, RÜling asserted, the Urninde is more like the “completely virile man.”<sup>67</sup> According to RÜling, the Urninde’s greater masculinity makes her a worthy, legitimate, and capable candidate for greater social rights, particularly access to education and the professions. These rights, in turn, would enable the Urninde to become independent and economically self-sufficient. RÜling asserted that the Urninde is especially suited to the study of the sciences and other “manly” professions, such as “medicine, law, agricultural

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid, 148.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, 144.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, 146.

professions, and the creative arts,” because of her “posess[ion] of those qualities lacking in feminine women: greater objectivity, energy, and perseverance.”<sup>68</sup>

Conversely, she insisted that, “[t]he feminine woman has been designed by nature to become first of all wife and mother.”<sup>69</sup> If given access to education, normal women would pursue studies more suited to their duties as wives and mothers. According to RÜling, “under favorable conditions most heterosexual women choose marriage. They seek a broader, more comprehensive education in order to become esteemed companions for their husbands, not just sensual love objects, and to be wives who are respected by their husbands as intellectual equals, and accordingly granted equal rights and responsibilities in marriage.”<sup>70</sup> Such statements recall Otto Weininger’s assertion that providing women with access to education would be a mistake because women would treat studying as a “fashion” and as an opportunity to “ensnare a man.”<sup>71</sup> They also reflect the fact that, although access to higher education and the profession were fundamental goals of the German feminist movement, many of the most radical feminists insisted that woman’s highest destiny was motherhood.<sup>72</sup>

Motherhood was certainly not a destiny RÜling envisioned for the Urninde. Indeed, for RÜling that potential fate was nightmarish, not only for the Urninde herself, but also, ultimately, for the race. RÜling drew upon the eugenic logic at work within scientific theories of homosexuality to argue on behalf of the Urninde’s freedom from a reproductive imperative, and to stress the ‘racial’ benefits of the Urninde’s exclusion

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<sup>68</sup> Ibid, 147, 146.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid, 146.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid, 147.

<sup>71</sup> Weininger, *Sex and Character*, 58.

<sup>72</sup> See, for example, Dickinson, “Reflections,” especially p. 198.



from maternity. She claimed that the Urninde could only fulfill “marital duties” in a heterosexual partnership “with aversion, or, at best, indifference.”<sup>73</sup> Enabling the Urninde to become self-sufficient as a single person would therefore, she claimed, leave more husbands “for those women whose natural inclinations are satisfied by the role of wife, housekeeper, and mother.”<sup>74</sup> Moreover, she insisted that this reform would have positive effects in terms of the health of future generations. Portentously, RÜling declared that, “the marriage of homosexuals is a triple crime; it is a crime against the state, against society itself, and against an unborn generation, for experience teaches us that the offspring of Uranians are seldom healthy and strong.” RÜling asserted that homosexual’s “procreat[ion] against their nature” was the cause of “a large percentage of the mentally disturbed, retarded, epileptics, tuberculars, and degenerates of all kinds.”<sup>75</sup> RÜling’s emancipatory arguments were therefore made via the concession of pathology.

Given her belief in the superior capacities and ‘rights-worthiness’ of the Urninde over the normal woman, how did RÜling envision the female homosexual’s relationship to the feminist movement? In her view, the female homosexual served a ‘bridging’ function, not only between the women’s movement and the homosexual movement, but also between the normal woman and the goal of emancipation.<sup>76</sup> Here I focus on this latter connection. RÜling explicitly asserted in her speech that, “[c]ontrary to the belief of the anti-feminists that women are inferior and that only those with strong masculine characteristics are to be valued, I believe that women in general are equal to men.” Yet what exactly she meant by ‘equality’ with men, in light of her description of the Urninde,

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<sup>73</sup> RÜling, “What Interest,” 145.

<sup>74</sup> *Ibid*, 145.

<sup>75</sup> *Ibid*, 145.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid*, 143.

was left unclear. Indeed, in the very next sentence, Rüling echoed the views of figures such as Arduin and Hirschfeld when she proclaimed, “I am convinced, however, that the homosexual Woman is particularly capable of playing a leading role in the international women’s movement for equality.”<sup>77</sup> In her estimation, “[w]ithout the active support of the Uranian women, the women’s movement would not be where it is today—this is an undisputable fact.”<sup>78</sup> Presaging Albert Moll’s assessment of the link between homosexuality and feminism, Rüling asserted that, “anyone with the slightest bit of familiarity with *homosexual traits* who has been following the women’s movement at all or who knows any of its leading women *personally or by pictures*, will find the Uranians among the suffragettes and recognize that Uranians are often noble and fine.”<sup>79</sup> Rüling’s assessment of the relationship between the Urninde and the women’s movement would both reinforce scientific hypotheses, and provide fodder for future formulations, such as those of Bloch and Hammer.

Rüling insisted that it was often the Urninde, “[w]ith her androgynous characteristics,” who often “initiated action because she felt most strongly the many, many injustices and hardships with which laws, society, and archaic customs treat women.” However, Rüling also maintained that the Urninde had a greater desire and need to be free from conventional restrictions on women; in fact, she argued that the Urninde had the capacity to awaken “naturally indifferent and submissive average women to an awareness of their human dignity and rights.”<sup>80</sup> This statement again recalls Weininger and his assertion that, “[a]ll those women who really strive for

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<sup>77</sup> Ibid, 148.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid, 150.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid, 148.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid, 149-150.

emancipation...always display many male properties.”<sup>81</sup> RÜling’s arguments ultimately seem to support the view, articulated by Arduin, that the Woman Question was fundamentally a Homosexual Woman Question. Indeed, RÜling’s demands for rights on behalf of the Urinde come at the expense of the normal woman. The normal woman is represented in RÜling’s speech exactly as many anti-feminists would have her: as incapable of freedom, and as biologically pre-destined to marriage and motherhood.

Clearly, sexual scientific theories of female homosexuality played a critical role in Anna RÜling’s representation of the female homosexual as a subject ‘naturally’ and legitimately in need of social rights and sexual freedoms. By stressing the Urinde’s innate ‘rational’ masculinity, RÜling justified her demands for access to education and the professions, and freedom from the strictures of marriage and motherhood. She sought recognition and toleration of the Urinde, along with a social niche that would correspond to her purportedly natural traits and abilities. Indeed, RÜling insisted that her subject possessed special aptitudes that made her capable of coping with the demands of higher education, professional work, and life as an autonomous social agent.

RÜling sought the privileges and powers of patriarchy by asserting her subject’s greater aptitude for them—often at the expense of “Woman.” Upon reflection, it is clear that in all instances where RÜling identified common cause between the women’s movement and the homosexual rights movement, she did so to argue on behalf of the Urinde’s liberation from the strictures of the category of Woman, and legitimated this move through recourse to the claim, first pioneered by Ulrichs and later echoed by Hirschfeld and Weininger, that all humans should have a right to live ‘according to their

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<sup>81</sup> Weininger, *Sex and Character*, 58.

natures'. As an attempt to abandon the heterosexual woman and the limits imposed by her reproductive sexuality, Rüling's speech thus represents an intriguing reversal of feminists' attempts to distance themselves from homosexuality.

*"Woman-Identified-Woman" avant la lettre: Johanna Elberskirchen's feminine homosexual*

Much like Anna Rüling, little is known about Johanna Elberskirchen. What is known of her life is again thanks to the work of Christiane Leidinger, who recently published the definitive biography on Elberskirchen.<sup>82</sup> Like Rüling, Elberskirchen was one of the few woman members of the Scientific Humanitarian Committee. Also like Rüling, Elberskirchen identified herself within her work as homosexual.<sup>83</sup> However, unlike Rüling, Elberskirchen was a social democrat with organizational ties to the German women's suffrage movement, and had studied medicine and law at the Universities of Bern and Zürich, respectively.<sup>84</sup>

In *The Love of the Third Sex* (1904) and *Revolution* (1904), Elberskirchen articulated a model of female homosexuality that diverged significantly from that offered by her compatriot Rüling that same year. Elberskirchen did not view female

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<sup>82</sup> Christiane Leidinger, *Keine Tochter aus gutem Hause. Johanna Elberskirchen (1864-1943)* (Konstanz: UVK Verlagsgesellschaft, 2008).

<sup>83</sup> See, for example, her use of the first person plural in *Revolution*: "Sind wir Frauen der Emanzipation homosexuell—nun, dann lasse man uns doch! Dann sind wirs doch mit gutem Recht...Die sich mit ihrer Annormalität abzufinden haben, wie die anderen mit ihrer Normalität..." See Elberskirchen, *Revolution*, 9.

<sup>84</sup> Elberskirchen was a member of the left-liberal *Fortschrittlichen Verein* and the *Sozialdemokratischen Vereins Bonn-Rheinbach*. However, Elberskirchen was eventually excluded from the *Sozialdemokratischen Vereins Bonn-Rheinbach* due to her involvement in the 'bourgeois' women's movement for the suffrage. Elberskirchen was also a member of the *Preussischen Landesvereins für Frauenstimmenrecht*, and founded the *Reichsvereins für Frauenstimmenrecht* in 1912. She studied medicine at the University of Bern from 1891 to 1895, and law at the University of Zürich from 1897 to 1898. Unlike Rüling, Elberskirchen never became involved in the Nazi party or Nazi state apparatus. In fact, her book *The Love of the Third Sex* was placed on the Nazi's list of "harmful and undesirable literature" [schädlichen und unerwünschten Schrifttums] in 1938. See Leidinger, *Keine Tochter*, 461-462, 464.

homosexuality as a masculine subjectivity; instead, she insisted that the homosexual woman was a more feminine subject than the normal, heterosexual woman. Elberskirchen maintained that the homosexual woman's greater femininity was revealed by her attraction to women, as well as her greater capacity and stronger desire for spiritual, rather than sexual, union. As such, Elberskirchen viewed the female homosexual as a more feminist identity—not only because female homosexuals sought love and relationships with women, but also because this tendency involved an exclusion of men and masculinity. Thus, whereas for Rüling the normal heterosexual woman provided a negative point of contrast, for Elberskirchen heterosexual masculinity served this rhetorical function.

In some ways, Elberskirchen's definition of female homosexuality seems to anticipate the 'Woman-Identified-Woman' represented by the Radicalesbians in the 1970s. Her definition of the homosexual woman as a subject independent of men and masculinity for her value and self-understanding, and as a more thoroughly feminist identity, foreshadows the Radicalesbians' demand that women define themselves through other women, rather than through the lens provided by men.<sup>85</sup> Indeed, in Elberskirchen's view, homosexual love constituted a purer, elevated form of love, particularly when compared with the excesses, failings, and inequalities of heterosexuality.

And yet, Elberskirchen deployed sexual scientific theory to naturalize female homosexuality and represent it as a distinct—and superior—subjectivity belonging to a third sex. Ultimately, she too drew upon eugenic rationale to justify the sexual freedoms

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<sup>85</sup> See Radicalesbians, "The Woman-Identified Woman" (Pittsburgh: Know, Inc., 1970). Accessed online via Special Collections Library at Duke University, Documents from the Women's Liberation Movement : An On-line Archival Collection, at <http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/wlm/womid/>

and social rights she demanded for the female homosexual and to refine the category of the female homosexual itself and thereby delimit which homosexuals were worthy of rights. Finally, it is worth reiterating that Elberskirchen's definition of female homosexuality as a more feminine and noble subjectivity hinges on the belief that this subject desires spiritual union, rather than sex. Indeed, within her writings sexual intercourse is portrayed as a heterosexual, masculine indulgence. Thus, within Elberskirchen's framework, the female homosexual's moral and existential superiority depended upon her chastity and sexual restraint.

Elberskirchen drew upon theories of sexual intermediaries to argue that homosexuality was a "biological fact" resulting from humanity's fundamental physiological bisexuality. Drawing upon her self-proclaimed "scientific" expertise, in *The Love of the Third Sex* (1904) Elberskirchen declared that homosexuality is "a transitional form between female and male which arises through the bi-sexual predisposition of helping organs and the mono-sexual predisposition of sex glands."<sup>86</sup> Like Weininger, Elberskirchen maintained that each cell possessed both male and female essences, but also asserted that "depending on the onset of a stimulus only certain special parts, [certain] characteristics or forces are developed more strongly." In some individuals masculinity is more developed, whereas in others femininity is the stronger force. Importantly, however, although masculinity and femininity are considered biological phenomenon, an individual's degree of masculinity or femininity need not correspond with their physiological sex. Thus, according to Elberskirchen, "the absolute man and the absolute woman are chimera, are errors. There is no absolute man. There is

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<sup>86</sup> Elberskirchen, *Revolution*, 8.

no absolute woman. There are only bisexual varieties.”<sup>87</sup> In this way, Elberskirchen insisted that sexual variation, and not sexual dimorphism, reflected the true state of nature.

Like RÜling, Elberskirchen began from the premise of sexual variety, only to insist later that homosexuality represented a unique subjectivity, a “transitional form between female and male.” Indeed, as suggested by the title of one of her tracts, she clearly thought that homosexuals constituted a “third sex.” Yet intriguingly, despite her extensive discussions of the biological origins of homosexuality, she eschewed sexual inversion theory when defining the female homosexual. Elberskirchen vigorously denied that masculinity played any role in defining female homosexual subjectivity, and in fact maintained that the theory of sexual inversion was a ruse that attempted to create divisions, especially within the feminist movement.<sup>88</sup> Instead, she defined the female homosexual through the nature—and orientation—of her love. Somewhat confusingly in light of her appeals to the concept of sexual intermediaries, she portrayed homosexuality as the love of one’s own sex, to the exclusion of the contrary sex. Strategically relying on the male-female sexual binary, Elberskirchen asserted that female homosexuality involved the exclusion of men and masculinity; for this reason, it constituted a more feminine subjectivity. According to Elberskirchen, neither woman in a same-sex couple is “impelled towards man”; rather, “both love in the other the same sex—the feminine, not the masculine.”<sup>89</sup>

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid, 18.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid, 4, 8.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid, 4-6.

Within her writings, Elberskirchen aligned femininity with vitality, high-mindedness, and regeneration. She thus viewed the homosexual woman as the “intellectual and spiritual generator of humanity” and as “nature’s finest expression of life.”<sup>90</sup> The greater femininity of the female homosexual was further evidenced in the character of her love. Citing authorities ranging from Plato to Hirschfeld, Elberskirchen declared that homosexual love was always spiritual in the first instance. Physical love, she insisted, was only a side-effect.<sup>91</sup> For such reasons, Elberskirchen was unequivocal in her assertion that, “homosexuality and the love of homosexuals is no degeneration, is no psychopathy, and it is not a source of guilt or shame.”<sup>92</sup>

Elberskirchen further adduced the femininity—and superiority—of homosexuality by comparing it with heterosexuality. Importantly, Elberskirchen conflated heterosexuality with masculinity, specifically with what she identified as masculine sexual decadence. Because of its masculinity, Elberskirchen believed heterosexuality was a sexual subjectivity burdened by “gross sensuality,” and, citing prostitution as evidence, she accused it of perpetuating both women’s oppression and racial degeneration. As such, heterosexuality represented to Elberskirchen a threat both to women’s rights and freedoms, and to cultural progress. Indeed, in her view, heterosexuality constituted “the harrowing site of the eternal rebirth of...human bestial profligacy.”<sup>93</sup> “If we emancipated women were homosexual,” Elberskirchen asserted,

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<sup>90</sup> Johanna Elberskirchen, *Die Liebe des dritten Geschlechts. Homosexualität, eine bisexuelle Varietät. Keine Entartung – keine Schuld* (Leipzig: Verlag von Max Spohr 1904), 34.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid*, 26.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid*, 34.

<sup>93</sup> Elberskirchen, *Revolution*, 26.



“well, then let us be! We are that way for good reason.”<sup>94</sup> Intriguingly, through her conflation of masculinity and heterosexuality, and her characterization of both as decadent, Elberskirchen attempted to shift the stigma of degeneration from homosexuality to heterosexuality.

Furthermore, again like RÜling, Elberskirchen ultimately deployed eugenic arguments to insist that homosexual women be freed from the expectations of marriage and motherhood, and allowed to pursue education and other occupations. As a rule, Elberskirchen insisted, homosexuals are not very good at physical reproduction, and ought “by nature” to be excluded from it. Elberskirchen further asserted, following Malthusian logic, that not everyone needs to or should have children. In her view, the homosexual therefore served as “the safety-valve, a regulative check on overpopulation.” Furthermore, by abstaining from reproduction, she believed that the homosexual woman’s sex drive would be free to “develop the inner nervous system, and facilitate spiritual and intellectual reproduction.”<sup>95</sup> Elberskirchen thus proposed a division of reproductive labour, with homosexuals responsible for spiritual and intellectual reproduction, and heterosexuals responsible for physical reproduction. She further rationalized this division of labour by asserting that heterosexuals “do not often exceed average intelligence,” usually as a result of dementia induced by sexual excess.<sup>96</sup>

On the basis of this division of reproductive labour, Elberskirchen argued that homosexual women were drawn to the feminist movement because it offered them an

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid, 9.

<sup>95</sup> Elberskirchen, *Die Liebe*, 31. Emphasis added.

<sup>96</sup> Ibid, 32.

opportunity to find an occupation in line with their ‘true’ inner natures.<sup>97</sup> While denying a causal relationship between homosexuality and feminism, and rejecting the idea that the leaders of the feminist movement were ‘masculinized,’ she nonetheless curiously asked her reader: “If woman’s strivings for emancipation...are attributable to a sexual abnormality—why fight it?”<sup>98</sup> If this was the case, she added, normal women would be excluded from emancipation anyways, and would preoccupy themselves with their natural ‘duties’ of marriage and motherhood. In making such claims, Elberskirchen, like Ruling, implied that reproductive sexuality marked a fundamental difference in the subjectivity and life courses of homosexual and heterosexual women, and that only the former were truly in need of social rights and sexual freedoms.

Yet importantly, unlike Ruling, Elberskirchen specified that she did not speak or demand rights for all homosexual women. Again drawing upon eugenics, Elberskirchen clarified that she spoke only “for the homosexuals, who are of healthy mind, healthy intellect/spirit (*Geist*), and healthy morals.” That is to say, she demanded “moral and scientific objectivity and justice” only of congenital homosexual women who maintained their chastity, pursued ‘spiritual’ love, and did not reproduce. In so doing, she reinforced the division in sexual scientific literature between the tolerable congenital homosexual and the ‘degenerate’ who acquired homosexuality as a product of sexual perversity and excess. Clearly for Elberskirchen, homosexuality was not merely a “biological fact,” but also a moral category.

Though Elberskirchen’s representation of female homosexuality challenged the evaluative priorities of patriarchal thought, she nonetheless reproduced distinctions of

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<sup>97</sup> Elberskirchen, *Revolution*, 10.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid*, 10.

value between ‘normal’ and homosexual women, and between purportedly innate and acquired homosexuality. Ultimately, like RÜling’s Urinde, Elberskirchen’s feminine homosexual woman sought greater access to patriarchal rights and privileges as a matter of ‘natural’ right and necessity that precluded the ‘normal’ woman.

*Psychic hermaphroditism as evolutionary ideal: Rosa Mayreder’s Synthetic Human Being*

Although long recognized as a leading feminist theorist, Austrian feminist Rosa Mayreder is not usually considered a theorist of non-normative sexuality.<sup>99</sup> However, Mayreder’s autobiographical notes and the essays in *Towards a Critique of Femininity* (1905) indicate that sexual scientific theories of homosexuality played an important role in her rethinking of female sexual subjectivity. They also informed her proposed alternative of the synthetic human, a ‘psychically hermaphroditic’ subject that embraced both male and female traits and stood at the pinnacle of sexual evolution. Initially drawn to sexual inversion theory as a means of understanding her own sexual subjectivity, Mayreder believed the theory of sexual intermediaries provided an opportunity to formulate a truly individualistic subjectivity that exceeded the limitations of ‘normal,’ binary sexuality. This possibility accorded both with her Nietzschean sympathies, and with her understanding of the true feminist mandate, that is, individual self-realization. However, like RÜling Mayreder prized masculine qualities above feminine qualities due

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<sup>99</sup> Mayreder was a founding member of the Allgemeine Österreichischer Frauenverein, the central organization of the Austrian women’s movement, and of the *Dokumente der Frau*, a key feminist journal. She was involved in feminist campaigns against the state regulation of prostitution, and in the Austrian branch of the League for the Protection of Mothers and Sexual Reform. Mayreder is also not usually considered someone holding a high opinion of sexual science. In the introduction of her influential treatise, *Towards a Critique of Femininity* (1905), she adeptly counterpoised the contradictory pronouncements of male sexual scientists to expose their lack of consensus, along with their masculine biases. Mayreder herself was presumably heterosexual in terms of her sexual preferences, if her long-lasting, troubled marriage—and numerous affairs—can be taken as evidence. Moreover, as I will illustrate in what follows, she was rather condemnatory in her pronouncements upon homosexuality and homosexuals.

to their purportedly greater disconnection from physiological limitations—specifically, those imposed upon women by motherhood. Mayreder therefore believed that the synthetic human being provided an opportunity for women to evolve into more masculine, that is, more intellectual, beings, and thus to transcend their reproductive sexuality.

Autobiographical material held within Mayreder's *Teilnachlass* at the Austrian National Library, read in conjunction with her essays in *Towards a Critique of Femininity* (1905), suggest that, for Mayreder, rethinking sexual subjectivities was as much a personal project as a political one. A collection of notes entitled, "Jugenderinnerungen von Rosa Mayreder, II. Teil: Die innere Welt," held in the *Teilnachlass*, indicate that, as an intellectually-predisposed young woman, Mayreder struggled from an early age with what she perceived to be a discrepancy between her physical and mental sexes. As she noted in her autobiographical sketch, she discovered a love of philosophy at an early age. Yet when her family began deriding her as a 'bluestocking,' she also quickly learned that intellectualism was considered antithetical to femininity.<sup>100</sup> As a youth, she lamented the limitations imposed by her femininity, writing in her diary, "Nature, you have given me talents, manifold and many; -- but you made me a woman—and I know what a woman's job entails. If I would be a man, I would have probably become the most important person in my Fatherland with these talents."<sup>101</sup> Mayreder disidentified with femininity

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<sup>100</sup> Rosa Mayreder, "Der Weg der Emanzipation," in *Jugenderinnerungen von Rosa Mayreder, II. Teil: Die innere Welt* (manuscript, n.d): 53c, *Teilnachlass Rosa Mayreders*, ÖNB, Ser. N. 24556. She also noted that hygiene books of her youth warned against women's education as it would cause their hair to fall out. See Rosa "Der Weg der Emanzipation," 45.

<sup>101</sup> "Natur, du hast mir Talente gegeben, mannigfach und viel;--aber du hast mich zugleich ein Weib werden lassen—und ich weiss, was sein Beruf ist. Wär' ich ein Mann, ich wäre mit den selben Talenten vielleicht meines Vaterlandes Grösster geworden." *Ibid*, 46.

and womanhood, and questioned whether she was actually, that is, psychologically, a man:

A critical analysis of my own being finally raises the question—how to explain the fact that my drives and tendencies correspond more to the male than to the female ideal of life. That the concept of individuality comprised a multitude of various characteristics which are not linked to a sex was the result of my thinking. So I created the hypothesis in order to explain the way I am --that nature has planted in me a man in the physical appearance of a woman. With that I thought to have found the solution to the puzzle, why my inner life was aiming in a quite different direction than that of all other females in my social circle.<sup>102</sup>

Mayreder eventually learned that she was not the first person to have arrived at this hypothesis. Thanks to a male friend, she came into contact with the ideas of the ‘Assessor [Karl Heinrich] Ulrichs,’ who she believed had aptly addressed “the problem of spiritual sex differentiation” through his theory of sexual inversion.<sup>103</sup> Mayreder recalled being encouraged by Ulrich’s theory, and attempted to discover more about this “extraordinary” man and how he developed his ideas.

However, Krafft-Ebing’s *Psychopathia Sexualis* dashed Mayreder’s enthusiasm for Ulrichs’ hypotheses. Though she disagreed with Krafft-Ebing’s refutation of Ulrichs’ ideas, she accepted Krafft-Ebing’s assertion that Ulrichs’ schema applied only to individuals attracted to members of their own sex. Because she did not feel that her self-understood psycho-sexual inversion included an attraction to people of the same sex, she concluded that the application of Ulrichs’ ideas to her situation was impossible and inaccurate. Mayreder even insisted that, physically or intellectually, “the female sex did

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<sup>102</sup> “Die kritische Analyse meines eigenen Wesens sties endlich auf die Frage, wie denn die Tatsache zu erklären sei, dass meine Antriebe und Neigungen umsoviel mehr dem männlichen als dem weiblichen lebensideal entsprachen. *Dass der Begriff der Individualität eine Vielheit der verschiedensten Eigenschaften umfasste, die nicht an des Geschlecht gebunden waren, erschloss sich bald meinem Nachdenken; und so schuf ich mir zu Erklärung meiner Wesenart die Hypothese, die Nature habe in meiner Person einen Mann in die körperliche Erscheinung eines Weibes gesteckt. Damit glaubte ich die Lösung des Rätsels gefunden zu haben, warum mein Innenleben nach einer so ganz anderen Richtung zielte als das aller anderen weiblichen Wesen meiner Umgebungs.*” Ibid, 66, emphasis added.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid, 66.

not attract me in the least.” Indeed, she later claimed that she had always rejected the “unreasonable demand” of sisterhood that prevailed within the women’s movement, because she “regarded sex as such as something very minor and unimportant.”<sup>104</sup>

And yet, as Mayreder herself noted, despite her renunciation of Ulrichs’ theories, she only slowly and unhappily separated herself from the ideas undergirding them. Indeed, her early engagement with Ulrichs would influence her later theoretical musings on ideal sexual subjectivities. According to her autobiographical notes, her reading of Ulrichs informed her conviction that ‘psychical’ sexual inversion was symptomatic of an evolutionarily superior type, a type which she believed was prefigured in Goethe—and which she believed herself to embody. Crucially, Mayreder believed that ‘psychical’ sexual inversion constituted not an exceptional condition, but rather an “announcement of nature” about the future. “The exception of today must become tomorrow’s rule,” she declared, “otherwise my life had no sense.”<sup>105</sup> Mayreder thus ultimately adopted the view that “the higher development of humanity aims for the centre of sex, and not for the endpoles.”<sup>106</sup>

It is clear that, from an early age, Mayreder had been interested in interrogating and deconstructing womanhood, as existing definitions of femininity did not reflect her own subjectivity. In Karl Heinrich Ulrichs’ concept of sexual inversion, Mayreder found a theory that expressed her own sense of self. Ulrichs’ hypothesis severed the link between mental and physical sex and, according to Mayreder, offered up the psyche as a space for the individual to develop unlimited by one’s physical sex. Over the years,

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid, 66.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid, 60.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid, 67a.

Mayreder would continue to engage with sexual scientific theories of homosexuality, and would become familiar with the ideas of August Forel, Havelock Ellis, and Iwan Bloch.<sup>107</sup> With her entry into the women's movement, Mayreder's personal investment in reformulating sexual subjectivity would become political, and would find its expression in the theoretical essays contained in *Towards a Critique of Femininity* (1905), particularly "Vistas of Individuality."<sup>108</sup>

In "Vistas of Individuality," Mayreder described the "synthetic human being" as the apotheosis of sexual subjectivity. The synthetic human being transcended binary sexual difference and embraced the psychological characteristics of both sexes. According to Mayreder,

The distinguishing mark of synthetic people is that they have an outlook over the barriers of sex...enabling them to reach a mental sphere common to both sexes of the human species...Thus, they raise themselves to a universality of perception...To them the life of the other sex does not appear as something strange and unaccountable, but as something closely related, originally a part of their own life and now the complement of their special individual existence advancing to meet them from without.<sup>109</sup>

Borrowing a phrase from Krafft-Ebing, Mayreder claimed that the synthetic human being exhibited 'psychic hermaphroditism.'<sup>110</sup> Indeed, she insisted that the "bisexuality of the brain" reflected in psychic hermaphroditism was the key to genius.<sup>111</sup> Because of its psychic hermaphroditism, the synthetic human being would overcome the barriers of

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<sup>107</sup> See *Rosa Mayreder Tagesbücher, 1873-1937*, edited by Harriet Anderson (Frankfurt: Insel Verlag, 1988), entries for 21 April 1905, 1 March 1914.

<sup>108</sup> As in the case of Anna Rüling, my analysis of Mayreder's ideas is based on the original 1905 German version of her work, *Zur Kritik der Weiblichkeit* (Jena: E. Diedrichs, 1905). However, my citations are derived from the English translation, *A Survey of the Woman Problem*, trans. Herman Scheffauer (Westport, Connecticut: Hyperion Press, Inc, 1913).

<sup>109</sup> Rosa Mayreder, "Vistas of Individuality," in Mayreder, *A Survey*, 266-7.

<sup>110</sup> Mayreder, "Vistas of Individuality" in *A Survey*, 255-6.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid*, 246.

binary sexuality, and could therefore help ameliorate the relationship between the sexes, much in the way hypothesized by Carpenter's construction of the intermediate sex.<sup>112</sup>

In line with the theory of sexual intermediaries, Mayreder stated in the introduction of *Towards a Critique of Femininity* (1905) that the psychic hermaphroditism required by the synthetic human being was possibly the result of a foundational physiological hermaphroditism present in embryonic development.<sup>113</sup> However, in "Vistas of Individuality," Mayreder insisted that the synthetic human being could only become an evolutionary possibility when humans became defined by their intellect, as opposed to their biological properties and processes. Mayreder maintained that the mind was not sexually differentiated to the same degree as the body, as the intellect, unlike the body, did not serve evolutionary (that is, reproductive) purposes through sex. Intriguingly, she asserted that the origin of the intellect lay in "religious strivings in which the highest aim was the overcoming of sexuality."<sup>114</sup>

The synthetic human being, above all, represented for Mayreder a truly individual sexual subjectivity. She claimed that, by embracing the "innumerable gradations" between the male and female psyches, the synthetic human being had a better grasp of the "meaning of individuality and its importance to human society."<sup>115</sup> This formulation again makes clear Mayreder's belief that the psyche, and more specifically the intellect, constituted the true site of individuality, undetermined by one's physiological sex. The intellect therefore also constituted the origin of an individual's desires for existential

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid, 263-4.

<sup>113</sup> Rosa Mayreder, "Outlines," in Mayreder, *A Survey*, 28-29.

<sup>114</sup> Mayreder, "Vistas of Individuality," 270.

<sup>115</sup> Ibid, 269.



freedom and self-actualization. Consequently, only the synthetic human being could truly desire and realize emancipation.

As an individualized sexual subjectivity that transcends the barriers of binary sexuality, the synthetic human is, theoretically, a subject position that could be realized by men *and* women. Yet as other essays in *Critique* make clear, Mayreder was particularly eager that women evolve to this state. For Mayreder, the synthetic human being represented for women the chance to truly become individuals by escaping what she called the “teleological limits of motherhood.” In her view, “The compulsion of woman to perform the duties of propagation places her under a natural disadvantage.”<sup>116</sup> Specifically, she believed that the physical demands of reproduction placed a barrier on women’s intellectual development, and she repeatedly represented maternity as the antithesis of intellectualism.<sup>117</sup> According to Mayreder, the price a woman pays for her maternity “is nothing less than spiritual freedom and equality.” Consequently, she believed that “the farther humanity advances towards higher”—that is, more intellectual—“forms, just so much farther must the female sex, for the sake of motherhood, remain behind the male.”<sup>118</sup> Mayreder therefore insisted that it ought to be the task of the feminist movement and its ‘exceptional’ leaders to encourage women to realize themselves as individuals rather than as mothers.<sup>119</sup> Indeed, she believed that the

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<sup>116</sup> Rosa Mayreder, “Motherhood and Culture,” in Mayreder, *A Survey*, 40.

<sup>117</sup> Mayreder, “Motherhood and Culture,” 49, and Mayreder, “On Masculinity,” in Mayreder, *A Survey*, 108.

<sup>118</sup> Mayreder, “Motherhood and Culture,” 46.

<sup>119</sup> See, for example, Rosa Mayreder, “Tyranny of the Norm,” in Mayreder *A Survey*, 75, 85.

battle of the “deviating individual” against the “normal majority” was necessary for the “organic evolution of civilization.”<sup>120</sup>

But who were these ‘exceptional leaders’ of the woman’s movement? According to Mayreder, these were women who had freed themselves from the “teleological” fate of their sex. She described these women as “the ‘unwomanly’ ones—no doubt less useful for man and the elemental sex purpose, and yet indispensable factors of the advancing processes of civilization.”<sup>121</sup> As such, these women resemble the ‘intellectual and cultural reproducers’ described in Johanna Elberskirchen’s characterization of female homosexuality. And yet, as unwomanly women, they also suggest Anna Rüling’s rational female masculinity. Indeed, Mayreder further insisted that exceptional women, and women of genius, “more often approximate to the male type.”<sup>122</sup> Almost echoing Rüling, Mayreder tasked exceptional, unwomanly women with rousing the normal women out of their “passivity” into individuality.<sup>123</sup>

However, unlike Rüling, Mayreder did not believe that these ‘exceptional’ women of the feminist movement were homosexual or masculinized in their external appearance. She explicitly countered Weininger’s definition of sexual intermediaries by asserting that, “[t]hese gradations do not mean (as Weininger thought) that the approximation of the manly to the womanly necessitates the man being less manly or the womanly being less womanly.”<sup>124</sup> Mayreder insisted that exceptional women were feminine, but that their femininity was an aesthetic—one could say, a performance—divorced from physiological

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<sup>120</sup> See Mayreder, “Tyranny of the Norm,” 64-75.

<sup>121</sup> Rosa Mayreder, “Survey of the Woman Question,” in Mayreder, *A Survey*, 63.

<sup>122</sup> Mayreder, “Vistas of Individuality,” 255-6.

<sup>123</sup> See Rosa Mayreder, “The Subjective Fetich of Sex,” in Mayreder, *A Survey*, 240-1, and Rosa Mayreder, “Woman as Gentlewoman,” in Mayreder, *A Survey*, 140.

<sup>124</sup> Mayreder, “Vistas of Individuality,” 270.

functions. Indeed, she maintained that only exceptional women who had realized themselves intellectually as individuals could adopt a self-stylized femininity.<sup>125</sup> Mayreder viewed actual physiological hermaphroditism as an atavism and degeneration, claiming that, “[e]very deviation from normal physiological sex characteristics renders the individual an imperfect being; bodily hybridism is repulsive because it indicates incompleteness, a defective and faulty structure.”<sup>126</sup> Likewise, while idealizing psychic hermaphroditism, she disparaged sexual inversion, writing that, “The womanish man has a lower sort of manliness, because the base female peculiarities which characterize him are considered as defects even in a woman.”<sup>127</sup> Likewise, she insisted that, “[a] woman with the bearing of ordinary masculinity is, to be sure, repellent under all circumstances.”<sup>128</sup> Ultimately, for Mayreder, sexual hybridity at the level of the mind—and a stylized performance of one’s physiological sex on the surface of the body—constituted the desirable evolutionary ideal, particularly for women.

Why Mayreder found physical hermaphroditism and the love of one’s own sex so abhorrent is unclear. Arguably, her ambivalence regarding womanhood, and her repulsion towards the ‘teleological’ limitations and supposed intellectual failings of her own sex played a role. In any event, it is clear that scientific theories of female homosexuality, particularly Ulrichs’ ideas regarding sexual inversion and the concept of sexual intermediaries, proved personally liberating for Mayreder, and played a critical role in her formulation of the ‘synthetic human’ as an evolutionary ideal.

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<sup>125</sup> Mayreder, “Outlines,” 34-36.

<sup>126</sup> Mayreder, “Vistas of Individuality,” 258.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid, 270.

<sup>128</sup> Mayreder, “Outlines,” 34.

What is perhaps most remarkable about Mayreder's deployment of scientific theories of female homosexuality—aside from her disparagement of homosexuals—is that it too led her to abandon the normal woman as a worthy subject of rights. Just like Rülíng and Elberskirchen, Mayreder considered women's reproductive sexuality an existential limitation that inhibited the normal woman from actualizing social rights and sexual freedoms. And like Rülíng and Elberskirchen, Mayreder viewed the feminist movement as a vehicle for exceptional women who broke with the normal type. Specifically, much like Rülíng, she portrayed 'unwomanly women' who had achieved 'masculine' levels of intellectual development to be the true bearers and subjects of feminist goals.

### Conclusion

This chapter provides another dimension of the struggle to 'scientifically' define female sexuality. In the previous chapter, I explored feminists and scientists' attempts to define normal female sexuality, and analysed the tensions and conflicts to which these efforts gave rise. In this chapter, I examined how feminists responded to the insistent conflation of feminism and homosexuality as sexually abnormal phenomena. I have argued that, although most feminists responded to imputations of homosexuality with denial, disgust, and attempts at distancing themselves from this association, some feminists saw an opportunity to develop and advance new models of sexual subjectivity. In this chapter, I specifically focused on how three German-speaking feminists used sexual scientific theories of female homosexuality to formulate and espouse non-normative, non-heterosexual subjectivities as legitimate social identities with 'natural' needs for social rights and sexual freedoms. Through my analyses of speeches and texts

by Anna Rüling, Johanna Elberskirchen, and Rosa Mayreder, I illustrated the diversity of alternative subjectivities that theories of homosexuality informed.

Despite their diversity, these subjects shared a few common features. All of these subjects were represented as enjoying a special relationship with the women's movement. Moreover, they were all represented as superior to normal women, who were limited in their existential possibilities by virtue of their reproductive sexuality. These new subjectivities thus represent attempts to escape the limitations of the feminine body. Women's greater association with nature and biological processes constituted a liability for these feminists, who sought in alternative sexual subjectivities a less physiologically-determined reality. As a result, the promotion of these new models of sexual subjectivity entrenched the claim, prevalent among many male scientists and anti-feminists, that normal women neither wanted nor needed 'masculine' rights to education and the professions, as they were 'naturally' predestined for marriage and motherhood. If anything, these new models of subjectivity, and the rights and freedoms associated with them, were claimed at the expense of the normal woman. Ultimately, these alternative subjectivities reaffirmed the assertion that the Woman Question only actually applied to a limited number of 'abnormal' women. And yet, while Rüling, Elberskirchen, and Mayreder insisted upon the superiority of their subjects over the 'normal' woman, Rüling and Elberskirchen's invocation of eugenic rationale to insist upon their rights claims reinforced associations of homosexuality with pathology and degeneration, and limited the existential possibilities available to their subjects.

The discursive struggles at the heart of Chapters Two and Three demonstrate that female sexuality was a contested category among 'first wave' feminists. Moreover, as

this chapter in particular has underscored, female sexuality was not a fixed, stable, singular, or unified entity at this time. Chapters Two and Three have further shown that interrogating the meaning, content and coherence of female sexuality was not simply an esoteric endeavor for intellectual feminists. Defining female sexuality had implications for feminist politics, and for the envisioned subject of feminism.

Yet the feminists I study were not simply interested in defining female sexuality. They were also keenly concerned with understanding—and criticizing—male sexuality, specifically male heterosexuality. Beginning with the campaigns against the state regulation of prostitution, feminists identified male sexuality a problem for women's freedom; however, they were divided on the question of whether male sexuality could be reformed to enable women to live with men as free and equal beings. In the next chapter, I examine how feminists turned to science to analyze male sexuality, and how their use of specific scientific ideas and evidence shaped their perspectives on the possibility of rehabilitating male sexuality.

## Chapter Four: The Trouble with ‘Normal’: Feminism, Science and the Critique of Male Sexuality

Within the Max Hirsch Nachlass at the Berlin Staatsbibliothek, there is an intriguing letter from German feminist Marie Stritt, dated February 16, 1914. Hirsch, a leading practitioner within the fledgling field of gynaecology, was preparing the first volume of his new journal, the *Archives of Gynaecology and Eugenics* in early 1914. Stritt’s letter indicates that he had solicited her participation in this new endeavour—an invitation which, the letter also makes clear, she gracefully declined.<sup>1</sup> Yet Stritt did not simply decline involvement: she went on to call for the establishment of a new journal, an “Archiv der Männerkunde.” Whether Stritt’s proposal was serious or ironic is unclear; nevertheless, she asserted that such a journal would remedy the paucity of scientific information available about Man, especially when compared to that available about Woman. According to Stritt, “...much thought and talk have been dedicated to the subject of the male as a species and concept...very little has been *written* about it and so far there is no mention of an appropriate study and comprehensive science of the male.”<sup>2</sup>

Many German-speaking and British feminists sought a “science of the male,” one that focused above all on male sexual behaviour. These feminists believed that science

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<sup>1</sup> As Paul Weindling notes, Hirsch was more successful in marshalling the support of prominent scientific figures such as Havelock Ellis, Alfred Grotjahn, Alfred Hegar, and Wilhelm Schallmeyer. See Weindling, *Health, Race and German Politics*, 257.

<sup>2</sup> “Ist doch über den ‘Mann’ als Gattungswesen- und Begriff im Vergleich zu der ‘Frau’ zwar schon mancherlei gedacht und geredet, aber noch sehr wenig geschrieben worden, von einem richtigen Studium des Mannes und einer umfassenden Wissenschaft vom Manne aber bisher überhaupt noch keine Rede gewesen.” Letter, Marie Stritt to Max Hirsch, 16.02.1914, Hirsch Nachlaß, Handschriftabteilung, Preussische Staatsbibliothek und Kulturbesitz. *Italic emphasis added.*

would reveal the true, ‘natural’ character and needs of male (hetero)sexuality, and expose the social and evolutionary consequences of men’s existing sexual practices for the larger collective they referred to as the race. Furthermore, they maintained that science would legitimize their sex reform proposals, which would give women a greater role in governing sexual and social life.

In scientifically establishing the ‘true nature’ and consequences of male sexuality, these feminists sought to undermine the sexual double standard<sup>3</sup> that underwrote and legitimized heterosexuality (and its inequalities) at both the interpersonal and social levels. A mainstay of patriarchal societies throughout much of human history, the sexual double standard espoused and rationalized differential codes of sexual conduct for men and women. While tacitly condoning extra-marital sexual behaviour among men, it heavily penalized the same behaviour among women. As discussed in Chapter One, during the period under study the sexual double standard gained legitimacy through the widely held medico-scientific claim that ‘normal’ men had a greater, ‘natural’ need for regular sexual activity than women.

Beginning in the 1870s in Britain, and especially after 1900 in Germany, feminists’ critiques of the sexual double standard became louder and more frequent, thanks in part to the highly publicized campaigns against the state regulation of prostitution.<sup>4</sup> These critiques targeted men’s legally and socially sanctioned sexual

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<sup>3</sup> In German ‘die doppelte Moral.’ On the sexual double standard, see Thomas, “The Double Standard.” On ‘doppelte Moral,’ see Erwin Haeberle, “Die doppelte Moral,” in *Die Sexualität des Menschen. Handbuch und Atlas*, Second Expanded Edition (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1985). Available at [http://www2.hu-berlin.de/sexology/ATLAS\\_DE/html/die\\_doppelte\\_moral.html](http://www2.hu-berlin.de/sexology/ATLAS_DE/html/die_doppelte_moral.html).

<sup>4</sup> On the British abolitionist movements and their arguments against the sexual double standard, see Walkowitz, “The Repeal Campaign” and “The Leadership of the Ladies National Association,” in *Prostitution and Victorian Society*, 90-136. As no general history of the German Abolitionist movement has been written, I would direct the reader to the journal of the German Abolitionist movement, *Der*



privileges in both the private sphere of the marital home and the public sexual marketplace of prostitution. As demonstrated in Chapter One, some feminists criticized the sexual double standard by casting doubt upon the claim that men and women's sexual drives and needs differed. However, as Chapter One also illustrated, many feminists insisted that male and female sexuality were fundamentally different. Thus another way feminists criticized the sexual double standard was to challenge the notion that male sexuality should provide the standard upon which modes of sexual governance ought to be based.

The turn of the century marked a propitious moment for such critiques. Thanks to widespread social, cultural and economic changes, masculinity<sup>5</sup> and especially male sexuality had become objects of concern not only for feminists, but also for a range of social commentators. Fears of sexual anarchy and racial degeneration helped frame masculinity as both threatened and threatening. In particular, public concern regarding the spread of venereal diseases provoked critical attention to male sexuality, linking men's 'normal' sexual practices to the degeneration of the body politic. The stakes involved in critical discourses on masculinity therefore implicated not only individual freedom in the present, but also the future health and progress of the race. In this way, fin-de-siècle discussions of masculinity were linked with eugenic debates regarding the 'regeneration' of the race.

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*Abolitionist*, particularly Anna Pappritz's article, "Die Zwecke und Ziele der Internationalen Abolitionistischen Föderation," *Der Abolitionist* 1, no. 1 (1902): 2-5. See also Kerstin Wolff, "Herrenmoral: Anna Pappritz and abolitionism in Germany," *Women's History Review* 17 (2008): 225-237.

<sup>5</sup> Here I draw upon Gail Cunningham's definition of masculinity as "the social, political and sexual behaviour of men...that upheld the patriarchal hegemony." See Gail Cunningham, "He-Notes: Reconstructing Masculinity," in *The New Woman in Fiction and in Fact: Fin-de-Siècle Feminisms*, edited by Angelique Richardson and Chris Willis (London: Palgrave, 2001), 94.

In this chapter, I explore how German-speaking and British feminists engaged scientific theories and facts to critique masculinity and male (hetero)sexuality. I focus in particular on the writing of German feminist Johanna Elberskirchen, Austrian feminists Rosa Mayreder, Grete Meisel-Hess, Helene von Druskowitz, and Elsa Asenijeff, and British feminists Frances Swiney, ‘Ellis Ethelmer,’ and Christabel Pankhurst.<sup>6</sup> While their critiques were not exclusively motivated or informed by science, the feminists I study all drew upon evolutionary theories, especially Darwinian sexual selection, as well as studies of animal behaviour to argue that men’s existing sexual practices contravened and exceeded nature, with negative implications for the future of humanity. However, some went further and also referenced sexual biology and anthropological theories of a universal, primordial matriarchy to account for the origins of men’s sexual behaviour. As I will argue in this chapter, the kinds of scientific evidence feminists used had implications for their proposed reforms of sexual governance. Feminists who drew primarily upon evolutionary ideas tended to be more optimistic regarding the possibility of changing male sexual behaviour, and of reforming the status quo. Conversely, feminists who drew upon biological evidence that claimed sexual traits were innate and unchanging proved less hopeful about the possibility of change—and were consequently more likely to propose radical solutions.

This chapter further demonstrates how feminists’ commitment to science transcended not only national but also political differences. The feminists I study held vastly different political views and affiliations. Johanna Elberskirchen and the writers behind the pseudonym Ellis Ethelmer demonstrated affinities to social democratic

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<sup>6</sup> Ellis Ethelmer was the pseudonym used by the British feminist couple Ben and Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy.

movements and ideas. While at one time a social democrat, suffragette Christabel Pankhurst became an ardent nationalist upon the outbreak of the First World War. Meanwhile, Frances Swiney was affiliated with the British Conservative Party, steadfastly supported Britain's imperial ambitions, and was fiercely devoted to theosophy. This chapter therefore provides further evidence that, when it came to sexual politics, the turn to science cut across ideological and organizational divisions.

### Masculinity and its Discontents: Fin-de-Siècle Discourses on Male Sexuality, Disease, and Degeneration

Feminists' scientifically informed critiques of male sexuality emerged at a time when many middle-class social reformers, commentators, artists and intellectuals feared that masculinity itself was in a state of crisis. This sense of crisis was largely inspired by the perceived destabilization of an ideal of middle class masculinity.<sup>7</sup> Over the course of the nineteenth century, an idealized norm of bourgeois masculinity emerged that was "at once self-assertive and self-controlled," defined by its "productivity, economic usefulness, self-discipline and moderation."<sup>8</sup> This masculine ideal was contrasted with a corresponding feminine ideal, defined by its emotionalism, irrationality, and capriciousness. Yet by the 1890s, contemporaries increasingly believed that masculinity, and patriarchal power itself, were threatened by new cultural and political realities, ranging from feminism, to the desegregation of the white collar workforce, to the

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<sup>7</sup> On the specificity of the 'crisis of masculinity,' see Peter Davies, "Introduction: 'Crisis' or 'Hegemony'?" *Approaches to Masculinity*, in *Edinburgh German Yearbook Vol 2: Masculinities in German Culture*, edited by Sarah Colvin and Peter Davies (Rochester: Camden House, 2008), 3-12; Gerald N. Izenberg, *Modernism and Masculinity: Mann, Wedekind, Kandinsky through World War I* (Chicago, London: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 5; Claudia Opitz-Belakhal, "'Krise der Männlichkeit'—ein nützliches Konzept der Geschlechtergeschichte?" *L'Homme* 19, no. 2 (2008): 31-50.

<sup>8</sup> Izenberg, *Modernism and Masculinity*, 6; Andrew Smith, *Victorian Demons: Medicine, Masculinity, and the Gothic at the Fin-de-Siècle* (Manchester; New York: Manchester University Press, 2004), 19-23.

emergence of new, predominantly urban, masculine subjectivities such as the dandy.<sup>9</sup> Many commentators believed that these developments were precipitating the increasing ‘feminization’ of man, which posed a threat to the militaristic manhood required by empire and to men’s stronghold on social and political power. However, these developments also signaled something much more profound to contemporaries: namely, the arrival of a state of ‘sexual anarchy’ portending the erasure of sexual difference—and thus social disarray.<sup>10</sup>

Yet this perceived ‘crisis’ of masculinity was not only sparked by new cultural countertypes or geopolitical contests. The growing panic surrounding the spread of venereal diseases at the turn of the century also exposed masculinity to public scrutiny. Fears surrounding venereal diseases—especially syphilis—even raised the prospect that ‘normal’ male sexual behaviour was potentially lethal. Beginning in the 1890s, the spread of syphilis and gonorrhoea in major metropolitan centres such as London and Berlin became an object of widespread concern for a variety of social actors, including physicians, public health administrators, moral reformers, feminists, and artists.<sup>11</sup> As

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<sup>9</sup> See Izenberg, *Modernism and Masculinity*, 7-9; Angus Maclaren, *Trials of Masculinity: Policing Sexual Boundaries, 1870-1930* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 1-2; Judith Allen, “Men Interminably in Crisis? Historians on Masculinity, Sexual Boundaries, and Manhood,” *Radical History Review* 82 (Winter 2002): 200; Edward Ross Dickinson, “A Dark, Impenetrable Wall of Complete Incomprehension: The Impossibility of Heterosexual Love in Imperial Germany,” *Central European History* 40 (2007): 487-90.

<sup>10</sup> See Elaine Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin-de-Siècle* (New York: Viking, 1990), especially pages 9-12. See also Andrew Smith’s discussion of Max Nordau’s analysis of fin-de-siècle masculinities as degenerative phenomenon, in *Victorian Demons*, especially his chapter entitled “Degeneration, masculinity, nationhood and the Gothic.”

<sup>11</sup> Though the actual extent of venereal diseases during the prewar period is contested, German dermatologist and co-founder of the German Society for the Fight Against Venereal Diseases, Alfred Blaschko, claimed that, according to the Prussian Kulturministerium, there were approximately 41, 000 individuals with venereal diseases by April 30, 1900. In Berlin alone, there were reportedly 11, 600 cases. Indeed, Blaschko asserted that in Prussia, three out of every 1000 people became sick with an infectious venereal disease daily. See S. Borelli, H-J Vogt, M. Kreis, eds. *Geschichte der Deutschen Gesellschaft zur Bekämpfung der Geschlechtskrankheiten* (Berlin: Blackwell, 199), 221, 25. According to Lutz Sauerteig,

Lutz Sauerteig has noted with respect to Germany, statistics indicate that the younger generations in the cities and the middle classes were especially affected.<sup>12</sup>

In many ways, public concern with venereal diseases marked the extension of long-standing anxieties surrounding prostitution. However, pre-existing anxieties were now amplified by new developments. Intensive urbanization, particularly in Germany, created greater awareness and visibility of the disease, while scientific advances in the later nineteenth and early twentieth century led to the discovery of the bacteriological origins of venereal disease.<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, increasing scientific and public interest in eugenics at the turn of the century drew attention to the role of syphilis and gonorrhoea in causing hereditarily transmitted congenital illnesses.

Although neither the German nor the British state treated venereal disease as a matter of pressing regulatory or legislative concern until the outbreak of the First World War, numerous congresses occurred and reform movements emerged between 1899 and 1914 in both countries to address the problem.<sup>14</sup> The First International Congress for the

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this number represented 1.9 per thousand of the Prussian population. See Lutz Sauerteig, "The Fatherland is in Danger, Save the Fatherland! Venereal Disease, Sexuality and Gender in Imperial and Weimar Germany," in *Sex, Sin, and Suffering: Venereal Disease and European Society since 1870*, edited by Roger Davidson and Lesley A. Hall (London: Routledge, 2001), 76. In Britain, estimations regarding rates of venereal infection were debated among feminists, public health reformers, and state officials. In the 1890s, feminists in the International Abolitionist Federation decried 'exaggerations' regarding extent of venereal disease on the pages of their journal, *The Shield*, because they believed such statistics would be used to demand the return of the Contagious Disease Act-style regulations. However, as Michael Adler notes, prior to the establishment of clinical services for Venereal Diseases in 1916, data regarding rates of venereal infection in Britain were "few and inadequate, being largely confined to mortality and serological surveys of syphilis in populations." Nevertheless, Adler et al. report that in 1910, 4, 375 deaths caused by syphilis were reported—a statistic they claim is lower than the number of actual deaths, as physicians often gave other reasons for death on death certificates. According to esteemed British doctors William Osler, deaths from syphilis were closer to 60,000. See Michael Adler, Andrew Phillips and Anne Johnson, "Communicable Diseases: Sexually Transmitted Diseases, including AIDS," in *The Health of Adult Britain, Vol. 2: Decennial Supplement No. 13*, edited by John Charlton and Mike Murphy (London: Office for National Statistics, 1997), 22.

<sup>12</sup> Sauerteig, "The Father Land is in Danger," 76.

<sup>13</sup> Alfred Neisser identified *gonococcus bacillus* as the cause of gonorrhoea in 1879. F. Scahuddin and Erich Hoffmann pinpointed *treponema pallidum* as the cause of syphilis in 1905.

<sup>14</sup> It is nonetheless clear that the British and German states were interested in investigating Venereal

Fighting of Venereal Diseases, held in Brussels on September 19, 1899, played a catalytic role in the formation of international organizations such as the “Société internationale de prophylaxie sanitaire et morale,” as well as national organizations such as the German Society for the Suppression Against Venereal Diseases.<sup>15</sup> In Britain, two rival societies, the National Society for the Prevention of Venereal Diseases and the National Council for Combating Venereal Diseases, had been established by 1914. The latter was

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Diseases. As Lesley Hall notes, the British Interdepartmental Committee on Physical Deterioration of 1904 recommended appointing a Commission of Enquiry into the prevalence and effects of syphilis. Such a commission came into being as the Royal Commission on Venereal Diseases in 1913, whose first report was released in 1914. Additionally, a Local Government Board Report on Venereal Diseases, under the direction of a Dr. R. W. Jonstone, was undertaken in 1913. The Royal Commission Report inspired the 1917 Venereal Diseases Act that established clinics for the free and voluntary treatment of the disease. However, during the war, more far-reaching measures were enacted. Regulations 13A and 40D, issued under the Defence of the Realm Act in 1916 and 1918 respectively, allowed the military to stop the soliciting of sex in the vicinity of troops, and punished woman with VD to sleep with a member of the forces. See Lesley Hall, “Venereal Disease and Society in Britain, from the Contagious Diseases Acts to the National Health Service,” in *Sex, Sin and Suffering*, 123. See also Greta Jones, “Women and Eugenics in Britain: The Case of Mary Scharlieb, Elizabeth Sloane Chesser and Stella Browne,” *Annals of Science* 52 (September 1995): 481-502. In Germany, various ministries, including those governing the military, health and social insurance, began compiling statistics regarding VD infection rates beginning at the end of the nineteenth century. The Reichsgesundheitsamt conducted the first nationwide survey of VD infection rates in Germany in 1919. It found that about half a million Germans—that is, approximately 8.7 per thousand of the population—became infected with venereal diseases each year. See Sauerteig, “The Fatherland is in Danger,” 76. However, before such studies were conducted, a variety of measures to curb the spread of VD were enacted during the First World War. As in Britain, VD Advice Centres were founded. By 1916, there were 93 across Germany. Also like Britain, the German state passed more punitive emergency legislation in 1918, which decreed that a person could be convicted of assault when exposing a sexual partner to venereal infection. This crime held a maximum penalty of three years imprisonment. As Sauerteig notes, it disproportionately affected women. The decree also allowed VD Advice Centres to implement compulsory treatment. See Sauerteig, “The Fatherland is in Danger,” 84-5.

<sup>15</sup> The German Society for the Fight Against Venereal Diseases (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Bekämpfung der Geschlechtskrankheiten), established in 1902, is a fascinating yet under-studied organization. Though its membership did not exceed 5000 in the prewar period, it could boast a number of high profile members and participants. These included not only of leading medical reformers and scientists, such as Alfred Blaschko and Alfred Neisser, but also of leading feminists including: Henriette Fürth, Anna Pappritz, Katharina Scheven, Bertha von Pappenheim, Alice Bernshimer, Helene Stöcker, Minna Cauer, Anita Augspurg, Lida Gustava Heymann, Elizabeth Krukenberg, Hope Bridges Adams-Lehmann, Marie Stritt, and Maria Lischnewska. Rosa Mayreder, Lina Eckstein, and Marianne Hainisch all participated in the organization’s Austrian branch. Reviewing the feminists involved, it is quite remarkable how this organization brought together feminists with divergent beliefs regarding sex and what constituted a desirable sexual politics. Moreover, as the organization’s journal *Zeitschrift zur Bekämpfung der Geschlechtskrankheiten* (1903-22) makes clear, feminists and scientists engaged and challenged one another’s ideas regarding the nature of male and female sexuality, as well as the best solutions to stem the spread of sexual diseases. The best source information on this organization during the prewar period, aside from their own journal and a small number of files in the Geheimes Staatsarchiv in Berlin, is Borelli et al, *Geschichte der Deutschen Gesellschaft zur Bekämpfung der Geschlechtskrankheiten*.

organized by Sybil Neville Rolfe, a key figure in the Eugenics Education Society, and boasted feminist eugenicist Dr. Mary Scharlieb among its members.<sup>16</sup> Other groups involved in the ‘fight’ against venereal diseases include feminist anti-prostitution organizations such as the International Abolitionist Federation and its national branches, and eugenics organizations like the Eugenics Education Society in Britain and Society for Racial Hygiene in Germany. The anti-venereal diseases movement thus brought together feminists, scientists, physicians, and eugenicists who sought to combat the spread of venereal diseases through various ‘social hygienic’ measures that translated scientific knowledge into social policy.

Whereas prostitutes had previously been the primary object of medico-scientific concern in the fight against venereal diseases, new statistics showing high rates of infection among young men helped draw attention to male sexual behaviour. According to statistics derived from the Prussian Kultusministerium reflecting the state of the world in April 1900, Dr. Alfred Blaschko, a chairman of the German Society for the Suppression of Venereal Diseases, asserted that young men between the ages of twenty and thirty years were responsible for two-thirds of all venereal infections. Blaschko claimed that in a large city like Berlin, 200 young men between the ages of 20 and 30 years were becoming infected with gonorrhoea for every 1000, with 24 out of 1000 becoming infected with syphilis.<sup>17</sup> Feminists offered an even higher, more alarming estimate. Citing esteemed German venereologist Alfred Neisser—another member of the German Society for the Suppression of Venereal Diseases—Christabel Pankhurst asserted in *The Great*

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<sup>16</sup> See Jones, “Women and Eugenics in Britain.”

<sup>17</sup> Cited in Borelli et al, *Geschichte der Deutschen Gesellschaft zur Bekämpfung der Geschlechtskrankheiten*, 24.

*Scourge, and How To End It* (1913) that, “75 to 80 per cent of men are infected with gonorrhoea before marrying.”<sup>18</sup>

While such statistics were in themselves disconcerting, men’s role in spreading venereal disease throughout the broader population was even more troubling. Indeed, diverse commentators and activists began to suggest that purportedly ‘normal’ male sexuality was a problem for social hygiene. As Davidson and Hall note, this phenomenon was consistent across northern Europe at the turn of the century.<sup>19</sup> Increasingly within both medical and literary texts, ‘normal’ male sexuality was represented as posing a pathological threat to the wider body politic. Within British medical textbooks such as Sir Jonathan Hutchinson’s *Syphilis* (1887) and Alfred Cooper’s *Syphilis* (1895), men are identified as the “primary vehicle[s]” in spreading sexual disease, and in precipitating hereditary congenital illness.<sup>20</sup> Likewise, contemporaneous literary works such as Henrik Ibsen’s *Ghosts* (1881), Sarah Grand’s *Heavenly Twins* (1893), and Emma Brooke’s *A Superfluous Woman* (1894), dramatized the physical and psychological suffering inflicted by venereal disease not only upon its immediate victims, but also upon hereditarily tainted next generations. These turn of the century medical and literary texts represented men who indulged their supposedly ‘natural’ sexual needs with prostitutes or other extramarital partners as ‘poisoning’ their sexually naïve wives and their children. Indeed, feminists argued that men’s ability to transmit sexual diseases to their ‘innocent’ wives, thanks to their sexual privilege and women’s sexual ignorance, crystallized the injustice and dangers of existing conditions.

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<sup>18</sup> Christabel Pankhurst, *The Great Scourge, and How To End It* (London: E. Pankhurst, 1913), vi.

<sup>19</sup> Roger Davidson and Lesley A. Hall, “Introduction,” in *Sex, sin and suffering*, 10.

<sup>20</sup> Smith, *Victorian Demons*, 98-115.



Frances Swiney for one lamented that, “unrestrained by legal restrictions, unhampered by medical supervision,” man is “left free to bring into existence offspring tainted from birth with the worst of human scourges, and may thus vitiate for generations various members of the race.”<sup>21</sup> Clearly, among reformers venereal disease was viewed as both a medical and a moral problem that threatened social and cultural degeneration.<sup>22</sup>

Increasing critical attention to man’s role as a vector for the spread of venereal disease not only drew attention to the injustice of existing arrangements but also helped expose contradictions within the bourgeois ideal of masculinity.<sup>23</sup> More specifically, it drew attention to the conflict between man’s self-discipline and his desire. On the one hand, as mentioned earlier, middle class masculinity was defined by its supposed superior capacity for self-control and moderation, particularly over ‘animalistic’ sexual desires. On the other hand, the ‘normal’ man was also attributed with a ‘natural,’ instinctual need for regular sexual fulfillment, one that exceeded those of the ‘normal’ woman. This latter assertion had usefully served to legitimize prostitution as a ‘necessary evil’ that prevented men from becoming ‘pests’ to their wives. Yet given the apparent frequency with which men’s desire won out over their self-control—and the dangerous ‘racial’ consequences of this capitulation—the tensions within the bourgeois masculine ideal were becoming ever

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<sup>21</sup> Frances Swiney, *The Awakening of Women, Or, Woman’s Part in Evolution* (London: G. Redway, 1899), 91.

<sup>22</sup> See Smith, *Victorian Demons*, 95, and Ann Taylor Allen, “Feminism, Venereal Disease, and the State in Germany, 1890-1918,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 4 (July 1993): 27-50.

<sup>23</sup> In his reading of British self-help literature, Andrew Smith skilfully demonstrates how this tension was elemental to paradigms middle class masculinity since at least the mid-nineteenth century. See Smith, *Victorian Demons*, 19-23. Importantly, feminists were also keenly aware of this conflict within masculinity. Rosa Mayreder offers a theoretically sophisticated analysis of this conflict within contemporary masculinity in her essay “Von der Männlichkeit,” in *Zur Kritik der Weiblichkeit* (Jena and Leipzig: Eugen Diedrichs, 1905), 102-119.

more clear. Indeed, according to feminists such as Christabel Pankhurst, venereal disease in man was more damning than in a prostitute, because every man is “free to abstain”.<sup>24</sup>

Yet despite increasing critical attention devoted to male sexual behaviour and its social effects, many male medical experts remained reluctant to tighten regulations over male sexuality. While anti-venereal disease activists of all stripes broadly agreed upon the desirability of certain social hygienic measures such as sexual education, treatment clinics, and legally mandated pre-marital health examinations, the treatment of male sexuality within anti-VD programmes consistently provoked conflict.<sup>25</sup> Feminists insisted upon new standards of sexual morality and new modes of sexual governance that would empower women to regulate male sexuality, including introducing ‘marriage certificates’ testifying the health of marital partners,<sup>26</sup> and criminalizing the transmission of venereal disease.<sup>27</sup> Conversely, male medical experts insisted upon measures that would safeguard the health of male clients and effectively preserve the sexual status quo, such as more ‘hygienic’ regulation of prostitution, the distribution of prophylactics, and

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<sup>24</sup> Pankhurst, *The Great Scourge*, 32.

<sup>25</sup> See Ann Taylor Allen, “Mothers of the New Generation: Adele Schreiber, Helene Stöcker, and the Evolution of a German Idea of Motherhood, 1900-1914,” *Signs*, 10 (Spring, 1985): 433-434. For contemporary feminist examples of such demands, see Lida Gustava Heymann, “III. Kongreß der deutschen Gesellschaft zur Bekämpfung der Geschlechtskrankheiten,” *Der Abolitionist* 3, no. 4 (1904): 65-66; Maria Lischnewska, “Die geschlechtliche Belehrung der Kinder,” 137-170; Henriette Fürth, “Der Aufklärungsunterricht: ein Beitrag zur Sexualpädagogik,” 243-6, and “Sexualpädagogik und Sexualethik,” 564-568. See also the Bund für Mutterschutz’s 1906 petition to the Reichstag, “Einführung der geschlechtlichen Belehrung in den Schulunterricht,” in Schreiber Nachlass, Bundesarchiv Koblenz [3.1 Frauenbewegung, 3.1.1 Bund für Mutterschutz, 29. Thesen, Aufrufe, Flugblätter, Petitionen und Veröffentlichungen des BfM].

<sup>26</sup> See Adele Schreiber, “Die Anfang neuer Sittlichkeitsbegriffe in Hinblick auf die Mutterschaft,” in *Mutterschaft: Ein Sammelwerk für die Probleme des Weibes als Mutter*, edited by Adele Schreiber (Munich: Langen, 1912), 163-88, as an example of feminists’ advocacy of marriage certificates.

<sup>27</sup> Norway and Denmark passed such laws in 1860 and 1906, respectively, which legally required both men and women to submit to treatment and penalty for knowingly exposing others to infection. The Norwegian law included a penalty of up to three years in prison for this offense. See Allen, “Feminism, Venereal Diseases and the State in Germany,” 42.

the use of pharmaceutical treatments for venereal disease such as Salvarsan, which proved more effective than existing treatments involving mercury salts.<sup>28</sup>

Male scientists rationalized their position by arguing that male sexual traits and behaviour were products of evolutionary instinct and sexual physiology. They claimed that men were possessed not only with regular sexual needs, but also with an aggressive, powerful sexual instinct that sought to satisfy these needs. In Krafft-Ebing's view, men's sexuality was guided by "a powerful natural drive," making him "aggressive and stormy in his love-play."<sup>29</sup> At times this aggressive instinct could be overpowering, overwhelming men's attempts at resistance and self-discipline and leading to sexual violence. Krafft-Ebing went as far as to claim that sadism was merely "a pathological exaggeration of the male sexual character."<sup>30</sup> The greater strength and aggression of male sexuality, male scientists insisted, was evident even at the level of the cells, represented most clearly by the different behaviours of sperm and egg. As the Scottish biologists Patrick Geddes and J. Arthur Thomson famously argued in *The Evolution of Sex* (1889), man's "stronger lust and passion" was the "obverse" of his predominant "katabolism," a principle Geddes and Thomson claimed was manifest in the small, active, and energetic sperm.<sup>31</sup> Male scientists further asserted that the strength and aggression of male sexuality necessarily exceeded the bounds of monogamy. In a curious turn of phrase, psychiatrist Paul Näcke claimed that men were "by nature polygamous and inclined to

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<sup>28</sup> Paul Ehrlich developed Salvarsan with his student Sahachiro Hata in 1909. Salvarsan entered clinical use in 1910.

<sup>29</sup> Krafft-Ebing *Psychopathia Sexualis* (Munich: Matthies & Seitz, 1984), 12-13. Cited in Dickinson, "A Dark Impenetrable Wall," 472.

<sup>30</sup> See Krafft-Ebing, *Psychopathia Sexualis*, 102. Cited in Dickinson, "A Dark Impenetrable Wall," 476.

<sup>31</sup> Patrick Geddes and J. Arthur Thomson, "The Evolution of Sex (1889)," in *Sexology Uncensored: The Documents of Sexual Science*, edited by Lucy Bland and Laura Doan (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 17.

sexual ‘snacking.’”<sup>32</sup> Male sexuality must be polygamous, these sexual scientists claimed, because male sexual desire was not necessarily motivated by or connected to feelings of love.<sup>33</sup>

Within their analyses of male sexuality, male sexual scientists asserted that their observations were neutral, and their conclusions were arrived at through the objective study of natural ‘facts.’ Thus, they insisted that because male sexuality was a product of nature, it should be subject to neither moral censure nor social regulation. However, as I will demonstrate in the following section, feminists developed their own scientifically-informed analyses to refute such contentions, and to further argue that, for the good of men, women and the future of the race, male sexuality ought to be subordinated to what they argued were the more altruistic impulses of female sexuality.

#### Discerning the ‘true nature’ of male sexuality: Sexual Science and Feminist Critique

Feminists’ use of science to critique masculinity has received little attention from historians. Intriguingly, most existing analyses of this phenomenon have tended to marginalize it by downplaying its extent. For example, in her study of the relationship between sex reform and suffrage politics in Britain, Susan Kingsley Kent asserted that the majority of feminists believed that masculinity was “culturally, not biologically, constructed.” Though she conceded that feminists sometimes “*slipped* into rhetoric suggesting belief in an instinctual [male] sexual brutality,” she ultimately insisted that “*most* feminists attributed women’s degraded, victimized position at the hands of men to a socialization process, reinforced by scientific and medical ‘proof’ and legitimized by

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<sup>32</sup> Paul Näcke, “Einiges zur Frauenfrage und zur sexuellen Abstinenz,” *Archiv für Kriminal-Anthropologie und Kriminalistik* 14 (1904): 54. Cited in Dickinson, “A Dark Impenetrable Wall,” 474.

<sup>33</sup> See Dickinson, “A Dark Impenetrable Wall,” 473-474.

law”.<sup>34</sup> Kent thus represented feminists’ engagements with science as a discursive practice engaged by a minority of feminists. Likewise, in her analyses of fin-de-siècle Austrian feminists’ writings on masculinity, literary critic Agatha Schwartz has deemed Helene von Druskowitz and Elsa Asenijeff’s biological essentialist critiques ‘viriphobic,’ thereby appropriating anthropologist David L. Gilmore’s neologism for the irrational hatred of men.<sup>35</sup>

And yet, as Kent’s examination of Frances Swiney’s ideas demonstrates, some feminists engaged science rationally, as a means of contesting existing social arrangements. Convinced of the importance of ‘nature’ in informing sexual practices and organizing sexual life, feminists such as Swiney rejected the ability of the social world to impose meanings and limits upon the body. Instead, they insisted that the particularities and requirements of the sexed, material body ought to shape social reality. Science provided the means of understanding and proving the ‘unnaturalness’ of existing male sexual behaviour and, relatedly, contemporary sexual life. Feminists’ appeal to science was therefore not irrational. Rather, it was the result of sincere epistemological conviction regarding how one can objectively ‘know’ the world ‘as it is’, and a genuine belief that nature should play a critical role in grounding, shaping, and rationalizing social order. In fact, some of the feminists I study who advanced scientifically informed critiques of masculinity received “enthusiastic letters of approval” from recognized male scientific experts. In a letter to Harriet McIlquaham dated 2 October 1895, Elizabeth

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<sup>34</sup> Kent, *Sex and Suffrage in Britain*, 161. Emphasis added.

<sup>35</sup> Agatha Schwarz, “Austrian Fin-de-Siècle Gender Heteroglossia: The Dialogism of Misogyny, Feminism, and Viriphobia,” *German Studies Review* 28 (May 2005): 347-366, and “Sexual Cripples and Moral Degenerates: Fin-de-siècle Austrian Women Writers on Male Sexuality and Masculinity,” *Seminar: A Journal of Germanic Studies* 44 (February 2008): 53-67. Gilmore proposed ‘viriphobia’ as a counterpart to misogyny; see David L. Gilmore, *Misogyny: The Male Malady* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001).

Wolstenhome Elmy wrote that the texts of ‘Ellis Ethelmer’ received “enthusiastic letters of approval” from Havelock Ellis, Edward Carpenter, and Alfred R. Wallace, co-founder of the theory of evolution via natural selection.<sup>36</sup>

Moreover, the popularity of texts expressing scientific critiques of masculinity makes it difficult to represent feminists’ scientific critiques of masculinity as a marginal or fringe phenomenon. For example, Frances Swiney’s *Awakening of Woman* went through multiple reprints and received favorable press reviews.<sup>37</sup> Swiney’s articles were also published internationally in leading feminist journals, including the American suffrage newspaper, *The Woman’s Tribune*. Christabel Pankhurst’s treatise, *The Great Scourge, and How To End It* (1913), was initially printed as a series of articles in *The Suffragette* and printed again in the United States as *Plain Facts about a Great Social Evil*. Though some proponents of these scientized critiques, such as Johanna Elberskirchen, Helene von Druskowitz, and Elsa Asenijeff, may be considered historically ‘marginal’ figures, Rosa Mayreder, Frances Swiney, and especially Christabel Pankhurst all worked well within what could be considered the feminist ‘mainstream’—Pankhurst in particular being one of the most famous feminists of her generation.

Furthermore, as Lucy Bland and George Robb have observed, feminists drew upon scientific ideas and evidence from the mainstream of existing scientific thought.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Letter 2 October 1895, E. Wolstenholme Elmy Add. MSS 47450, British Library Manuscripts and Archives.

<sup>37</sup> Swiney’s *Awakening of Woman* went through three editions, published in 1899, 1905, and 1908. It was translated into Dutch and printed in 1902, and again in 1908. It was favourably reviewed in the mainstream liberal journal the *Westminster Review* in 1899 by Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy, under her pen name ‘Ignota’. See Ignota, “Awakening of Woman,” *Westminster Review* 152 (July 1899): 69-72.

<sup>38</sup> See Bland, *Banishing the Beast*; George Robb, “Between Science and Spiritualism: Frances Swiney’s Vision of a Sexless Future,” *Diogenes* 52, no. 4 (2005): 163-168; George Robb, “Eugenics, Spirituality,

All of the feminists I study invoked evolutionary theory in their analyses. Darwin's theory of sexual selection played a particularly important role within feminists' critiques of male sexuality. While these feminists did not always directly cite Darwin in their writings, sexual selection implicitly provided the template for what constituted 'natural' sexual relations. Sexual selection stressed that the sexual instinct was fundamentally geared towards the reproduction of species. According to the theory, mate selection was based upon criteria that would contribute to the improvement of the species. Sexual selection also clarified males and females' sexually-distinctive yet equally important roles in the mating process. Importantly for some feminists, the theory asserted that in the final instance, females exercised the power of mate selection. To elaborate and explicate sexual selection, feminists deployed examples of animal mating behaviour. Indeed, they adopted a 'zoomorphic' interpretive framework that used animal behaviour to understand—and criticize—human behaviour.<sup>39</sup>

The theory of sexual selection, and the examples of 'natural' sexual behaviour upon which it was built, enabled these feminists, like the feminists in Chapter Two, to argue that in the 'natural world' male sexual need and instinct were neither greater nor stronger than female's. However, unlike the feminists studied in Chapter One, the majority of feminists I study in this chapter insisted that the human sexual instinct, like that of other animals, was fundamentally a reproductive instinct, naturally regulated by seasonal mating cycles. Indeed, stressing the fundamentally reproductive character of the

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and Sex Differentiation in Edwardian England: The Case of Frances Swiney," *Journal of Women's History* 10 (August 1998): 97-117.

<sup>39</sup> Erika Milam defines zoomorphism as a 'technique' for conceptualizing the relationship between humans and animals, which interprets human behaviour as "a complex form of animal behaviour." As she notes, this approach has existed alongside anthropomorphism, the interpretation of animal behaviour through human behaviour, for centuries. Both have served as key rubrics for understanding evolution. See Erika Milam, *Looking For a Few Good Males: Female Choice in Evolutionary Biology* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 7.

sex drive helped these feminists establish a common standard of sexuality for men and women. As Rosa Mayreder asserted, because both sexes take the same interest in and equally contribute to reproduction, the sex drive cannot logically be stronger in one sex than in the other.<sup>40</sup> These feminists further claimed that an equitable division of sexual labour was the key defining characteristic of ‘natural’ sex life. According to Johanna Elberskirchen, unlike the world of human sexuality, the animal world does not know sexual oppression, sexual inferiority, or sexual slavery.<sup>41</sup>

Defining the sex drive as an essentially reproductive one in turn led these feminists to argue that sex beyond reproductive purposes constituted an excessive, unnatural indulgence. Drawing on examples of animal behaviour, these feminists asserted that excessive sexual indulgence was exclusively the province of men, unique among all other animals. German feminist Eva Stamm noted that, “Within the animal world Nature established a barrier on the sex drive by creating mating seasons; in allowing mating seasons to fall away among humans, she put too much faith in male intellect; her favourite son has shown himself to be not a self-governing being, but rather a shameless raging beast.”<sup>42</sup> Likewise, in her 1905 tract *The Man as Logical and Moral Impossibility and as Curse of the World* (*Der Mann als logische und sittliche Unmöglichkeit und als Fluch der Welt*), Helene von Druskowitz maintained that unlike animals, who attended to their lust in short phases, man was totally overwhelmed by his

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<sup>40</sup> Rosa Mayreder, “Einiges über die starke Faust,” in *Zur Kritik der Weiblichkeit*, 157.

<sup>41</sup> “Das Tierreich kennt keine unterdrückung, keine Inferiorität, keine Schwäche des weiblichen Tieres— aber es kennt auch keine geschlechtliche Sklaverei!” Elberskirchen, *Revolution*, 61

<sup>42</sup> “In der Tierwelt hat die Natur durch die Paarungs- und Brusntzeit dem Geschlechtstrieb eine Barriere gesetzt; sie hat mit dem Fallenlassen derselben für den Menschen dem männlichen Intellekt zuviel zugetraut; ihr Leibelinssohn zeigt sich nicht als selbstbeerrsches Wesen, sondern als schamlos rasende Bestie.” Eva Stamm, review of Heberlin [Karl] ‘Die habituelle Schwachsinn des Mannes,’ *Die Lehrerin in Haus und Schule. Zentralorgan für die Interessen der Lehrerinnen und Erzieherinnen des In- und Auslandes* 20, no. 20 (1903/04): 583.



“sexual intoxication.”<sup>43</sup> According to Christabel Pankhurst, man had forgotten that his “sex powers” were given to him “in trust for the perpetuation of the race”, and that his sexuality ought to “lie dormant until legitimate occasion arises for its use.” Citing “a man who is a doctor,” she reiterated that, “The secretion of the testicles is the hope of the future of the race, and yet if wrongfully used it is so potent that it may figuratively be classed with the secretions of the poison fangs of venomous reptiles.”<sup>44</sup> Pankhurst’s compatriot Frances Swiney similarly insisted that man currently indulged the “function of reproduction” to “morbid excess, injurious to himself, to the woman, to the offspring.”<sup>45</sup>

As Swiney’s allegations suggest, feminists insisted that men’s repeated transgression of nature had degenerated their sexuality. Christabel Pankhurst argued that, as a result of these transgressions, men’s sex drive had become ‘abnormally’ strong, stronger indeed “than is warranted by the interests of society.”<sup>46</sup> Pankhurst further insisted that the degeneration of the male sex instinct led men to engage in riskier sexual practices, such as prostitution, that allowed man to satisfy his sexual desires without consideration for his partner. According to Pankhurst, men’s sex instincts had “become so perverted and corrupted that intercourse with virtuous women does not content them...They fly to women who will not resent foul words and acts, and will even permit unnatural abuse of the sex function.”<sup>47</sup> Grete Meisel-Hess hypothesized that men had

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<sup>43</sup> “Während das Tier nur in kurzen Phasen Liebe pflegt, ist der Mann stets dem Geschlechtsrausch unterworfen. Er ist in der eigentlichen Liebesphase überschwänglich bis zum äußersten Extrem.” See Helene von Druskowitz, *Der Mann als logische und sittliche Unmöglichkeit und als Fluch der Welt. Pessimistische Kardinalsätze*, edited by Traute Hensch (Freiburg: Kore, 1988), 38-39.

<sup>44</sup> Christabel Pankhurst, *The Great Scourge*, 61.

<sup>45</sup> Frances Swiney, “Redemption through the Son,” *The Woman’s Tribune* 25, no. 20 (1903): 97.

<sup>46</sup> Pankhurst, *The Great Scourge*, 125.

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid*, 46.

developed a ‘natural preference’ for prostitution, as they willingly choose of their free will “to pass the nights of their best years with sexual dissipation.”<sup>48</sup>

Feminists further maintained that men’s sexual excess had degraded not only their instinct and sense of sexual need but also their physiological and psychological constitution. In Frances Swiney’s view, man’s decadent sexuality has given rise to “the most grievous bodily ills...as well as the fearful mental heritages of insanity, idiocy, and criminality.”<sup>49</sup> Citing numerous male medical authorities, Christabel Pankhurst insisted that, due to an “excess of seminal secretions,” man’s ‘incontinence’ led to “a waste of vital force which impoverishes their moral nature and weakens their body.”<sup>50</sup>

The theory of sexual selection and its associated zoomorphic analyses enabled feminists to assail basic medico-scientific claims regarding male sexuality, and in so doing undermine the rationale for the sexual double standard. Nevertheless, the analyses feminists developed from sexual selection raised a number of unresolved questions. Why did men willfully transgress the requirements of nature? And how were they able to do so? Feminists like Christabel Pankhurst attributed the excesses of male sexuality to their social and political dominance. Because “men have got all the power in the State,” she argued, they “therefore make not only the laws of the State, but also its morality.”<sup>51</sup> However, some feminists probed the ‘essence’ of male sexuality to answer such questions, focusing in particular on how the features of male sexuality related to man’s

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<sup>48</sup> Grete Meisel-Hess, *Weiberhaß und Weiberverachtung. Eine Erwiderung auf die in Dr. Otto Weiningers Buche ‘Geschlecht und Charakter’ geäußerten Anschauungen über ‘Die Frau und ihre Frage’*, Second Edition (Vienna: Verlag Die Wage, 1904), 43.

<sup>49</sup> Francis Swiney, *The Awakening of Women, or Woman’s Part in Evolution*, Second Edition (London: William Reeves, 1905), 96.

<sup>50</sup> Pankhurst, *A Great Scourge*, 50, 57, 60

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid*, 5-6. On page 123, Pankhurst refers to beliefs concerning men’s natural sexual need for “immorality” as “gross cant”.

total personality. Intriguingly, while maintaining that male and female sexual need was the same and that male and female sexual drives served common evolutionary purposes, these feminists argued that the ‘essence’ of the male sex drive was fundamentally different from that of woman. In fact, they asserted that human male sexuality possessed gender- and species-specific traits that led it to transgress natural requirements.

These feminists alleged that the male sex drive was inherently selfish, self-serving, aggressive, and possessive. Elsa Asenijeff provides a pithy statement of such views in her novel *Diary Pages of an Emancipated Woman (Tagesbuchblätter einer Emancipierten, 1902)*, when her narrator Irene characterizes her suitor Berthold’s sexual desire for her as “wanting to possess me! Wanting to defile me! Brr! Disgusting!”<sup>52</sup> By attributing an inherent aggression and self-interest to male sexuality, feminists found themselves in agreement with the claims of male sexual scientists. Both parties also agreed that male sexual aggression was a product of evolution. Yet feminists departed from their male counterparts in their insistence that this trait was atavistic. Feminists maintained that while man’s sexual aggression may have been critical at an earlier stage of evolution, it should no longer play a role within conditions of higher civilisation. Rosa Mayreder argued that male sexual aggression was characteristic of what she termed “primitive masculinity.” Mayreder tied this primitive masculinity to an erotic of the ‘strong fist’ which depended not only upon aggression and violence, but also upon the subordination and sexual objectification of women to achieve sexual satisfaction.<sup>53</sup> Indeed, she claimed that true erotic pleasure for ‘primitive’ men derived from their sense

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<sup>52</sup> “Mich-Besitzen-Wollen! Mich-Schänden-Wollen! Brr! Ekelhaft!” Elsa Asenijeff, *Tagesbuchblätter einer Emancipierten* (Leipzig: Hermann Seemann Nachfolger, 1902), 120

<sup>53</sup> Mayreder, “Einiges über die starke Faust,” in *Zur Kritik der Weiblichkeit*, 151.

of power over women and the associated belief that they could conquer every female being if and when they wanted.<sup>54</sup> Mayreder further insisted that this type of man applies the strong fist not only to the female but to all life phenomena.<sup>55</sup> According to Mayreder, man's single-minded sexual selfishness and aggression thus extended itself beyond the bedroom, and characterised man's lust for socio-political power and control.

Mayreder was not alone in viewing prevailing standards of male sexuality as 'primitive' or in arguing that man's sexual characteristics directed men's actions beyond the bedroom. Many feminists' believed that men's sexuality overwhelmed their entire personality. In Grete Meisel-Hess's view, "man seems to be subject...to a *force majeure* stronger than his own will...the strongest impulse of his own nature [is] the impulse to the discharge of sexual tensions".<sup>56</sup> From these feminists' perspective, men seemed innately, and single-mindedly, interested and invested in the pursuit of their own sexual satisfaction. Thus, according to Johanna Elberskirchen, sex constitutes the first and deepest point of life for men.<sup>57</sup>

Nowhere was the connection between male sexuality and social behaviour argued more powerfully than within feminist grand narratives that sought to account for women's subordination. Feminists such as Elberskirchen and Swiney drew upon anthropological theories of a universally-existing primordial matriarchate, along with Darwinian and Lamarckian theories of evolution, to argue that men's self-serving sexuality led them to usurp women's natural, rightful roles as both centres of the social

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid, 156. As Mayreder notes, this belief also depended on the maintenance of women's chastity.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid, 153.

<sup>56</sup> Meisel-Hess, *The Sexual Crisis*, 292-293.

<sup>57</sup> Elberskirchen, *Revolution*, 87.

order and regulators of sexual life.<sup>58</sup> According to Frances Swiney, matriarchy constituted a form of social organization in tune with the dictates of nature. They asserted that women, as the final arbiters of sexual selection, reproducers of life, and creators of industry, were altruistic rulers whose decisions aimed not at personal aggrandizement, but at the improvement of the species. As was common practice among scientists and social commentators during the period, Swiney derived her knowledge of ‘natural’ human life through studies of purportedly ‘primitive’ societies encountered by anthropologists in the course of imperial conquests. According to Swiney, anthropological studies of ‘primitive’ matriarchal societies proved that humans ‘originally’ observed naturally dictated periods of sexual continence during women’s pregnancy and lactation to assure the wellbeing of both mother and infant.<sup>59</sup> As a result of their observation of “natural laws of hygiene and sanitation,” Swiney insisted, most ‘primitive’ people are free of diseases, overcrowding, ‘dysgenic’ children, and individual poverty.<sup>60</sup>

Deploying the same declension narrative, Elberskirchen argued that with the fall of the matriarchy, the rise of private property and slavery, women fell into the “sexual serfdom” of man.<sup>61</sup> In her analysis, women’s social subordination and sexual disempowerment were caused by the rise of patriarchal civilization based on private

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<sup>58</sup> See for example Johann Jakob Bachofen, *Das Mutterrecht: eine Untersuchung über die Gynaiokratie der alten Welt nach ihrer religiösen und rechtlichen Natur* (Stuttgart: Kraus & Hoffmann, 1861). See also Ann Taylor Allen, “Feminism, Social Science, and the Meanings of Modernity: The Debate on the Origins of the Family in Europe and the United States, 1860-1914,” *American Historical Review* 104 (October 1999): 1085-1113.

<sup>59</sup> Frances Swiney, *The Mystery of the Circle and the Cross. The Interpretation of Sex* (London: The Open Road Publishing Co., 1908), 38-39.

<sup>60</sup> Frances Swiney, *Women among the Nations* (London: The Awakener, 1913), 24.

<sup>61</sup> “Mit dem Sturze des Mutterrechts, der Entstehung des Privateigentums und des Sklaventums...geriet das Weib in die geschlechtliche Leibeigenschaft des Mannes.” Elberskirchen, *Revolution*, 73, 75, 77

property and individual rather than collective enrichment.<sup>62</sup> According to Elberskirchen, women could not equally compete with or participate in systems based on individual accumulation due to the demands of pregnancy and childcare. In this way, she argued, men seized control of social power and, more fatefully, of sexual selection. Male sexuality and material dependence were thus represented as the interconnected causes of women's downfall. In fact, Elberskirchen implied that it was man's innate sexual selfishness, which permeated his entire being, that drove him both to accumulate private property and to sexually dominate women.

Women's material dependency in turn enabled men to subordinate women and to satisfy their sexual desires whenever they wanted. Elberskirchen insisted that because women were economically dependent upon man, men could force women to service their excessive sexual lust. Consequently, she asserted, men's sex drive had become unnaturally aroused, in turn requiring an unnatural satisfaction.<sup>63</sup> The unrestricted possibility of sex also caused men to lose sight of what constituted 'natural' sexual need, and to confuse their decadent standard with a natural one.

As a result of such analyses, feminists like Elberskirchen and Swiney concluded that the transition from matriarchy to patriarchy had degenerated male sexuality. However, drawing upon eugenic ideas, they also asserted that patriarchy precipitated widespread racial degeneration. Much in line with the principles of private property ownership, they argued, men exercised their right of sexual selection not in the interests of 'racial' advancement, but rather according to their own individual inclinations.

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<sup>62</sup> Christabel Pankhurst advanced a similar argument to explain the origins of prostitution in *The Great Scourge*, 44.

<sup>63</sup> Elberskirchen, *Revolution*, 76.

According to Swiney, when woman was responsible for sexual selection, she “evolve[d], and create[d].” Conversely, as sexual selectors men “disintegrate[d]” and “destroye[d].”<sup>64</sup> Swiney went as far as to insist that civilisation under male dominance has seen an increase in “animalism, abnormality, unnatural sorrows and diseases, selfishness, destructiveness.”<sup>65</sup>

These feminists further claimed that women’s evolution had been particularly hampered by patriarchal modes of sexual governance. Indeed, according to Frances Swiney, women “began to decline in health and strength under the depressing, harmful effects of male supremacy, and the infringement of the natural law.”<sup>66</sup> Johanna Elberskirchen maintained that men selected women who would satisfy their sexual desires, expressing a marked preference for subservient, passive, and superficially beautiful women. Such a woman, Elberskirchen asserted, was “best designed to serve the degenerate sexual lust of man—she was without will and without the capacity to resist”. With such a prevailing standard of sexual selection, Elberskirchen maintained that men could hereditarily perpetuate women’s biological and psychological inferiority, in order to maintain unequal relations between men and women.<sup>67</sup> In Elberskirchen’s view, men had transformed woman into a sexual object, “a sad and sadness-arousing torso of human strength and beauty.”<sup>68</sup> Indeed, feminists attributed a range of negative physiological effects suffered by women to male sexuality. Ellis Ethelmer went as far as to argue that

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<sup>64</sup> Frances Swiney, *Woman and Natural Law* (London: C. W. Daniel Ltd., 1912), 8-9.

<sup>65</sup> See Frances Swiney, *The Cosmic Procession, or, The Feminine Principle in Evolution. Essays of Illumination* (London: Ernest Bell, 1906), 177-183.

<sup>66</sup> Swiney, *Mystery of the Circle and the Cross*, 45.

<sup>67</sup> “Es pflanzten sich also hauptsächlich die Frauen fort, welche sich den inferioren Verhältnissen am besten angepaßt.” Elberskirchen, *Revolution*, 79-80.

<sup>68</sup> “...[e]inen traurigen und Trauer erweckenden Torso menschlicher Kraft und Schönheit—das, was er aus dem Weibe machte!” Elberskirchen, *Revolution*, 88

the species-specific, debilitating and inhibiting pain women experience upon menstruation was a result of man's sexual excess and brutality. Citing a variety of medical experts, Ethelmer argued that menstruation is a 'pathological' consequence of "man's longtime abuse of woman's functions, in selfish and inconsiderate gratification of his own lower desires."<sup>69</sup>

Concluding this overview of feminists' analyses, the reader is left with a damning view of male sexuality, and masculinity generally. Based on feminists' arguments, it would seem that women's prospects within heterosexuality were bleak. Indeed, some feminists insisted that, in addition to degenerating the male sex drive and thwarting women's evolution, male sexuality had destroyed the grounds of intimacy and understanding between men and women. According to Ellis Ethelmer, true love cannot exist where one partner is unwillingly subordinated to the sexual whims of the other. The "boorishness of the husband" leads to the "disillusionment of the wife," ultimately transforming marriage into love's "living tomb."<sup>70</sup> Feminists such as Grete Meisel-Hess further insisted that the degeneration of male sexuality had made men incapable of initiating, sustaining, or even recognising loving relationships between men and women. Following Freud, Meisel-Hess alleged that man's inability to love, as well as his dependence upon sexual enjoyment in absence of love, had made him into a 'sexual cripple.'<sup>71</sup> Indeed, feminists' assertions regarding the fundamental differences between male and female sexuality suggested a fundamental incommensurability. As Dickinson

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<sup>69</sup> Ethelmer, *Life to Woman*, 16, 52-53, 26.

<sup>70</sup> Ellis Ethelmer, *Phases of Love: As It Was; As It Is; As It May Be* (Congleton: Thomas Gordon, 1897), 39-40.

<sup>71</sup> Meisel-Hess, *The Sexual Crisis*, 153-155.



has observed, such assertions were commonplace within sexual scientific literature at the time.<sup>72</sup> In light of such conclusions, what kinds of reforms were possible?

### Competing visions of sexual reform: Equality, Matriarchy, Asexuality, Unisexuality

Despite sharing a dim view of male sexuality, these feminists advanced different visions for the reform of sexual life. Some feminists believed that male sexuality could be reformed by creating conditions of greater equality in social and sexual life. They sought this equality through legal changes, namely the suffrage, and through the reform of sexual ethics. These feminists therefore believed that men and women could find fulfillment in a shared life, both in public and in private. That is, they believed heterosexuality could become a sexually just and fulfilling way of life for women as well as for men. Others, however, were more pessimistic. They insisted that, given the innate incommensurability between male and female sexuality, and the degenerative effects of male sexuality, radical change was needed that would return women to the centre of social and sexual life—or perhaps lead to the transcendence of sex altogether.

This divergence in feminists' attitudes towards sexual reform can in part be explained by factors specific to the individual authors. In light of Christabel Pankhurst's devotion to the cause of women's suffrage, it is not surprising she would seek legal remedy. Likewise, Frances Swiney's theosophic beliefs played no small role in convincing her that the future was female.<sup>73</sup> Beyond these specific differences, I maintain that this divergence can also be attributed to the kinds of scientific ideas and evidence feminists invoked. Feminists such as Pankhurst, Ethelmer, and Mayreder, for example,

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<sup>72</sup> See Dickinson, "A Dark Impenetrable Wall."

<sup>73</sup> On the relationship between gender, sex and theosophy, see Joy Dixon, *Divine Feminine: Theosophy and Feminism in England* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001).

primarily engaged medical statistics and, above all, evolutionary theory. Importantly, evolutionary theory does not relate a linear narrative of either progress or decline. It is premised upon the possibility of change and adaptation.<sup>74</sup> And as Rosa Mayreder asked of her fellow feminists, “Inasmuch as sexuality has, during the evolution of civilisation become sublimated into love, why should a biological change, destined to influence still further the psychosexual disposition of the sexes, be regarded as a mere Utopian assumption?”<sup>75</sup> Thus, their belief in the possibility of transforming male sexuality does not indicate a logical inconsistency within their thought. Conversely, feminists such as Frances Swiney, Johanna Elberskirchen, and Helene von Druskowitz engaged not only evolutionary ideas, but also evidence from biology that maintained sexual traits were innate and unchanging as they emanated from the cells themselves. Perhaps not surprisingly, such ideas encouraged a great deal of pessimism regarding the ameliorative effects of legal reforms to the status quo.

For some feminists, the reform of male sexuality—and thus of heterosexuality—was possible, but depended upon women’s social and sexual equality with men. They insisted that true love and partnership, both social and sexual, could only be possible when conditions of equality existed between the sexes. Feminists thus proposed a range of legal, economic and ethical reforms to ensure equality—and to empower women to exercise an ‘uplifting’ influence upon male sexuality. Importantly, all of these proposed reforms were premised on the belief that behaviours could be changed and adapted through conscious human effort. They also expressed faith in the capacity of socio-

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<sup>74</sup> For this reason, present-day feminists such as Elizabeth Grosz continue to view evolutionary theory as a serviceable narrative for feminists. See Elizabeth Grosz, *Time Travels: Feminism, Nature, Power* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2005), 13-53.

<sup>75</sup> Mayreder, “Einiges über die starke Faust,” in *Zur Kritik der Weiblichkeit*, 157.

political reforms to address sexual problems, as well as in the ability of the state and society to include women as equals. It is perhaps not coincidental that the most vocal advocates of such reforms were British suffragists such as Christabel Pankhurst, who believed in the transformative potential of women's participation within the liberal state.

Indeed, according to Christabel Pankhurst, the surest means of sexual reform was a political one: namely, women's suffrage. Many feminist historians have probed the connection between British feminists' suffrage agitation and demands for sexual reform.<sup>76</sup> Feminists claimed that the suffrage would endow women with both greater political and greater sexual power. Pankhurst's *The Great Scourge, and How to End It* (1913) stands as an exemplary exposition of this claim. Pankhurst argued that the vote would increase women's self-respect and would lead them to demand greater respect from men. She believed that the vote would also attune women to their great importance as "transmitters of life" and embolden them to "condemn every law and custom which belittles and condemns to social and political inferiority the mother sex to which they belong."<sup>77</sup> Moreover, the vote would empower women to demand laws for their protection and to strengthen their economic position.<sup>78</sup> Ultimately, Pankhurst insisted, the merits of women's suffrage extended beyond the benefits to women themselves. Specifically, she claimed it would help "redeem the race" by forcing the state—and, intriguingly, the medical profession—to pay attention to "[women's] interests and the interests of her children."<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>76</sup> See, for example, Bland, *Banishing the Beast*; Mort, *Dangerous Sexualities*; Kent, *Sex and Suffrage*; Jeffreys, *The Spinster and Her Enemies*.

<sup>77</sup> Pankhurst, *The Great Scourge*, 108-109.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid*, viii, 22.

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid*, 21-22.

In addition to the suffrage, feminists such as Pankhurst sought the reform of sexual ethics that would eradicate the sexual double standard. Pankhurst famously demanded not only “Votes for Women,” but also “Chastity for Men!” Like-minded feminists supported premarital chastity for both sexes before marriage and continence within marriage. Such demands are much in line with their view of sex as primarily reproductive. To achieve this ethical reform, feminists insisted that men had to be re-educated regarding the true purpose of sex and the actual extent of their natural sexual need. As Pankhurst pointed out, men’s “sex powers” are meant to serve, “reverently and in a union based on love,” the perpetuation of the race.<sup>80</sup> If it is in man’s nature to “consort with prostitutes” and indulge in sexual “immorality”, Pankhurst insisted, “[o]ne is forced to the conclusion, if one accepts men’s account of themselves, that women’s nature is something very much cleaner, stronger, and higher than the human nature of men.”<sup>81</sup>

As Pankhurst’s comments suggest, most feminists felt it was up to women, as men’s sexual and ethical superiors, to regulate men’s sexuality. According to Rosa Mayreder, after years of striving for sexual purity and monogamic loyalty, women had developed a superior sexual consciousness and self-mastery that made them well-equipped to regulate sexual life.<sup>82</sup> In addition to pre-marital chastity, these feminists insisted upon ‘continence’ within marriage. Following the biologists Geddes and Thomson, Ellis Ethelmer stressed ‘prudence after marriage’ that would reflect the

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid, 121

<sup>81</sup> Ibid, 6-7.

<sup>82</sup> Mayreder, “Frauen und Frauentypen,” in *Zur Kritik der Weiblichkeit*, 122.

‘natural periodicity’ dictated by reproductive cycles.<sup>83</sup> Such a practice would transform marriage into a “psychic alliance, based on ‘noble fellowship,’” and would transform marital partners into “equal consorts, equal comrades”.<sup>84</sup> Ethelmer maintained that the “two conjoint masters of physiology and psychology” now taught that “the worthy control of lower passion by higher purpose [was] essential to any intellectual and just condition of marriage.”<sup>85</sup>

Until such legal and ethical reforms were realized, however, feminists insisted that women must refuse ‘unworthy’ men as husbands and, therefore, as sexual companions. Many feminists believed that, at present, women were much more evolved than men and that the reforms they proposed were necessary to speed nature along its course. Consequently, Pankhurst declared, “There can be no mating between the spiritually developed women of this new day and men who in thought or conduct with regard to sex matters are their inferiors.”<sup>86</sup>

Whereas feminists such as Pankhurst, Ethelmer, and Mayreder believed that male sexuality—and heterosexuality more generally—could be rehabilitated through legal and ethical measures that would create conditions of equality and enhance women’s social, cultural, and political influence, others were less optimistic. For German-speaking feminists, this pessimism may have been driven in part by the lesser likelihood of political reforms, and the greater legal restrictions placed on women’s social and political activities. Another reason for this pessimism lies in the fact that these feminists did not believe that true sexual equality existed in nature. While drawing on evolutionary ideas

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<sup>83</sup> Ethelmer, *Phases of Love*, 41.

<sup>84</sup> Ethelmer, *Life to Woman*, 65-66.

<sup>85</sup> Ethelmer, *Phases of Love*, 51, 65, 41.

<sup>86</sup> Pankhurst, *The Great Scourge*, 98.

like their optimistic counterparts, these more pessimistic feminists also drew upon evidence from sexual physiology, which suggested that sexual traits were innate and, more importantly, unchanging. Their analyses therefore led them to conclude that social and ethical reforms could not affect sexual equality because the sexes were unequal at the most basic biological level. More specifically, they believed that men were intrinsically, naturally inferior to women. For this reason, they maintained that the existing social order was based on a perversion of nature. Furthermore, they insisted that, for the good of women, the race, and men themselves, men ought to be subordinated to women's regulatory authority within a fundamentally transformed system of sexual governance.

Like Pankhurst, Mayreder, Meisel-Hess and others, Elberskirchen, Swiney and Druskowitz believed that male sexuality was less evolved than female sexuality; however, they alleged that this lesser evolution extended beyond man's sexuality. Drawing evidence from scientific studies of sexual difference, these feminists argued that man himself existed in an evolutionary state of arrested development. Citing authorities including Darwin, Havelock Ellis, Lester Ward, Sir James Crichton-Browne, and Ludwig Büchner, Frances Swiney insisted that men more resembled primates than humans.<sup>87</sup> Likewise, Helene von Druskowitz cited man's greater bodily hairiness, flat breast, and "obnoxious" voice to suggest that man was a "freak" (*Spottgeburt*) that served as the link between the human and the animal worlds. According to Druskowitz, man's genitals, which he carries around "like a criminal," serve as the greatest "brand mark" of his atavism. Conversely, for these feminists, women as a group represented a higher state of human evolution. As Swiney argued, physiologists attributed to women "a higher degree

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<sup>87</sup> Swiney, *The Cosmic Procession*, 221.

of evolution than men” by virtue of the “relatively smaller weight of their jaws,” their “greater powers of endurance and resistance,” and their “more complex, varied, assimilative, and adaptable” vital organs.<sup>88</sup>

Feminists found further, elementary evidence of man’s inferiority and women’s superiority in the sperm and the ovum. In turning to the sex cells to both divine innate sex traits and evaluate them, these feminists followed the scientific precedent established by Geddes and Thomson, whose ideas regarding the sperm were cited earlier. Swiney even used Geddes and Thomson’s terminology and conclusions to argue that the sperm represented the masculine ‘katabolic’ principle, but associated katabolism with waste, decay, disintegration, dispersion, and death.<sup>89</sup> “Parasitic and helpless,” she asserted that the sperm depended upon the ovum for its entire existence.<sup>90</sup> According to Swiney, “The sperm cells are the smallest of cells, always infinitely smaller than the ova which receive and absorb them, and, as Geddes and Thomson point out, they have gone too far in katabolic (disintegrating) processes to be capable of self-reproduction”.<sup>91</sup> The sperm’s dependence upon the ovum led Swiney to declare that the male begins and subsists as a parasite on the female.<sup>92</sup> Likewise, Elberskirchen declared sperm “an appendage of the ovum” (“ein Adnex der Eizelle”) completely dependent upon the ovum for its existence. Unlike the ovum, the sperm lacked protoplasmic nutrients with which to nourish itself; if it wants to develop itself, Elberskirchen pointed out, it must bind itself to the ovum and

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<sup>88</sup> Swiney, *The Awakening of Woman*, Second Edition, 29, 23

<sup>89</sup> Swiney, *The Mystery of the Circle and the Cross*, 26.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid*, 37.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid*, 27.

<sup>92</sup> Swiney, *The Cosmic Procession*, 56-58.

allow itself to be fed. As such, Elberskirchen declared the sperm “destitute.”<sup>93</sup> Elberskirchen even advanced the peculiar metaphoric claim that, the sperm (and likewise the man) was a “natural-born proletariat, dependent upon the ovum, dependent upon the woman in his entire development and existence.”<sup>94</sup>

Contrary to the sperm, Swiney and Elberskirchen maintained that the ovum, ‘the mother-cell,’ was the original source of being. Drawing on scientific authorities such as Ernst Haeckel, Swiney proclaimed that, “Every individual of whatsoever species...begins with a globular speck of protoplasm—self-procreative, self-contained, and potential with latent possibilities. The ovum alone is ‘the germinal spot’ and ‘the germinal point’ of the future life.”<sup>95</sup> Again using Geddes and Thomson’s terminology, Swiney attributed to the ovum the ‘anabolic’ principles “of nourishment, of sustenance, of creation, of making, of building-up, of growth, of life-giving processes”.<sup>96</sup> Similarly, Elberskirchen maintained that the superiority of the ovum is apparent in its rich abundance of plasma, which nourishes and sustains life.<sup>97</sup> It is the ovum, Elberskirchen claimed, in which “all strength is saved.”<sup>98</sup>

Like male sexual scientists, these feminists insisted that the purported qualities of the ovum and the sperm characterised the sex-specific character traits of woman and man.

According to Swiney, like the ‘anabolic’ ovum, women were altruistic, creative, and

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<sup>93</sup> “Das Spermatozoon ist bettelarm!” Elberskirchen, *Revolution*, 69-70.

<sup>94</sup> “das Spermatozoon (bezw. der Mann) der naturgewordene Proletarier, abhängig vom Ovum, abhängig vom Weibe in seinem ganzen Entwicklung und Existenz.” Elberskirchen, *Revolution*, 71.

<sup>95</sup> Swiney, *The Mystery of the Circle and the Cross*, 15.

<sup>96</sup> *Ibid*, 26.

<sup>97</sup> Elberskirchen, *Revolution*, 69.

<sup>98</sup> “...in welcher alle Kräfte aufgespeichert sind—in der männlichen Samenzelle nicht. Sie bedarf unter allen Umständen die weibliche Keimzelle zur Entwicklung. Nie noch geschah es, soweit unsere Kenntnisse gehen, daß aus einer männlichen Samenzelle ohne Mitwirkung der weiblichen Eizelle ein Lebewesen sich entwickelt hätte.” Elberskirchen, *Revolution*, 68.



future-oriented.<sup>99</sup> And, like the ‘katabolic’ sperm, they insisted that men were dependent, restless, selfish and present-minded.<sup>100</sup> Whereas the male is competitive, the female naturally tends toward mutual aid.<sup>101</sup> Interestingly, feminists’ biologicistic conclusions regarding the sexed characteristics of men and women closely resembled the assertions of male sexual scientists such as Geddes and Thomson. However, feminists’ interpretations of the value of these traits and their implications for social and sexual life were fundamentally different, and weighed heavily in women’s favour.

Man’s existential inferiority further manifested itself, feminists claimed, in the subordinate role played by the sperm within the reproductive process. According to these critiques, man’s role and responsibility within reproduction was limited to fertilisation, or, in Asenijeff’s words, serving as an “agent provocateur.”<sup>102</sup> Swiney declared that the sperm “seeks out” the ovum, which subsequently absorbs the sperm.<sup>103</sup> Citing *The Physiology of Reproduction* authored by a Dr. Marshall, Swiney alleged that the sperm contributes “little material to the fertilised ovum, being provided with only sufficient protoplasmic substance to form a locomotive apparatus by means of which it gains access to the ovum.”<sup>104</sup> The primary purpose of the sperm in fertilising the ovum, she argued, is to ensure “further variations of type and diversity of chemico-physics.”<sup>105</sup> It is then up to the ovum to transmit and eliminate certain hereditary traits,<sup>106</sup> such as the “evil [i.e. the male element], the waste, the katabolic energies and forces, that, if left to themselves,

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<sup>99</sup> Swiney, *The Cosmic Procession*, 76.

<sup>100</sup> Ibid, 76.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid, 168.

<sup>102</sup> Asenijeff, *Tagesbuchblätter einer Emancipierten*, 148.

<sup>103</sup> Swiney, *The Mystery of the Circle and the Cross*, 35

<sup>104</sup> Swiney, *Woman and Natural Law*, 17.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid, 12.

<sup>106</sup> Swiney, *The Mystery of the Circle and the Cross*, 21-25, 31.

would produce universal anarchy.”<sup>107</sup> Thankfully, Swiney noted, scientists were increasingly discovering that the sperm’s meagre reproductive role was becoming progressively superfluous, and that eventually females would be able to parthenogenically—that is, asexually—reproduce. For Swiney, the dynamics of reproduction, and the possibility of parthenogenic reproduction borne out by physical scientific research, demonstrated what she perceived as fact: namely, that, “Woman is a necessity to man; but man is not necessary to woman.”<sup>108</sup>

Indeed, the proclaimed superior strength and greater purpose of the ovum led feminists to espouse and reiterate Havelock Ellis’ conclusion in *Man and Woman* (1894) that woman “is thus of greater importance than the male from nature’s point of view.”<sup>109</sup> However, feminists pushed this conclusion further to assert that, because nature had endowed women with greater powers and responsibilities than men, women’s existence was inherently more important and more meaningful than that of the male. According to Elsa Asenijeff, man lacks natural duties, and consequently he “flies around in his life like a butterfly and his goal is to follow wherever chance leads him.” Conversely, she maintained, woman is like a flower, “always joined together with her Mother Earth.”<sup>110</sup> Indeed, according to Swiney, the female was the original sex, representing “the centre of gravity of the whole biological system.” Citing Herbert Spencer, she described the feminine as “the moving equilibrium” that “regulates, dirigates, and controls the process

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<sup>107</sup> Swiney, *The Cosmic Procession*, 13.

<sup>108</sup> Swiney, *The Mystery of the Circle and the Cross*, 93-94.

<sup>109</sup> Havelock Ellis, *Man and Woman: A Study of Human Secondary Sexual Characteristics* (London: Walter Scott, 1894), 384.

<sup>110</sup> “Der Mann ist von Natur aus pflichtenlos. Alle Pflichten, die er erfüllt, hat er sich selbst um einer bestimmten Ordnung oder Idee willen erfunden. Das Weib hat Pflichten vor der Natur...Der Mann fliegt wie der Schmetterling im Leben umher und sein Ziel ist, wohin ihn der Zufall führt. Das Weib gleicht der Blume, die immer mit ihrer Mutter Erde zusammenhängt.” Elsa Asenijeff, *Aufruhr der Weiber und das dritte Geschlecht*, Third Edition (Leipzig : Dr. Brandstetter, 1898), 44.

of evolution.”<sup>111</sup> In fact, drawing on arguments made by sociologist Lester Ward, she asserted the female not only “typifies the race...she is the race.”<sup>112</sup> Accordingly, Swiney insisted that, “[p]riority of existence, then, belongs to the female”.<sup>113</sup>

Given what they believed to be the demonstrable and innate biological superiority of the female over the male, some feminists insisted upon a radical overhaul of existing modes of social organization and sexual governance that would place the preponderance of power in women’s hands. Both Elberskirchen and Swiney advocated the establishment of what Elberskirchen called a ‘new-style matriarchate’ that re-centred woman, the “original social cell,” as the “biological fulcrum and crux of the world, its biological axis.”<sup>114</sup> A ‘female dictatorship’ (*Weiberherrschaft*), in Elberskirchen’s view, would reflect the natural order as it is based upon biological processes, namely woman’s central role in generating and sustaining life. In fact, Elberskirchen insisted upon a social order wherein the sexes’ powers corresponded with their innate biological value and degree of responsibility for the reproduction of the species. According to her, where no biological legitimacy (*Gesetzmäßigkeit*) existed, degeneration must necessarily enter. It is for this reason, Elberskirchen asserted, that under the “male dictatorship” (*Männerherrschaft*) there has been an increase in “unnaturalness, sickness, prostitution, bodily, spiritual, and economic degeneration.”<sup>115</sup> Elberskirchen insisted that recognizing woman’s biological centrality in maintaining and improving the life of the species was necessary to restore social and ‘racial’ health.

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<sup>111</sup> See also Swiney, *The Mystery of the Circle and the Cross*, 15, 23.

<sup>112</sup> Swiney, *Woman Among the Nations*, 11.

<sup>113</sup> Swiney, *Woman and Natural Law*, 10.

<sup>114</sup> “...biologisch Dreh- und Angelpunkt der Welt, ihre biologische Achse.” Elberskirchen, *Revolution*, 100-1.

<sup>115</sup> “...Unnatur, Krankheit, Prostitution, körperliche, geistige und ökonomische Entartung.” Elberskirchen, *Revolution*, 108-10.

Indeed, Elberskirchen and Swiney believed that the return to a matriarchal order would regenerate the race by returning to women their 'natural' right of final choice in sexual selection. Just as they did during the time of the ancient matriarchate, feminists argued, women would exercise sexual choice with a view to improving the race. As Elberskirchen asserted, women would choose their mates according to "intelligence, strength, and beauty."<sup>116</sup> By exercising an altruistic sexual selection, Swiney maintained, women would "purify the very source of life." Through her superior sexual selection of the "best and fittest morally and physically," Swiney proclaimed that, "women might incontestably hasten the grandest phase of moral evolution the world has yet seen."<sup>117</sup>

Arguably, Elberskirchen and Swiney's goals did not differ dramatically from those of Pankhurst, Ethelmer, or Mayreder. All wanted to empower women, to realize a 'natural' standard of sexuality for men and women, and to 'regenerate' sexual life. Yet in advocating matriarchy as mode of sexual governance, feminists such as Elberskirchen and Swiney expressed considerable pessimism regarding the possibility of changing men's behaviour and the existing social order, despite their evolutionary beliefs. Yet for some feminists, even a female-centred system of sexual governance did not go far enough. Swiney herself viewed matriarchy as a transitional stage. After all, a new-style matriarchy would still be a heterosexual order, albeit one wherein the balance of power was shifted into women's hands. Some feminists believed that women's only salvation would come with transcendence of sex itself.

According to Helene von Druskowitz, a crucial first step in this direction was sexual separatism. She in fact insisted upon a division of cities according to sex, a

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<sup>116</sup> Elberskirchen, *Revolution*, 89.

<sup>117</sup> Swiney, *The Awakening of Woman*, Second Edition, 101.

restriction and eventual elimination of marriage, and education and free choice of occupation for women.<sup>118</sup> Such measures, she claimed, would enable women to focus the totality of female energy on their own half.<sup>119</sup> Women, she argued, must live in the full knowledge of their rights, in self-confidence, and in sympathy and love for their own sex. They must stop revering male works and creation; indeed, Druskowitz insisted that women ought to “hate men and marriage,” and instead focus on creating a ‘knighthood’ and ‘priesthood’ of women.<sup>120</sup> Druskowitz insisted that such an arrangement would eliminate the “disgusting promiscuity” of contemporary sex life, and make the sexes distinguishable “only through their nicknames.”<sup>121</sup> Abandoning both sexual intercourse and sexual identity would facilitate the transcendence of sex. However, Druskowitz’s radical, uncompromising vision for women’s empowerment was ultimately a fatalistic one: following the logic of her analysis, women’s integrity could only come at the cost of the species’ continued existence.

Like Druskowitz, Frances Swiney also envisioned the transcendence of sex. According to Swiney, the key evolutionary problem facing humanity was sexual difference. She therefore insisted that, “the problem of mankind...will find its solution in the Oneness of Sex.”<sup>122</sup> For Swiney this transcendence did not necessarily mean the abandonment of all sexual identity. Rather, she believed that humans were evolving into a feminine, asexually-reproductive, spiritually-oriented species. Ultimately, she believed, the male would be ‘reabsorbed’ into the female once the human female regained the

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<sup>118</sup> Druskowitz, *Der Mann als logische und sittliche Unmöglichkeit*, 58-59.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid.*, 75-76.

<sup>121</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

<sup>122</sup> Swiney, *The Cosmic Procession*, 233. See also Frances Swiney, “The Awakening of Women: A Reply by the Author,” *Woman’s Sphere* 42, no. 3 (1904): 405.

capacity for parthenogenesis.<sup>123</sup> Indeed, she asserted that with the elimination of the male, all species reached the height of their evolution.<sup>124</sup>

According to Swiney this evolutionary process was already under way. As demonstrated by “the opinion of leading biologists”, she argued that the male originally emerged as an accidental “waste product of nature” that could not survive evolutionary struggles without female help.<sup>125</sup> To prove that the male was a natural misfortune, she cited mortality statistics which showed that a greater percentage of male births occur during periods of malnutrition and unfavourable evolutionary conditions, such as war, famine and pestilence, and that the infant death rate was higher among males than females. Conversely, she maintained that, “such well-known authorities as Duesing, Pflueger, Ploss, Heape, Maupas, Loeb, Geddes, and Thomson conclusively prove that the female, whether in plant or animal, so far from being the result of an arrest in development, as was erroneously supposed by Darwin and Spencer, is the direct outcome of the most favourable nutritive and environmental conditions”.<sup>126</sup> With the evolution of civilisation, she argued, woman will prove herself to be “truly human,”<sup>127</sup> and man will prove himself a “rudimentary” female.<sup>128</sup> Although Swiney’s enthusiasm for the erasure of sexual difference was largely motivated by her theosophic beliefs, these beliefs were informed and legitimated through careful and comprehensive scientific citation.

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<sup>123</sup> Swiney quotes from an article from the April 1905 edition of *The Westminster Review* entitled “The Evolution of the Male” to substantiate this point: “The man shall become the substance of the woman; the male shall be reabsorbed into the feminine nature by a gradual and persistent transmutation of the many to the one; an integrating synthetic determination of mankind to one ideal standard.” See Swiney, *The Mystery of the Circle and the Cross*, 67, 57. See also “Redemption through the Son,” *The Woman’s Tribune* 23, no. 20 (1903): 89-91 and *The Woman’s Tribune* 25, no. 20 (1903): 97.

<sup>124</sup> See Swiney, “Woman Revealed” *The Woman’s Tribune* 19, no. 12 (1902): 1; emphasis added.

<sup>125</sup> Swiney, *The Awakening of Woman*, Second Edition, 20.

<sup>126</sup> Swiney, *Woman and Natural Law*, 16.

<sup>127</sup> Swiney, *The Cosmic Procession*, xi.

<sup>128</sup> Swiney, *The Awakening of Woman*, Second Edition, 19.

Swiney thus urged women to realize their superiority and men to embrace the feminine within themselves. Indeed, she believed that men had *some* feminine traits within them: how else could one explain their creative and intellectual achievements? Such a position provides a fascinating counterpoint to the ideas explored in Chapter Two, which attributed all of women's creative and intellectual achievements to the existence of masculine traits. Swiney specified humility, submission, and obedience as the most important 'feminine' traits men must adopt.<sup>129</sup> Once men embraced these feminine traits, Swiney believed the elimination of the male would be hastened.<sup>130</sup> "Men have cheerfully acquiesced in promulgating the fact of their ascent from the ape," she observed. "[T]hey must now, with equal equanimity, recognise the trend of the biological law towards the development of the male to the standard embodied in the woman."<sup>131</sup>

### Conclusion

In this chapter, I have explored how German-speaking and British feminists deployed scientific ideas to criticize male sexuality and to propose new modes of sexual governance. I have shown how feminists turned to sexual science to ascertain the 'true nature' of male sexuality, to argue that existing male sexual practices were 'unnatural,' and to elucidate the negative effects of male sexuality on the health of women, men, and the body politic. Some feminists went further, drawing upon sexual biology and anthropological theory to account for the origins of the status quo in the specifically 'male' properties of male sexuality. Based on their analyses, feminists demanded

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<sup>129</sup> Swiney, *The Cosmic Procession*, 91.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid.*, 87-91.

<sup>131</sup> Swiney, *Woman and Natural Law*, 48.

reforms to existing modes of sexual governance in the interests of men themselves, women, and the race.

And yet, as I have demonstrated, despite sharing similar views about the ‘nature’ of male sexuality, the feminists I studied herein proposed divergent reforms in order to realize both women’s emancipation and ‘racial’ regeneration. Whereas some feminists advocated legal and ethical reforms of the existing order, others insisted on a radical overhaul that would place women at the centre of social and sexual life. Still others insisted on sexual separatism and the transcendence of sex, in all its polysemic meanings. While various national and political factors undoubtedly also played a role in influencing feminists’ affinity for particular visions of reform, I have proposed that feminists’ engagement with particular forms of scientific knowledge also helps explain this divergence. Feminists who took a primarily evolutionary approach to sex life and sex reform were generally more optimistic regarding the prospects of reform. While these feminists believed in the existence of essential sexual differences, they nonetheless believed in the possibility of adaptation. Conversely, feminists who drew upon sexual biology, which asserted the existence of innate, unchanging sex traits, were much more pessimistic about the potential of reform, and tended to seek more radical solutions—including the transcendence of sex itself.

This chapter illustrates many of my dissertation’s more general arguments. It demonstrates how recourse to scientific ideas and ‘facts’ empowered feminists to challenge existing modes of sexual arrangements, as well as existing beliefs and knowledge regarding sexuality—particularly those promoted by male sexual scientists.



Science further enabled feminists to assert the objective truth of their views, and to legitimize their visions for the reform of sexual life.

This chapter also illuminates the polyvalence of scientific knowledge for feminist ends. The diverse forms of sexual scientific knowledge available to feminists—and its contradictory implications—meant there was no singular ‘scientific’ feminist vision for sexual reform, even among those who believed scientific approaches and natural knowledge provided the indispensable foundations for sexual reform. Sexual science, as a diverse and uniquely interdisciplinary field, could underwrite and legitimize diverse feminist proposals for sexual reform.

Furthermore, this chapter demonstrates how feminists tied male sexuality and sexual behaviour both to women’s sexual oppression and to ‘racial’ degeneration. They were thereby able to connect women’s sexual emancipation with racial regeneration. By appealing to scientific revelations of ‘nature,’ feminists were able to argue that existing practices were unnatural, hence abnormal, and that they had tremendous negative consequences for the health of the body politic. Feminists could therefore claim that the stakes involved in the struggle for women’s rights and sexual reform were nothing less than the life and future of the species. Relatedly, in demonstrating the ‘unnatural’ and ‘abnormal’ nature of male sexuality, feminists could assert that sexual life should no longer privilege male sexual preferences and prerogatives. Indeed, they were able to argue for man’s decentralization in the governance of sexual life, whether through greater standards of sexual equality, the creation of a ‘new style matriarchy,’ or the transcendence of sex and elimination of men altogether.

While this mode of critique clearly had a number of advantages for feminists, like the other cases I explore in my dissertation, it had considerable limits. Feminists' reliance on evolutionary theory's definition of sex as primarily reproductive had implications not only for definitions of male sexuality but also for understandings of female sexuality, and of heterosexuality more generally. Within the critiques examined in this chapter, feminists asserted woman's sexual superiority by claiming that women's sexual instinct and need were more in tune with natural reproductive cycles. They also insisted that women's sexuality did not seek to satisfy itself, but rather that it sought to improve the race. Unlike the ideas explored in Chapter Two, such definitions of female sexuality allowed no space for the erotic, and gave no consideration to the role sex itself played in cementing lasting bonds of love and intimacy between men and women.

Indeed, the vision of heterosexual life offered by these critiques betrays a certain wariness or unease regarding relations between men and women.<sup>132</sup> Sex is represented as something necessary for the species, but not for relationships between men and women. Love may ennoble sex, but sex is not necessary for love. More radically, these analyses suggest that, from an evolutionary perspective, love between men and women need not exist at all. Ironically, despite their recourse to evolutionary theory and zoomorphic interpretative models, these feminists' idealized vision of sexual life helped reinforce the binary between the 'animalistic' and the 'spiritual' in human life—a binary which other feminist adherents of evolutionary ideas viewed as specious.

Did these critiques represent utopian—or, depending on one's perspective, dystopian—visions? Or are they more accurately understood as manifestations of

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<sup>132</sup> Dickinson identifies this sentiment in German feminism; see "A Dark Impenetrable Wall."

political frustration? Were the more radical visions of reform reflections of pessimism regarding the possibility of social change, as I have argued? Or rather, did they reflect frustration at *men's* seeming unwillingness to change? It would be easy to criticize these feminists for assuming a limited and limiting view of female sexuality and for advancing essentialist understandings of masculinity and femininity. Yet it is worth reflecting on what other dynamics were at play.

I would argue that these critiques speak to many feminists' deep desire, seen in Chapter Two in the writings of Marianne Weber, Helene Lange, and Anna Pappritz, that women should be able to be and become something other than sexual beings. Indeed, feminist sexual politics were not only about the right to be sexual—they were also about the right not to be sexualized and not to have sex define their entire existential worth. Moreover, regardless of the realism of their visions, these feminists' engagements with science enabled them to envision a future wherein male needs and experience did not anchor and orient sexual—and social—life. Science enabled feminists to envision a future beyond, and without, men.

However, another critical impetus behind feminists' critique was clearly eugenic. This chapter demonstrated that appeals to the logic and language of race were elemental to feminists' critiques of male sexuality, and to their alternative visions of sexual governance. Whether sincere or purely strategic, feminists believed such reforms would benefit not only women, but also the race. Thus, by invoking degeneration, regeneration, and eugenic rationale, feminists tied women's emancipation to racial imperatives, and suggested that that they did not seek sexual reform solely for women's benefit, either as individuals or as a group. In the next chapter, I shall consider in greater depth the

relationship feminists posited between women's fortunes and racial futures, and explore reasons why racial thinking appealed to feminists. Unlike this chapter, I focus on feminists seeking to enhance women's ability to pursue (hetero)sexual experiences with the same freedom as men.

## **Chapter Five: “The struggle for the rights of women are no more than a means to an end”?<sup>1</sup> Women’s sexual freedom and racial regeneration**

In 1911, the National Council of Public Morals published Havelock Ellis’ *The Problem of Racial Regeneration* as part of its series, “New Tracts for the Times.”<sup>2</sup> This series, which also included titles by British eugenicists Dr. C. A. Saleeby and Mary Scharlieb, aimed to shine the “searchlight of the twentieth century” onto what the Council believed was the most important problem facing modern life: namely, racial regeneration.<sup>3</sup> In his tract, Ellis argued that nineteenth century social reform had largely failed to improve the quality of life because it preoccupied itself with ameliorating living conditions. According to Ellis, this approach failed to get to the source of social problems, because it assumed that “we have no control over human life and no responsibility for its production.”<sup>4</sup> Ellis claimed that the modern science of human heredity—eugenics—had proven such beliefs to be erroneous. “We possess the power,” he asserted, “if we will, deliberately and consciously to create a new race, to mould the world of the future.” And as humans became conscious of this power, Ellis insisted, they would realize their responsibility not only for limiting the “quantity of human life,” but

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<sup>1</sup> Quote taken from Meisel-Hess, *The Sexual Crisis*, 233.

<sup>2</sup> The National Council of Public Morals was a socially conservative organization that sought the “elevation” of public morals.

<sup>3</sup> Rev. James Marchant, “General Introduction,” in Havelock Ellis, *The Problem of Racial Regeneration* (London: Cassells, 1911), 8.

<sup>4</sup> Havelock Ellis, *The Problem of Racial Regeneration* (London: Cassells, 1911), 26.

also for “the higher end of improving its quality.”<sup>5</sup> It was therefore up to those living during the present ‘transitional period’<sup>6</sup> to seize the power and ‘racial responsibility’ “not only to generate life, but...to regenerate life.”<sup>7</sup>

According to Ellis, a sense of responsibility for racial regeneration could not be inculcated by Act of Parliament; indeed, he claimed that eugenics itself was still in its infancy and therefore should not be trusted to inform laws and state policies. Instead, he declared that racial responsibility must be internalized as part of a new system of sexual ethics that stressed individual responsibility for reproductive decisions and outcomes. Ellis readily conceded that this new ethic provoked a tension between an individual’s sexual liberties on the one hand, and his or her reproductive “responsibility” on the other. However, he sought to mitigate this tension by arguing that freedom, including sexual freedom, was rooted not in license, but in governance, specifically in “order, self-control, sympathy, [and] intelligent regulation.”<sup>8</sup> Ellis reasoned that, “If in our efforts to better social conditions and to raise the level of the race we seek to cultivate the sense of order, to encourage sympathy and foresight, to pull up the racial weeds by the roots, it is not that we may kill freedom and joy, but rather that we may introduce the conditions for securing and increasing freedom and joy.”<sup>9</sup> He further argued that the most important subjects of this new ethic were women, the future mothers of the race, upon whom Nature has laid “the need for a pre-occupation with matters of sex.”<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Ellis, *The Problem of Racial Regeneration*, 54.

<sup>6</sup> Marchant, “General Introduction,” 5.

<sup>7</sup> Ellis, *The Problem of Racial Regeneration*, 54, 50.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, 71.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 57.

“Racial regeneration” was not a preoccupation exclusive to Ellis and the National Council of Public Morals. At the turn of the century, it was an international obsession among a range of physicians, scientists and social reformers. Concerns for the human race and its future were prompted by numerous factors, ranging from economic depression to geopolitical competition to increasing awareness of the human costs of what we now term modernity. Though the health of populations had constituted a concern among states, scientists, and social reformers throughout the nineteenth century, Ellis’s arguments suggest that by the turn of the century, many believed that the old ways of ministering to collective welfare were no longer working. Surveying their crowded urban landscapes, commentators in both Germany and Britain saw disorder, disease, and ugliness. Meanwhile, assaying the political situation, and particularly the rise of new social and political movements such as feminism, socialism, nationalism, and imperialism, life seemed unstable and uncertain, both at home and abroad. Many anxious commentators believed themselves to be living at a decisive moment in human history. The direction of collective fate seemed unpredictable: collective life seemed to change all too quickly—and not for the better—leaving individuals feeling powerless and overwhelmed. Indeed, the cumulative effect of these myriad social, economic, and political developments was to undermine faith in the continual progressive improvement of humanity, a prospect that had seemed an indisputable fact decades earlier.

As Ellis’ tract demonstrates, many fin-de-siècle scientists and social reformers believed it was no longer adequate to focus solely on improving environmental conditions; instead, they insisted that reformers look inward, to heredity and reproduction, as the keys to humanity’s improvement. Deploying an understanding of

humanity as a race, that is, as an organically interconnected and interdependent community of shared fate, many scientists and social reformers stressed that the future hinged on the maximization of desirable genetic goods throughout the population—as well as the elimination of undesirable ones.

For this reason, many scientists and social reformers hailed eugenics. Simultaneously a self-proclaimed science of human heredity, a code of sexual ethics, and a social movement advocating varied and wide-ranging policies and other mechanisms for social reform, eugenics aimed to enhance the quantity and improve the quality of the race. Unifying its various instantiation was its evaluative impetus, that is, its desire to classify humans as either “fit” or “unfit” via diverse methods, including statistics, genealogy, and visual signifiers, and according to a range of purportedly heritable traits. As Alison Bashford and Philipa Levine point out, the objects of eugenic intervention “were often not racial outsiders, but marginalized insiders whose very existence threatened national and class ideals.” In Germany and Britain, eugenics focused on the “massed and urban poor,” the “problem populations” of industrialization.”<sup>11</sup> Eugenics as a science built upon numerous intellectual sources, including scientific theories of heredity dating back to the late eighteenth century and Malthus’s theory of population; however, it was especially indebted to Darwin’s evolutionary theories of natural and sexual selection.<sup>12</sup> What made eugenics political, as Bashford and Levine argue, was the *prescriptive* nature of eugenics, as both a sexual ethic and a program for social reform.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Alison Bashford and Philipa Levine, “Introduction: Eugenics and the Modern World,” in *Oxford Handbook of the History of Eugenics*, edited by Alison Bashford and Philippa Levine (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 6.

<sup>12</sup> Bashford and Levine, “Introduction: Eugenics and the Modern World,” 4-5.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, 5.



Though the national manifestations of eugenics varied, eugenics nonetheless provided a “shared language and ambition” that transcended national boundaries.<sup>14</sup>

Feminists were among the earliest and most vocal proponents of racial regeneration and eugenics. Indeed, over the course of this dissertation, race has emerged as a significant leitmotif. The preceding chapters have repeatedly demonstrated that appeals to race figured prominently within feminist sexual politics. Feminists frequently deployed eugenically derived arguments regarding the race and its future to undergird their critical analyses of the sexual status quo and to legitimize their demands for sexual reform. There are clear strategic reasons why eugenics appealed to feminists. First, eugenics politicized and publicized sexual ethics and sexual governance as matters of widespread concern. Indeed, during the prewar period, eugenics was largely a discourse about ethics, a realm of thought and politics which Tracie Matysik has recently demonstrated was of great significance at the turn of the century.<sup>15</sup> Second, as Lucy Bland has observed, racial discourses offered women social esteem and political capital through the morally- and evolutionarily-superior subject position of the “race mother,” which represented women as the “link to the future.”<sup>16</sup>

Yet feminists’ engagement with eugenics did not represent a calculated, strategic appeal to a socially popular discourse. Eugenics shared with feminist discourses a set of sexual ethical precepts, as well as an understanding of women’s importance in sexual life. Both eugenicists and feminists stressed the relationship between individual sexual

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid, 4.

<sup>15</sup> See Matysik, *Reforming the Moral Subject*, 1-16.

<sup>16</sup> Bland, *Banishing the Beast*, 230. Bland convincingly argues that eugenics’ “praise and sacralization” of women’s maternal role endowed them with great responsibility for “racial regeneration,” in turn strengthening their demands for social reform.

choices and their broader, collective consequences. Feminists in particular believed that making this link drew critical attention to the moral, legal, and social contexts within which individuals—particularly women—made, or could make, decisions about their sex lives. Moreover, both eugenicists and feminists stressed women’s critical role in affecting racial regeneration, as well as the importance of maternal wellbeing in determining the ‘quality’ of her offspring. However, unlike many male eugenicists, feminists insisted that the clear connection between women’s fortunes and racial futures could only lead one to conclude that women and their sexual needs must constitute the centrifugal force of any racially regenerated society. This conclusion, in turn, supported feminists’ demands for the empowerment of women in the governance of sexual life.

Thinking with and through eugenics profoundly influenced many feminists’ views on women’s ideal roles and rights as sexual subjects enmeshed within a broader, interdependent community. Yet eugenics produced no unified feminist sexual politics. Although most eugenically inclined feminists agreed that empowering women as free sexual subjects was a fundamental precondition for racial regeneration, they profoundly disagreed on what constituted empowerment and sexual freedom for women. These disagreements stemmed from feminists’ differing understandings of the purpose of sex and the ‘nature’ of female sexuality. In Chapter Four, I examined how feminists engaged eugenic ideas to critique male (hetero)sexuality, and demonstrated how racial arguments enabled feminists not only to criticize male sexuality, but also to represent female sexuality as a racially regenerative force. Embedded with these feminists’ critiques of male sexuality—and celebration of female sexuality—was an understanding of sex as a primarily reproductive activity that existed to perpetuate the species. According to these

feminists, neither women nor men had a pronounced physiological or psychological need for sex as an end in itself, apart from the purpose of reproduction. Moreover, they understood true love and intimacy as purely spiritual, emotional affairs. Their proposed reforms therefore ranged from demands for an equal standard of morality premised upon sexual restraint and ‘continence’ to calls for the establishment of a ‘new-style matriarchy,’ sexual separatism, and the transcendence of sex.

In this chapter, I examine how new understandings of sex and the female sex drive explored in Chapter Two, when combined with eugenics, produced a feminist vision of sexual reform that claimed women’s greater sexual freedom and autonomy was commensurate with—in fact, fundamental to—racial regeneration. Importantly, the feminists I study in this chapter understood sexual freedom as a “positive liberty”, that is, as a “freedom to” engage in non-reproductive, hetero sex on the same terms as men.<sup>17</sup> These feminists further connected sexual freedom to women’s experience of sexual pleasure in heterosexual intercourse. Here I draw on the historiographic foundation laid by scholars such as Ann Taylor Allen, Edward Ross Dickinson, and Lucy Bland, whose work has shown that many German-speaking and British feminists believed racial regeneration provided a compelling argument against sexual conservatism, particularly for women.<sup>18</sup>

I focus in this chapter on the ideas of two feminists, Briton Jane Hume Clapperton and Austrian Grete Meisel-Hess, whose work has been overshadowed by their more

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<sup>17</sup> I take the concepts of “positive” and “negative” liberty from Isaiah Berlin, “Two Concepts of Liberty,” in Isaiah Berlin *Four Essays on Liberty* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1969).

<sup>18</sup> See, for example, Ann Taylor Allen, “German Radical Feminism and Eugenics, 1900-1908,” *German Studies Review* 11 (February 1988): 31-56; Bland, *Banishing the Beast*; Ann Taylor Allen, “Feminism and Eugenics in Germany and Britain”; Dickinson, “Reflections.”

famous colleagues. I chose these two particular feminists for a number of reasons. Though largely unknown today, both Clapperton and Meisel-Hess were widely read during their time, and were among the most radical voices of their generations. Both Clapperton and Meisel-Hess were prolific writers, and their work persistently links women's sexual freedom and racial regeneration. Despite their differences in age and intellectual influences, both feminists believed that women's sex drive was as active and 'needful' as men's, and that women had what Elberskirchen termed a "biological" right to sexual experience—both inside and outside of marriage. They both insisted that women's sexual freedom to initiate sexual encounters was an integral precondition for racial regeneration. Furthermore, they maintained that science and its revelation of natural laws ought to guide sexual and social reform.

In what follows I undertake a close examination of Clapperton and Meisel-Hess' ideas to explore how racial discourses, when combined with new scientific ideas about female sexuality, informed their analyses of existing conditions as well as their visions of reform. In particular, I highlight how racial thinking influenced these feminists' views of society and women's role in it, and the effects of individual acts on collective wellbeing. In turn, I show how their positions on these subjects led them to advance demands for sexual reform that were simultaneously emancipating and restrictive. Indeed, as I will demonstrate, despite espousing the need for women's sexual freedom, both Clapperton and Meisel-Hess supported restrictions on women's reproductive freedoms by tasking women, based on their racial 'fitness,' with obligations to either reproduce or abstain from reproducing. These restrictions on women's reproductive freedoms in turn reflect

the pernicious and increasingly ubiquitous belief that not all human life was of equal value from a “racial” perspective.

The “Chief Problems for Solution”<sup>19</sup>: Race, Sex, and Science at the Turn of the Century

Over the course of the nineteenth century, race became the subject of increasing scientific and political interest and anxiety. Concerns with race were fundamentally concerns with the quality and quantity of populations; indeed, by the turn of the century, invocations of race could refer to nationality, continental identity, ethnicity, or skin colour. The discussion of populations in terms of race, however, reveals a profound change in the conceptualization of collective human life. Humanity itself was increasingly understood as an organically interconnected and interdependent entity. According to this new understanding, humans’ shared fate would be determined not only by states and industry, but also by the sum total of individual decisions and actions—and especially sexual decisions and actions.

Representations of humanity as a race gained the status of factual description thanks to the scientization of race during the nineteenth century.<sup>20</sup> Importantly, the scientization of race was a product not only of scientific innovations, but also of geopolitical events and socio-economic transformations. As Nancy Stepan has observed,

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<sup>19</sup> The phrase is taken from Havelock Ellis, *Studies in the Psychology of Sex* Vol. 1 (London: Wilson and Macmillan, 1897), x.

<sup>20</sup> Although race itself was an incredibly polysemic concept during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, my focus here is on modern, ‘scientific’ understandings of race, as opposed to what Paul Weindling has termed “ethnological” understandings of race, associated with the likes of Count Arthur Gobineau and Houston Stewart Chamberlain. Although there was slippage between these two theories, Weindling defines ethnological theories of race as denoting cultural difference. They stressed the importance of blood, rather than physiology, in defining racial difference, and concerned themselves primarily concerned with questions of purity, unity, and aesthetics. Leading ethnological theorists such as Gobineau posited an ‘aristocracy of blood’ that depended upon a rather stark separation between the races, and an insistence upon the superiority of the white race. See Weindling, *Health, Race, and German Politics*, 51-59, 109-111.

imperialism provided the catalyst for the initial scientization of race.<sup>21</sup> Nevertheless, at the turn of the century, ‘racial’ concerns often focused upon one’s own national population.

In Britain, race became the subject of domestic concerns due to the increasingly apparent human cost of industrialization. These costs manifested themselves most starkly in the ill health of the urban poor, as revealed by pioneering social scientific studies and by the degraded physical condition of army recruits for the Crimean and South African wars.<sup>22</sup> British anxieties regarding the state of the race were heightened by the enduring economic depression of the 1870s and 1880s, and by growing threats to Britain’s economic and imperial hegemony. In light of the poor health of the masses, many British commentators believed that their race was degenerating. Indeed, pointing to the differential rate of reproduction between the purportedly prudent middle classes and profligate poor, many feared that their race faced irreversible decline.<sup>23</sup>

Meanwhile in Germany, anxieties surrounding the future of the newly unified—and rapidly changing—nation sparked racial concerns. In the decades before the turn of the century, Germany experienced changes that were unprecedented in their speed and scope. During this time, Germany emerged as a major economic, military, and imperial power. Domestically, the nation rapidly transformed from a largely agrarian to an industrial economy, with cities like Berlin exploding thanks to new economic migrants. These changes may have marked “progress,” but they also fueled significant social and

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<sup>21</sup> Nancy Stepan, *The Idea of Race in Science: Great Britain, 1800-1960* (London: Macmillan, 1982), xii-xiii.

<sup>22</sup> Richard Soloway, *Demography and Degeneration: Eugenics and the Declining Birthrate in Twentieth Century Britain* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1990), 38.

<sup>23</sup> Soloway, *Demography and Degeneration*, 18.

political unrest. Like Britain, Germany also confronted economic depression before the boom years of the 1890s, along with the ill health—and growing political demands—of its labouring poor. Unlike Britain, Germany responded early on to these problems with impressive social legislation, including workers’ insurance and pension programs which sought to mitigate the damages of industrial capitalism—as well as the threat of workers’ radicalism. And yet, reformers and scientists sought solutions to Germany’s so-called “Social Question” not only in economics but also in biology. As Kevin Repp has argued, biological sciences appealed to scientists and reformers because they promised not only to ameliorate public health but also to affect “social integration.”<sup>24</sup>

Inspired by the new discoveries and theories emerging from biology, scientists and social reformers in both Germany and Britain turned away from existing environmentally-oriented approaches to population health and instead focused on the importance of heredity in shaping collective fate. Increasingly, scientists maintained that one’s life chances were primarily determined not by one’s external material realities, but rather by the genetic inheritance one received at birth. Such beliefs were encouraged in large part by the influential theories of degeneration and Darwinian evolution which emerged in the late 1850s. Both stressed the decisive importance of inherited traits not only for individual health but also for the survival and improvement of the species. Psychiatric theories of degeneration, first outlined in Bénédict Augustin Morel’s *Physical, Intellectual, and Moral Traits of Degeneration (Traité des dégénérescences physiques, intellectuelles et morales de l’espèce humaine et des causes qui produisent ces variétés malades)*, 1857), deployed Lamarckian theories regarding the transmission of

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<sup>24</sup> Kevin Repp, *Reformers, Critics and the Paths of German Modernity: Anti-Politics and the Search for Alternatives, 1890-1914* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000), 38-39.

acquired traits to suggest that psychopathology was the product of biological inheritance. Degeneration theory further insisted that psychological abnormalities were atavistic, that is, attributable to a more ‘primitive’ evolutionary state. Meanwhile, Darwin’s theory of evolution via natural selection, as outlined in *On the Origin of Species* (1859), held that creatures best adapted to their environments are more likely to survive, reproduce, and hence transmit their traits to future generations. Natural selection thus maintained that traits which did not aid survival would—and should—eventually become extinct.

Theories of degeneration and especially evolution captured popular and expert imagination. Evolutionary theory inspired naturalistic, quasi-metaphysical philosophies such as Ernst Haeckel’s Monism, which insisted that all matter was infused with spiritual energy. They also encouraged attempts to apply evolutionary theory to human society. Evolutionary theory initially incited an intellectual tendency commonly referred to as ‘Social Darwinism,’ which advocated unmitigated social competition to ensure the survival only of the ‘fittest.’ Yet many disliked the randomness and anarchic competitiveness of the social Darwinist vision. Instead, theorists such as Francis Galton proposed that insights from his cousin Darwin’s theory of evolution could be mobilized to *ensure* collective advance by maximizing the presence of ‘desirable’ traits within the population—and eliminating the ‘undesirable.’

Such was the vision and the claim of eugenics, the ‘science’ of good breeding. Although ‘eugenic-like’ concerns with population ‘quantity’ and ‘quality’ already existed in the early nineteenth century, Francis Galton is responsible for coining the term ‘eugenics’ and giving early shape to the turn of the century eugenic program. Galton coined the term eugenics in 1883; however, his efforts to develop a new reproductive



ethic, and a program for social reform, began in the 1860s, with his monograph *Hereditary Genius* (1869). Interestingly, Galton's theory of eugenics would subsequently shape Darwin's theory of sexual selection, as articulated in *Descent of Man, and Selection in Relation to Sex* (1871)—a theory which, as I have shown throughout this dissertation, played a hugely important role in feminist analyses.

Following Galton, eugenicists saw heredity as the key to racial improvement and thus examined how reproductive choices affected hereditary outcomes. According to them, traits such as vitality, intelligence, self-control, diligence, and beauty were essential for human survival and improvement.<sup>25</sup> Eugenicists insisted that men and women in possession of these desired (yet highly subjective) qualities ought to seek them out in their potential reproductive partners. In fact, they maintained that these criteria should inform reproductive choices to the exclusion of all other considerations. Tellingly, Galton's theory was inspired not only by evolution but also by stirpiculture, that is, animal husbandry.

Eugenicists therefore understood sex as an act of reason, not passion, instrumental to the breeding of a new race. They insisted that a fundamental precondition for racial regeneration was the reform of reproductive practices and sexual ethics along these lines. Galton for one viewed his science as a new secular religion aimed at inculcating a “sentiment of caste among those who are naturally gifted.” He wanted the elite members of his envisioned ‘natural aristocracy of talent’ to breed exclusively with each other and thereby affect racial regeneration through the ‘purification’ of genetic lines.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Soloway, *Demography and Degeneration*, 23.

<sup>26</sup> Intriguingly, as Richard Soloway notes, in Galton's unpublished novel “Kantsaywhere,” the racially-blessed inhabitants of this fictional eugenic utopia “worshipped a sort of fuzzy, omnipresent life force

Eugenic ideas became extremely popular with middle class intellectuals and social reformers at the turn of the century, particularly as these groups became disenchanted with the failings of so-called ‘Manchester’ liberal capitalism, and consequently more favourably disposed to collective, interventionist solutions. They were attracted to the idea that identifying supposedly meaningful and unchanging differences between humans could lead to the establishment of a ‘natural’ order over the chaotic and contested transformations of social and political life. As Ellis claimed in *The Problem of Race Regeneration* (1911), studying and regulating the transmission of ‘racial’ traits offered humans the chance to take control of their collective fate. The appeal of eugenics—and indeed, of racial discourses more generally—thus lay in their proclaimed ability to definitively resolve moral and political questions concerning human rights and value by establishing—and evaluating—innate differences between and within human groups.<sup>27</sup>

In the early years of the twentieth century, eugenic ideas inspired a range of social movements seeking racial regeneration. In Germany, eugenics was understood in terms of ‘racial hygiene,’ a scientific movement initiated by physician Alfred Ploetz following his reading of Galton.<sup>28</sup> Racial hygiene pursued racial regeneration through the study of heredity as well as environmental factors that facilitated and inhibited ‘natural’ evolutionary processes. Ploetz advanced racial hygienic ideas through the *Archive for Racial and Social Biology* (*Archiv für Rassen-und Gesellschaftsbiologie*) established in 1904, and the Society for Racial Hygiene, founded in 1905. Eugenics also infiltrated the

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represented by judgmental ancestral spirits who closely watched the progress of selective breeding.” See Soloway, *Demography and Degeneration*, 80-81.

<sup>27</sup> See Stepan, *The Idea of Race in Science*, xiii, xx-xxi.

<sup>28</sup> See Weindling, *Health, Race and German Politics*, 141, 151-2.

concerns of German sexual scientists, leading to the formation of the Medical Society for Racial Hygiene and Eugenics in 1913, under the direction of Magnus Hirschfeld and Iwan Bloch. In Britain, eugenic ideas and policies were pursued through two avenues. Thanks to an endowment from Galton himself, eugenics became the subject of academic inquiry. Galton's money helped establish the Francis Galton Laboratory for the Study of National Eugenics in 1906 at the University of London, under the direction of Galton's protégé, Karl Pearson.<sup>29</sup> Pearson kept the laboratory independent of the myriad British social movements that emerged to propagate eugenics ideas, including the Sociological Society (established in 1904), and the Eugenics Education Society (henceforth EES, established in 1907).<sup>30</sup> Interestingly, despite their foci on their respective national populations, both the Society for Racial Hygiene and the EES collaborated with each other in the years preceding the First World War, though their relationship was always fraught with suspicion and competition.<sup>31</sup>

During the pre-war period, organizations such as the Society for Racial Hygiene, the Medical Society for Racial Hygiene and Eugenics, and the EES focused primarily on popularizing eugenic ideas and ideals. They also advocated a range of social policies to induce the reproduction of the racially fit, such as tax incentives and financial supports including the "endowment of motherhood." These organizations also advocated restrictive measures, such as marriage certificates, sterilization, and the elimination of

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<sup>29</sup> Soloway, *Demography and Degeneration*, 28.

<sup>30</sup> As Richard Soloway notes, Galton had deliberated establishing organizations to propagate eugenics since 1873, as a means of gaining support and legitimacy for his ideas. However, Pearson believed that eugenics should refrain from popularization until it had a solid scientific base from which it could assert authority and influence. According to Soloway, Pearson complained that Galton did not adequately differentiate between eugenics as a science, and eugenics as a creed of "social action." See Soloway, *Demography and Degeneration*, 31-32.

<sup>31</sup> For example, numerous international eugenic and racial hygiene organizations participated in the International Eugenics Congress of 1912.

charity and welfare for the ‘unfit’. Despite the involvement of many statesmen and public figures in these organizations,<sup>32</sup> these groups exercised little influence on pre-war state policy and planning.<sup>33</sup>

Despite eugenicists’ failure to influence pre-war state policy, eugenics exercised a powerful influence over the public imaginary—especially the feminist imaginary. Markedly eugenic ideas and concerns with racial regeneration began to infuse feminist thought in the 1880s, particularly among ‘radical’ feminist figures, and gained strength in the early twentieth century.<sup>34</sup> Indeed, in the early twentieth century, eugenics proved popular among women generally. This was particularly true in Britain, where women joined mixed-sex eugenics organizations in far greater numbers than in Germany. As historian Richard Soloway has observed, 40% of the initial members of the Eugenics Education Society were single women.<sup>35</sup> In fact, records of the first meeting of the Society’s provisional committee on November 25, 1907 indicate that five of the 11 founding members were women.<sup>36</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Notable members of the EES include Arthur J. Balfour, Neville Chamberlain, John Maynard Keynes, Arnold White, Winston Churchill, G. B. Shaw, H. G. Wells, Beatrice and Sidney Webb, Harold Laski, and James Crichton-Browne. Statesmen were less prominent within the Gesellschaft für Rassenhygiene; however, the Society included important and respected scientists, such as August Weismann.

<sup>33</sup> However, the EES was invited to contribute to a number of state-sponsored enquiries, including the Home Office Inebriates Enquiry (1908), the Royal Commission on the Care and Control of the Feeble-minded (1908), the Royal Commission on Divorce and Matrimonial Causes (1909-13), the Royal Commission on the Poor Law (1910), the Royal Commission on Venereal Diseases (1913), and the National Birth-Rate Commission (1913). See Bland, *Banishing the Beast*, 228.

<sup>34</sup> Feminists’ and radical sex reformers’ interest in eugenics began in the 1880s. Both August Bebel’s *Die Frau und der Sozialismus* (1879) and early Austrian feminist Irma von Troll-Borostyáni’s *Im freien Reich. Ein memorandum an alle Denkende und Gesetzeher zur Beseitigung sozialer Irrtümer und Leiden* (1884) bear the imprint of racial thinking. These works informed the Men and Women’s Club’s discussion of sexual questions. In fact, the Club became increasingly interested over time. See for example, the Minute Book of the Men and Women’s Club, 10/1 Pearson Papers, Special Collections, University College London, which notes the presentation of a lectures by Dr. Esther Williams on the “Physiological Basis of Heredity,” and Karl Pearson on “Galton’s Natural Inheritance” in 1889.

<sup>35</sup> Soloway, *Demography and Degeneration*, 33.

<sup>36</sup> See Eugenics Education Society Council Minutes 1907-1909, SA/EUG/L.1 Eugenics Society, Wellcome Archives.

At first glance, eugenics' appeal for feminists is not obvious. Many eugenicists insisted that nature intended for women to serve *only* as the reproducers and caretakers of the race; therefore, women ought to forsake any activity that interfered with their reproductive ability. Galton in particular envisaged and idealized women, in Soloway's words, as "submissive vessels for conveying and nurturing the vital germ plasm provided by their mates."<sup>37</sup> Eugenic movements themselves tended to marginalize their female members—especially their feminist members. For example, the EES was careful to keep outspoken eugenic feminist Frances Swiney at a distance from power, as some members feared her views might "prejudice the society."<sup>38</sup> Moreover, as records from the 1910s demonstrate, the Society's Executive Council became increasingly male-dominated in the years immediately preceding the war. Tellingly, when the EES was invited to send a delegate to the planned 1914 International Conference of Women in Rome, the Society decided to send a female representative, Dr. Mary Murdoch—and have her read a paper written by a man, a Dr. Schuster.<sup>39</sup> Within the Society for Racial Hygiene, the situation was even more severe. It had virtually no women members, aside from Agnes Bluhm. Ploetz in fact believed that the high degree of women's involvement in the EES testified to its lack of scientific credibility.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> Soloway, *Demography and Degeneration*, 129, 111, 114. In his reading of Galton's anti-feminist attitudes, Soloway insightfully muses that, "Underlying much of this sort of rhetoric was an almost palpable fear of the loss of power and control on the part of men if women did not need or want them and declined to fulfill their biological destiny."

<sup>38</sup> See Eugenics Education Society Annual Reports, SA/EUG/A.1-78, AMS/MF/144, Eugenics Society, Wellcome Archives. At an Executive Committee meeting of February 12, 1908, Frances Swiney was nominated to the Council. Her nomination was debated at some length, and ultimately rejected. She remained an "associate" of the EES, and an ardent eugenicist throughout the period under study. Interestingly, the EES did invite a diverse range of other feminist women, including Lady Henry Somerset and Margaret Macmillan, to become honorary vice presidents.

<sup>39</sup> See Eugenics Education Council Minutes 1913-1916, 25 March 1914, SA/EUG/L.3, Eugenics Education Society, Wellcome Archive.

<sup>40</sup> See Weindling, *Health, Race, and German Politics*, 147-153.

Eugenics' appeal for feminists did not lay in the possibility of organizational involvement, but rather in its conceptualization and politicization of sexual ethics and its understanding of women's role in racial regeneration. Eugenics' approach to sexual ethics reiterated what feminists had argued since the campaigns against the Contagious Diseases Acts: namely, that individual sexual decisions and actions had broader, collective consequences. They maintained that the spread of venereal diseases and their potential hereditary effects provided proof positive of this assertion. Moreover, feminists and eugenicists both stressed that the individual ought to subordinate his or her 'selfish' sexual desires in service of the greater racial good. Indeed, the bulk of feminist sexual theorizing at the turn of the century questioned what kinds of sexual rights and freedoms could be biologically and socially justified in view of the individual's inextricable, organic ties to his or her larger community.

Furthermore, eugenics' preoccupation with women's role in racial regeneration legitimized feminists' involvement in discussions of sexual ethics. After all, according to eugenicists such as W. C. D and C. D Whetham, the burden of maintaining a "sound hereditary stock" fell to women.<sup>41</sup> Havelock Ellis went as far as to declare the "question of eugenics" to be at one with the "Woman Question."<sup>42</sup> Particularly in Britain, eugenics organizations focused their attention on girls and women, and provided sex education and

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<sup>41</sup> Cited in Lorna Duffin, "Prisoners of Progress: Women and Evolution," in *The Nineteenth-Century Woman: Her Cultural and Physical World*, edited by Sara Delamont and Laura Duffin (London: Croom Helm, 1978), 79.

<sup>42</sup> According to Havelock Ellis, "The breeding of men lies largely in the hands of women. That is why the question of Eugenics is to a great extent one with the woman question." Havelock Ellis, *The Task of Social Hygiene* (London: Constable and Co., 1912), 46-47.

lessons in “mothercraft.”<sup>43</sup> Importantly, many feminists agreed with eugenicists’ claim that women’s primary, natural role was that of mother and that ‘racially-fit’ women had a duty to bear many children. Nevertheless, they disagreed with male eugenicists who argued that women’s role was limited to that of mothering and caretaking. Moreover, feminists insisted that racial regeneration required that women be empowered to make autonomous sexual decisions. In fact, they insisted that women’s sexuality should constitute the central organizing force of human collective life. Drawing on Darwin’s theory of sexual selection, feminists argued that restoring women’s ‘natural’ right of sexual choice would have positive effects for the race.

While feminists broadly agreed that women’s sexual independence and empowerment would both improve individual women’s lives and affect racial regeneration, they disagreed on what women’s sexual ‘independence’ and ‘empowerment’ involved. Indeed, the feminist visions of reform I analyze in this chapter vary considerably from those explored in Chapter Four. These differences resulted from their divergent understandings of sex and women’s sexuality. As a result, they profoundly disagreed on the kinds of ethical and social reforms needed to realize women’s sexual independence and empowerment.

Intriguingly, these disagreements among feminists mirrored debates among eugenicists regarding the relationship between sexual freedom and racial regeneration—debates which also emerged as a result of divergent understandings of sex and sexuality. Although all eugenicists believed that sex should be subject to social control, in his

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<sup>43</sup> See, for example, Eugenics Education Society Council Minutes 1913-1916, SA/EUG/L.3, Eugenics Education Society, Wellcome Archive, and Anna Davin, “Imperialism and Motherhood,” *History Workshop Journal*, no. 5 (Spring, 1978): 9-65.

analysis of debates among British eugenicists historian George Robb observed a division between what he termed ‘moral’ eugenicists, who believed sex was exclusively reproductive and inferior to spiritual ‘love’ unions, and ‘progressive’ eugenicists, who attributed racial degeneration to sexual repression, particularly women’s sexual repression.<sup>44</sup> These differences had implications for eugenicists’ proposed reforms. Because they believed sex existed exclusively for reproductive purposes, moral eugenicists like Francis Galton deplored the concept of birth control as not only unnatural but also detrimental to racial regeneration and advocated celibacy for those deemed racially unfit. Many of the German-speaking and British feminists discussed in Chapter Three subscribed to ‘moral eugenics’; indeed, Robb identified Frances Swiney as a leading exponent of these beliefs.<sup>45</sup> Meanwhile, progressive eugenicists like Karl Pearson believed that the human sexual instinct was not exclusively reproductive. In his “Socialism and Sex,” Pearson distinguished between “child-bearing” and “sex-relationship,” defining the latter as “the closest form of friendship between man and woman.”<sup>46</sup> Consequently, while acknowledging reproduction as a social function, Pearson argued that a private realm of sexual activity should exist beyond the purview of society and the state.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>44</sup> George Robb, “Race Motherhood: Moral Eugenics vs. Progress Eugenics, 1880-1920,” in *Maternal Instincts: Visions of Motherhood and Sexuality in Britain, 1875-1925*, edited by Claudia Nelson and Ann Sumner Holmes (London: Macmillan, 1997), 57-71.

<sup>45</sup> Robb, “Race Motherhood,” 59-63.

<sup>46</sup> Karl Pearson, *Socialism and Sex* (London: William Reeves, 1887), 14.

<sup>47</sup> Indeed, in Pearson’s ideal socialist state, there would exist “complete freedom in the sex-relationship left to the judgment and taste of an economically-equal, physically trained and intellectually developed race of men and women,” and “state interference in the matter of child-bearing in order to preserve intersexual independence on the one hand, and the limit of population on the other.” Pearson, *Socialism and Sex*, 14-15.



But such a conceptualization of sex life did not originate with Pearson. In fact, in “Socialism and Sex,” Pearson explicitly acknowledged feminist Jane Hume Clapperton as exercising a critical influence over his views on sex and social reform.<sup>48</sup> The feminists I examine in this chapter, including Clapperton, advanced their own vision of ‘progressive eugenics’ and organized to advance these ideals from a feminist perspective. In the following sections, I examine feminists’ ‘progressive’ eugenics, beginning with a brief survey of the organizations through which they advanced these positions before examining the ideas of two exponents, Jane Hume Clapperton and Grete Meisel-Hess.

“Procreate, Not to Multiply, But to Advance!” Advocating women’s rights and racial regeneration in the Malthusian League and League for the Protection of Mothers and Sexual Reform

Feminists in Germany and Britain were actively involved in advancing ‘progressive’ eugenics, one that highlighted women’s centrality to racial regeneration and stressed their need for sexual freedom and autonomy. These feminists largely did so, however, outside or on the margins of the women’s movement, in groups that brought them into dialogue with male eugenicists and sexual scientists. Feminists in these organizations also collaborated with each other internationally, arguably as a means of overcoming domestic resistance, and to secure broader audiences for their analyses and reform proposals. They published in each other’s journals, joined each other’s organizations, and held conferences bringing together European feminists, scientists, and social reformers.

In Britain, a major vehicle for the feminist expression of ‘progressive’ eugenics was the Malthusian League, the world’s first organization to advocate the exercise of

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<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 15.

birth control, or ‘preventive checks’ on population. The ‘free love’ couple, Drs. Charles R. Drysdale and Alice Vickery,<sup>49</sup> founded the League in 1879 following Charles Bradlaugh and Annie Besant’s obscenity trial for publishing and disseminating the American birth control tract, *The Fruits of Philosophy* (1832).<sup>50</sup> Drysdale and Vickery were physicians with a long-standing commitment to women’s rights, beginning with their involvement in the struggle against the Contagious Diseases Act. They were initially motivated to establish the League based on their commitments to ‘freethought’ and the Malthusian theory of population, their insistence on the importance of science in guiding social reform, and their belief in the non-reproductive needs of the female sex drive.<sup>51</sup>

Though the League was first envisaged as a vehicle for the propagation of Malthusian ideas, free thought, and liberal economic doctrine, the League became increasingly eugenic and feminist in its orientation in the early twentieth century. This new direction became particularly marked as leadership of the League passed into the hands of Vickery and her son, Charles V. Drysdale, both of whom were members of the EES.<sup>52</sup> With its new motto, “Non Quantitas Sed Qualitas”—No Quantity Without Quality—the League synthesized its concerns with population ‘quality’ and ‘quantity’

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<sup>49</sup> The lack of historical attention to this fascinating couple is somewhat shocking. The only comprehensive study that exists on the Drysdale family is J. Miriam Benn, *The Predicaments of Love* (London: Pluto Press, 1992). As Benn demonstrates, Drysdale and Vickery’s scientific ideas about sex and sexuality informed not only their political and social activism, but also their personal lives and choices.

<sup>50</sup> On the Bradlaugh-Besant trial, see Rosanna Ledbetter, *A History of the Malthusian League, 1877-1927* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1976), 29-37.

<sup>51</sup> Charles Drysdale and Alice Vickery were particularly inspired by the ideas of Drysdale’s brother, George Drysdale, as expounded in his *Elements of Social Science* (1855). See Ledbetter, *A History of the Malthusian League*, 9.

<sup>52</sup> Charles V. Drysdale and his wife Bessie Drysdale became members of the EES in February 1909. Alice Vickery became a member in March 1909. See Eugenics Education Society Council Minutes, SA/EUG/L.1, Eugenics Society, Wellcome Archives. For more on the League’s increasing eugenic orientation, see Ledbetter, *A History of the Malthusian League*, 203-208. However, I would argue that Ledbetter minimizes the significance and extent of the League’s turn to eugenics.

and increasingly focused on women's right to control their own fertility. According to Charles V. Drysdale, birth control enabled women not only to take reproductive decision-making "into their own hands" but also to "exercise their natural power of eugenic selection." It further enabled men and women to "utilis[e] all its wonderful possibilities as regards to the moulding of the race and of their own lives."<sup>53</sup>

The Malthusian League established a Women's Branch in 1904 in an attempt to increase women's involvement in the League and encourage more women to demand birth control.<sup>54</sup> Although Alice Vickery and Jane Hume Clapperton were early members of the League, and although younger British feminists such as Stella Browne and Edith How-Martyn would eventually join their ranks, during the pre-war years most female members of the League were 'Continental' women.<sup>55</sup> In fact, Helene Stöcker and Marie Stritt became honorary vice-presidents of the Malthusian League in 1911.<sup>56</sup> League leaders would reference the involvement of 'Continental women' in their organization to shame British feminists for their timidity and their supposed sexual conservatism, which League leaders believed reflected a religious, unscientific, and ultimately harmful attitude towards sexuality.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Charles V. Drysdale, "Freewomen and the Birth-Rate IV," *The Freewoman* 1, no. 12 (25 January 1912): 194.

<sup>54</sup> As Vickery argued, "Union is necessary to admit of women speaking out." See Dr. Alice Vickery, "International Woman's Branch of the Malthusian League," *The Malthusian* 28, no. 2 (February 1904): 15.

<sup>55</sup> Among these "Continental Women" were French feminist Nelly Roussel, Dutch feminist Dr. Aletta Jacobs, and Hungarian feminist Rosika Schwimmer.

<sup>56</sup> See *The Malthusian* 35, no. 4 (15 April 1911). Stritt and Stöcker remained on the roster of Honorary Vice Presidents until July 1914. Thereafter, a number of British military officials were nominated to the council, ostensibly in a crass and fearful concession to rising nationalism. See "Our Vice Presidents," *The Malthusian* 38, no. 7 (July 1914): 50.

<sup>57</sup> For examples of the League's critique of 'social purity,' see Charles R. Drysdale, "The Malthusian Question in Germany and France," *The Malthusian* 21, no. 10 (October 1897): 73; Alice Vickery, "The Bar of Isis," *The Malthusian* 32, no. 3 (March 1908): 22-3 and *The Malthusian* 32, no. 4 (April 1908): 27; anon, "Social Purity and Its Consequences," *The Malthusian* 32, no. 5 (May 1908): 33.

League leaders were lavish in their praise of Continental women, especially German women, and their “advanced opinions” on sexual matters. These “advanced opinions,” of course, were best exemplified by their seemingly greater acceptance of the relationship between birth control and women’s rights.<sup>58</sup> League leaders such as Bessie Drysdale believed that German feminists and their “Mutterschutz idea” formed the vanguard of modern sexual politics<sup>59</sup> and the League readily seized opportunities to collaborate with German feminists at the international level.<sup>60</sup> In September 1911, the League participated in the First International Congress for the Protection of Mothers and Sexual Reform, which brought together radical feminists, sexual scientists, and social reformers from across Europe. The Malthusian League also eagerly supported the attempt, cut short by the war, to found an International “Mutterschutz” organization.<sup>61</sup>

The Malthusian League was not alone in its assessment of and enthusiasm for “advanced” German feminists. According to Havelock Ellis, the German women’s

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<sup>58</sup> See, for example, anon, “Women’s Suffrage and Malthusianism,” *The Malthusian* 33, no. 1 (January 1909): 4; Alice Vickery, “Our second Conversazione,” *The Malthusian* 30, no. 1 (January 1908): 2; Alice Vickery, “Feminism and Neo-Malthusianism,” *The Malthusian* 38, no. 8 (August 1914): 60.

<sup>59</sup> Bessie Drysdale, “The Position of the Unmarried Mother in England,” in *Mutterschutz und Sexualreform: Referate und Leitsätze des I. Internationalen Kongresses für Mutterschutz und Sexualreform in Dresden 28./30. September 1911*, edited by Dr. Max Rosenthal (Breslau: Verlag von Preuss und Jünger, 1912), 57. See also “International Neo-Malthusian League,” *The Malthusian* 34, no. 8 (15 August 1910): 63.

<sup>60</sup> For example, the League collaborated with the Bund für Mutterschutz to stage an exhibition on neo-Malthusianism at the Dresden International Hygiene Exhibit in September 1911.

<sup>61</sup> This Congress brought together attendees from Germany, Britain, Austria-Hungary, Sweden, Italy, and France, to discuss the protection of mothers and racial hygiene, mother and child insurance schemes, the social position of unmarried mothers and their children, sexual science as the foundation for sexual reform, marriage, and sexual life in modern culture. Among the initial supporters of the International Union for the Protection of Mothers and Sexual Reform were social democrats Eduard Bernstein and Eduard David, feminist Minna Cauer, feminist Hedwig Dohm, Havelock Ellis, August Forel, Sigmund Freud, Ernst Haeckel, jurist and Scientific Humanitarian Committee activist Kurt Hiller, writer Carl Hauptmann, Magnus Hirschfeld, Swedish feminist Ellen Key, Käthe Kollwitz, Grete Meisel-Hess, Rosa Mayreder, Hermann Rohleder, racial hygienist Wilhelm Schallmeyer, Marie Stritt, Franz Wedekind, and Eduard Westermarck. The Congress’ attendees affirmed in their “Appeal to men and women of all civilized lands” that increasing the health of human sexual relationships, and encouraging the higher development of the human race, does not and ought not end at the borders of any one country. See “Aufruf an Männer und Frauen aller Kulturländer,” in *Mutterschutz und Sexualreform*, 134-5.

movement constituted the “actual embodiment of this new phase of the woman movement,” informed as it was by new scientific conceptions of women’s sexuality and race regeneration.<sup>62</sup> However, both the Malthusian League and Ellis were referencing a very specific—and highly controversial—tendency within German feminism, represented by the League for the Protection of Mothers and Sexual Reform.

Although competing claims exist surrounding the formation of the League for the Protection of Mothers and Sexual Reform, most scholars maintain that it was founded in Berlin in 1905.<sup>63</sup> Initially this League brought together an eclectic mix of ‘radical’ feminists, socialists, scientists, physicians, racial hygienists, and political economists. This mix included feminists Helene Stöcker, Adele Schreiber, Henriette Fürth, Maria Lischnewska, Dr. Hope Bridges Adams Lehmann, Marie Stritt, and Grete Meisel-Hess; scientists such as Dr. Iwan Bloch, Dr. August Forel, Dr. Max Marcuse; politicians such as August Bebel; and sociologists Max Weber and Werner Sombart.<sup>64</sup> The League sustained this diversity by synthesizing concerns with women’s rights and racial

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<sup>62</sup> See Havelock Ellis, *The Task of Social Hygiene*, 87-88. Likewise, in their “Translators’ Preface” to Grete Meisel-Hess’ *The Sexual Crisis*, the eugenicist-socialist couple Eden and Cedar Paul asserted that, “In freedom of discussion in sexual matters, and as far as concerns a theoretical understanding that economic emancipation and sexual emancipation are essential foundations of the movement for the emancipation of women Germany is in the van.” See Eden and Cedar Paul, “Translators’ Preface,” in *The Sexual Crisis*, 15.

<sup>63</sup> Competing claims exist regarding the original founder of the Bund für Mutterschutz. The poet and teacher Elisabeth Bouness, a.k.a Ruth Bre, claimed the Bund as her brainchild. After her falling out with the other members of the organization, she alleged that money meant for settlements of unmarried mothers was stolen from her. Helene Stöcker also asserted ownership of the Bund’s origins, and insisted that she founded the Bund’s, with fellow feminist Marie Lischnewska, due to her feminist colleagues’ failure to agitate explicitly for radical sexual reform. Most of the literature engages with both claims, while siding on behalf of Stöcker. The Bund would be rocked by controversy again in 1910, after a falling out between Stöcker and Adele Schreiber over the direction of the Bund generally, and the fate of funds earmarked for the building of homes for mothers specifically. Schreiber’s Nachlass in the Bundesarchiv Koblenz provides a rich source of documentation regarding both controversies. See Bestand N1173, Folder 2.15, 2.17, 2.19, 3.1.1-41. For a general history of the Bund für Mutterschutz, see Bernd Nowacki, *Der Bund für Mutterschutz* (Husum: Matthiesen Verlag, 1983), and Gudrun Hamelmann, *Helene Stöcker, der "Bund für Mutterschutz" und "Die Neue Generation"* (Frankfurt am Main : Haag + Herchen, 1992).

<sup>64</sup> Interestingly, Rosa Mayreder and Sigmund Freud belonged to the Austrian branch of the League.

regeneration, sexual ethics and conditions of motherhood, individual sexual liberties *and* duties to the collective.

These intersecting concerns are best demonstrated by the League's portrayal of the plight of the unwed mother.<sup>65</sup> The League represented the unwed mother as a victim of society's unscientific, patriarchal attitudes towards sexuality, one that denied women's physiological need for sexual activity. Though not all League members believed that sex must lead to reproduction, all maintained that women's "natural" destiny was to become mothers. The League therefore demanded sweeping reforms to sexual ethics to enable unmarried women to become mothers, and to recognize all children as legitimate. The League also proposed pragmatic social reforms that would provide state support for unwed mothers and their children, ranging from infant homes to maternal welfare. Importantly, these arguments and claims were premised not only upon women's physiological needs, but also upon 'racial' needs. In the League's 1905 petition to the Reichstag, for example, it lamented the loss of high quality racial specimen and thus 'national efficiency' due to the perverse and unnatural sexual ethics that penalized reproduction among young, racially healthy parents.<sup>66</sup> Likewise, as various drafts of the League's 1908 Constitution reveal, it considered mothers to be at the very heart of

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<sup>65</sup> See for example Ruth Bre, *Das Recht auf die Mutterschaft. Eine Forderung zur Bekämpfung der Prostitution, der Frauen- und Geschlechtskrankheiten* (Leipzig: Verlag der Frauen-Rundschau, 1903); Dr. phil. Helene Stöcker, Lily Braun, Ellen Key, et al., *Bund für Mutterschutz* (Berlin: Pan-Verlag, 1905); Adele Schreiber, "Ehereform," *Die Umschau* 12, no. 10 (7 März 1908): 181-185; Adele Schreiber, *Der Bund für Mutterschutz und seine Gegner* (Leipzig: Felix Dietrich, 1909). See also Ann Taylor, "Mothers of the New Generation: Adele Schreiber, Helene Stöcker, and the Evolution of a German Idea of Motherhood, 1900-1914," *Signs* 10 (Spring 1985): 418-438.

<sup>66</sup> "Aufruf Januar 1905," 3.1 Nachlass Adele Schreiber, Bestand N 1173 Bundesarchiv Koblenz.

national futures—and thus women’s wellbeing and development as crucial to racial improvement.<sup>67</sup>

Like the Malthusian League, the League for the Protection of Mothers and Sexual Reform connected women’s reproductive rights and freedoms to racial regeneration. Both groups interrogated the justice and consequences of existing sexual ethics and governance, and demanded women’s right to sexual self-determination and positive sexual freedom. Moreover, both groups were invested in secular, scientific approaches to sexual and social reform, and were highly critical of the hypocrisy and “superstition” that they believed surrounded Christian sexual morality. Unlike the Malthusian League, the League for the Protection of Mothers and Sexual Reform was more explicitly feminist in its orientation and its leadership, and was inspired by a range of intellectual and political influences, including sexual science, eugenic precepts, socialist sympathies, and Nietzschean philosophy. Feminists within the League took seriously Nietzsche’s imperative to “Procreate, not to multiply, but to advance!”<sup>68</sup> Because of its feminist orientation and leadership, it was also much more focused on women’s rights. Indeed, thanks to the guiding influence of Helene Stöcker, the League was primarily dedicated to advancing a feminist ‘New Ethic’ to reform sexual life. The League’s explicit and uncompromising feminism would ultimately alienate many early male supporters, such as the racial hygienist Alfred Ploetz. The League for the Protection of Mothers and Sexual Reform was also much more insistent on women’s ‘natural’ maternal destiny. Although the League’s members did not believe that women’s role was restricted to motherhood,

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<sup>67</sup> See “Entwicklung von Satzung und Programm des BfM,” 3.1 Nachlass Adele Scheriber, Bestand N 1173, Bundesarchiv Koblenz.

<sup>68</sup> On the relationship between Nietzsche and German feminism, see, for example, Carol Diethe, “Nietzsche and the Early German Feminists,” *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* 12 (Autumn 1996): 69-81.

they nonetheless maintained that motherhood, and the potential of motherhood, constituted a fundamental part of women's identity. This conviction in turn led to some ambivalence among League members regarding birth control. While most feminist members felt that women should have the right to control their fertility, they concomitantly claimed that racially-fit women have a duty to become mothers, and feared the racial implications of such women's failure to contribute to the 'coming generation.'

In the preceding paragraphs I provided an overview of the Malthusian League and the League for the Protection of Mothers and Sexual Reform because these groups constituted the organizational context for racial feminist ideas regarding women's rights and racial regeneration. That is to say, they provided a space for like-minded feminists, scientists, and social reformers to meet, discuss, and disseminate ideas, and to advocate desired policies and legal reforms. Both of the feminists whose ideas I study in the subsequent sections belonged to these organizations: Jane Hume Clapperton was a member of the Malthusian League, and Grete Meisel-Hess a member of the League for the Protection of Mothers and Sexual Reform. Clapperton and Hess' writings both reflect and helped to shape the ideas promoted by their respective organizations. Their ideas also bear striking similarities, particularly in terms of their conceptualizations of female sexuality and racial regeneration. However, they also critically diverge, particularly around birth control.

#### Jane Hume Clapperton's Vision of the Future

Jane Hume Clapperton was one of the oldest 'first wave' British feminists, and in many respects she was also one of the most radical. Born to a liberal and locally-influential middle-class family in Edinburgh in 1832, Clapperton belonged to a



generation of middle-class British social reformers whose worldview was shaped by utilitarian liberalism, positivist sociology, evolutionary theory, and religious agnosticism. Like many of her generation, she believed that scientific knowledge of nature, human physiology, and civilizations, ought to inform the creation of a more rational socio-political order that could ensure collective progress, happiness, and wellbeing. Largely self-educated, her early intellectual influences included Herbert Spencer, George Eliot, Charles Darwin, Harriet Martineau, Mary Wollstonecraft and her friend, the Bradford artist and social reformer George Arthur Gaskell. However, towards the end of her life, she became increasingly interested in socialism and sexual science, incorporating the insights of August Bebel, Edward Carpenter, and Havelock Ellis into her own work.

Clapperton's involvement with social reform and feminist causes did not begin until the later 1870s, following the death of her mother, when she was well into her 40s. In addition to her work on behalf of women's suffrage, she proved a dedicated and vocal supporter of marginalized and unpopular sex reform causes, including 'free love' and birth control (often referred to as Neo-Malthusianism). In the 1890s Clapperton supported the Legitimation League, an organization that sought social recognition for 'free love' unions, and for children born outside of marriage.<sup>69</sup> An early supporter of the Malthusian League, she joined its Women's Branch upon its establishment in 1904. Clapperton remained active in feminist sex reform politics until her death on September 30, 1914.<sup>70</sup> Before amassing these organizational affiliations, Clapperton began

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<sup>69</sup> Founded in 1897, the Legitimation argued for the recognition and rights of illegitimate children and 'free love' unions. On Legitimation League, see Anne Humpherys, "The Journal that Did: Form and Content in *The Adult* (1897-1899)," *Media History* 9 (2003): 65-80.

<sup>70</sup> The above biographical information was derived from two sources: Miss Jane Hume Clapperton, Authoress," *Women's Penny Paper* 35, no. 1 (22 June 1889): 1-2, and Sandra M. den Otter, "Clapperton,

expounding her analyses of contemporary social and sexual problems, and advancing her feminist vision of social reform. In addition to numerous newspaper and journal articles, she wrote weighty non-fiction texts, with titles such as *Scientific Meliorism and the Evolution of Happiness* (1885), *What Do We Women Want* (1900), and *A Vision of the Future* (1904). These texts were widely reviewed in scientific, social reform, and feminist journals, and would continue to exercise an influence on British intellectual life into the 1930s.<sup>71</sup>

Integral to Clapperton's vision of social reform was an overhaul of sexual ethics and modes of sexual governance. Throughout all of her writing, she insisted that, "A fundamental condition of social happiness is that men and women be intellectually and morally equal and free to form intimate and lasting relations with one another, of the most varied character."<sup>72</sup> Clapperton's program for social reform demanded above all a commitment to the progress and happiness of the collective, which she conceived as "a living, growing organism of vast complexity and incalculable capacity."<sup>73</sup> Clapperton was a contemporary of Francis Galton, and she numbered among the first feminists to engage and incorporate eugenic principles within her analyses and visions for social and sexual reform. Eugenics' rationalization and politicization of reproduction appealed strongly to Clapperton's belief that collective happiness depended upon rational, scientifically-informed social planning. However, as I will demonstrate, she was not

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Jane Hume (1832–1914)," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [http://www.oxforddnb.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/view/article/55282, accessed 7 October 2008]

<sup>71</sup> See "Science and Socialism," *Nature* 141 (26 March 1938): 548. It is unclear whether any of her texts were ever published or read abroad. Clapperton also published a novel, *Margaret Dunmore* (1888), in which she argued on behalf of communal housing and 'free love.'

<sup>72</sup> "Miss Jane Hume Clapperton, Authoress," *Women's Penny Paper* 35, no. 1 (22 June 1889): 1.

<sup>73</sup> Jane Hume Clapperton, *Scientific Meliorism and the Evolution of Happiness* (London: Kegan Paul, French & Co., 1885), xi.

uncritical of ‘malestream’ eugenic precepts, particularly their views on women and sexuality.

As a utilitarian, the central purpose of life for Clapperton was the attainment of the greatest happiness of the greatest number. According to Clapperton, happiness involved a diminution of “poverty, crime, ignorance, and *hereditary disease*.”<sup>74</sup> She enumerated material inequality between the classes, “the birth of individuals weak and unfit,” enforced celibacy, late marriage, prostitution, religious bigotry, and “social repression of innocent enjoyment” as obstacles to the realization of happiness.<sup>75</sup> Intriguingly, sexual pleasure<sup>76</sup> and health played key roles in Clapperton’s definition of happiness and the good life.<sup>77</sup> Although Clapperton sought happiness for both the individual and the collective, she argued that psychology had proven individual happiness is “bound up with, and dependent upon, *general happiness*.” In her view, “Man to be truly happy must be so collectively and not merely individually or sectionally.”<sup>78</sup>

Clapperton maintained that rational, scientifically-informed reforms constituted the means to realize happiness. She insisted that natural scientific knowledge “is altering our conception of man’s existence and nature, and extending our vista of his future.” In so doing, she declared that science was teaching humanity that “men’s true business is to understand and seek to perfect human nature and the social state.”<sup>79</sup> Science could therefore help humans to “evolve superior social conditions” by distinguishing between “the forces which are antagonistic or destructive to the true health of that organism, and

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<sup>74</sup> Clapperton, *Scientific Meliorism*, 9. Emphasis added

<sup>75</sup> Jane Hume Clapperton, *A Vision of the Future Based on the Application of Ethical Principles* (London, Swan Sonnenschein and Co, 1904), 327.

<sup>76</sup> Clapperton, *Vision of the Future*, 13

<sup>77</sup> “Health is the basis of happiness.” Clapperton, *Scientific Meliorism*, 326.

<sup>78</sup> Clapperton, *Vision of the Future*, 325

<sup>79</sup> Clapperton, *Scientific Meliorism*, xi.

those forces...which directly tend to the creation of conditions under which 'no suffering can exist.'"<sup>80</sup>

Social Darwinism and eugenics, along with sexual scientific theories of the sex drive and sexual needs, played critical roles in shaping Clapperton's "vision of the future." The influence of evolutionary theory and eugenics is evinced by Clapperton's preoccupation with what she claimed was widespread racial degeneration, which she attributed to the haphazard and unscientific arrangement of contemporary social life. Citing authorities including Francis Galton and evolutionist A. R. Wallace, she argued that there existed an "extreme prevalency of inherited disease" indicated by "an increase of insanity, idiocy, and suicide, a deterioration taking place in physical stature, a degeneracy of the structure of the teeth."<sup>81</sup> According to Clapperton, disease constituted "the great obstacle of human happiness."<sup>82</sup> She insisted that reversing the trend of 'advancing' degeneration required fundamental reforms of socio-economic institutions and structures. In addition to advocating a reorientation of economic life away from capitalist competition towards cooperation and collectivization, she also demanded that society must no longer "patronize the poor" and therefore must abandon charity which only encouraged "too rapid increase, dependence, parental irresponsibility, and racial deterioration."<sup>83</sup>

Yet Clapperton insisted that such social reforms were secondary to the reform of personal conduct, particularly in light of the new knowledge regarding heredity provided

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid, xi.

<sup>81</sup> Ibid, 325.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid, 323.

<sup>83</sup> Clapperton, *Vision of the Future*, 332.

by eugenics.<sup>84</sup> She synthesized new scientific understandings of female sexuality with eugenic ideas about heredity and reproductive consequences to offer an ethical guide to individual sexual decision-making that she believed would ensure both personal and collective happiness. Clapperton insisted that sexual intercourse was a physiological and psychological necessity for individual development—particularly for women—and that prolonged celibacy was therefore harmful.<sup>85</sup> She represented the sex instinct as simultaneously animal and social and claimed that sex itself “creates happiness in the giving and receiving of pleasure.”<sup>86</sup> Moreover, she asserted that “the physiological exaltation connected with pleasure promotes individual health and buoyancy.”<sup>87</sup> She characterized the “sex-appetite” as “the root and source of all the exquisitely delicate tenderness of humanity,” further declaring that “A healthy animal [i.e. sexual] life is the only secure foundation for lofty attainments and a broad development on the altruistic or social and moral side of human nature.”<sup>88</sup> In Clapperton’s view, sex served purposes beyond the strictly reproductive.

Consequently, Clapperton insisted that sexual life must be divided into two realms. One was a private sphere of non-reproductive sexuality that constituted a site of pleasure, love, and intimacy. The other was a public sphere of reproductive sex, subjected to ‘rational’ eugenic regulation, as reproduction’s outcomes affected the happiness and wellbeing of the race. Thus, according to Clapperton, “What social morality requires is that the forces of philoprogenitiveness and a public conscience

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<sup>84</sup> Clapperton, *Scientific Meliorism*, 102.

<sup>85</sup> See Jane Hume Clapperton, *What Do We Women Want?* (London: Reynolds, 1900), 2-4.

<sup>86</sup> Clapperton, *Scientific Meliorism*, 303.

<sup>87</sup> Clapperton, *Vision of the Future*, 13, 15, 99.

<sup>88</sup> Clapperton, *What Do We Women Want*, 4.

combined should dominate the function of reproduction, while love is left free from coercive control in the sphere of individual life.”<sup>89</sup> She vehemently disagreed with Galton’s advocacy of celibacy for the racially unfit, insisting that no racial benefit was to be gained from an “overstrained morality.”<sup>90</sup> Nothing, she claimed, was to be attained from sexual asceticism:

The principles underlying the new morality may be thus stated: Goodness does not consist in starving or denying any normal animal appetite, therefore chastity in the sense of total abstinence is essentially immoral. Life is not so prodigal of joys that man can wisely forego any source of innocent happiness, hence asceticism has no place in a rational theory and code of morals. The course for rational man to adopt in reference to sexual appetite is duly to satisfy and regulate it.<sup>91</sup>

In Clapperton’s view, not only the rational man, but also woman, had a right to experience sexual pleasure. Indeed, she insisted that, “Until *society* recognises and honors the sexual function by enabling women to exercise it in purity, dignity and freedom there can be no escape from prostitution, celibacy and sexual disease, with their accompanying miseries; marriage without love; adultery and divorce scandals; a high infant mortality; numerical inequality of the sexes; and poverty arising from over-population.”<sup>92</sup>

To facilitate women’s attainment of sexual pleasure, Clapperton insisted on the need for the sexual education of the young, and the possibility of greater social intercourse between men and women from a young age.<sup>93</sup> She even recommended “early moderate stimulation of the female sexual organs (after puberty is reached)” to ensure the

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<sup>89</sup> Clapperton, *Vision of the Future*, 113. See also Clapperton, *Scientific Meliorism*, 334.

<sup>90</sup> Clapperton, *Scientific Meliorism*, 333-4.

<sup>91</sup> Clapperton, *Vision of the Future*, 106.

<sup>92</sup> Clapperton, *What Do We Women Want*, 4.

<sup>93</sup> “A correct knowledge of human nature, its social needs and the possibilities of supplying those needs is required; in short, physical facts, the laws of health, the history of the development of the race and its civilisation.” *Ibid*, 6.

development of women's sexual physiology.<sup>94</sup> She further suggested that women be free to pursue sexual experience before and outside of marriage. Indeed, Clapperton did not see any intrinsic superior moral value in either monogamous marriage or sexual exclusivity.<sup>95</sup> Nevertheless, she advocated early marriage to maximize reproductive potential and minimize recourse to prostitution and the spread of venereal disease. In any event, she supported youthful experimentation with sexuality, declaring that, "with early marriage *and* freedom to young love, checked only by scientific knowledge of the laws of health, propagation at the *age of maturity* is bound to put forth vitality of maximum quality."<sup>96</sup> Most radically, she insisted on the need for birth control to ensure that women can experience sexual pleasure without the fear and the burden of becoming pregnant.<sup>97</sup>

While positing sexual pleasure as an individual right and physiological need for the realization of a happy life, Clapperton stressed the ability to exercise self-control as a fundamental precondition of sexual pleasure. She maintained that individuals should always bear in mind the potential collective consequences of their actions. This dictum was particularly important for women, whose sexual activity could result in unexpected and unwanted pregnancy. She therefore insisted that the young "must be taught to use sex to 'subserve social health and not degrade the race.'"<sup>98</sup>

While Clapperton believed all people had a right to sexual experience and pleasure, she nonetheless stressed that the 'racially unfit' had a duty to ensure that their sexual activity did not lead to reproduction. Indeed, Clapperton was considerably less

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<sup>94</sup> Clapperton, *Scientific Meliorism*, 321.

<sup>95</sup> "While permanency is eminently valuable in sexual relations, can we venture to say the same as regards exclusiveness?" Clapperton, *Vision of the Future*, 141.

<sup>96</sup> Clapperton, *Scientific Meliorism*, 429, 333-4. Emphasis added.

<sup>97</sup> Clapperton, *Vision of the Future*, 154-7.

<sup>98</sup> Clapperton, *Scientific Meliorism*, 429.

liberal when it came to reproduction. She was unequivocally eugenic, believing that individual morality and character was largely hereditarily-determined. In her view, reproduction constituted a social function. She maintained that a “progressive system of general reform” must “embrace and combine rational breeding, rational training and a rational order of life.”<sup>99</sup> Such a system would, in turn, encourage the “promotion of the best types, and repression of the increase of the worst.”<sup>100</sup> The “path of progress” thus involved the “creation of a superior race whose spontaneous impulses will construct and support a perfected social system.”<sup>101</sup> According to Clapperton, “The world is at last beginning to awaken to the fact, that the life of the individual is in some real sense a prolongation of those of his ancestry. His vigour, his character, his diseases are principally derived from theirs; sometimes his faculties are blends of ancestral qualities...The life histories of our relatives are prophetic of our own futures.”<sup>102</sup> Conceding that eugenic ideas are “a nauseous draught for mankind to swallow” as they blame “tender parents with transmitting an evil heritage to offspring whom they passionately love,”<sup>103</sup> Clapperton nevertheless insisted that science forces humans to approach the world ‘as it is,’ and to be unsentimental in restricting the reproduction of the unfit. In this regard, she praised Spartan society, specifically its treatment of marriage and “generation,” as facts of “vital national importance”—and for their “unsentimental”

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<sup>99</sup> Clapperton, *Vision of the Future*, 329.

<sup>100</sup> Clapperton, *Scientific Meliorism*, 102.

<sup>101</sup> Clapperton, *Vision of the Future*, 328.

<sup>102</sup> Clapperton, *Scientific Meliorism*, 324

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid*, 329



elimination of sickly offspring.<sup>104</sup> Importantly, Clapperton viewed not only psychological and physical disease but also “moral defects” as hereditary traits.<sup>105</sup>

As mentioned earlier, Clapperton believed that individuals ought to exercise self-control and restrict their fertility on the basis of internalized eugenic precepts. She asserted that, “it is in man’s [sic] power, therefore it is clearly his duty, to improve the physical, intellectual, and moral structure of his race, by intelligent forethought and careful action, in exercising the function of propagating his kind.”<sup>106</sup> Clapperton argued that women had an important role to play in this process, not only as the sex wholly responsible for the physical act of reproduction, but also because, in her view, women’s sexual instinct was more morally and ‘racially’ advanced than men’s.<sup>107</sup> If and when individuals failed to restrict their fertility in accordance with eugenic principles, Clapperton allowed a role for state intervention, declaring that,

In regard to the portion of the population which is so degraded as to be *incapable* of giving heed to the morals of parenthood, I believe a time must come when the state, profoundly convinced of its moral obligation to promote the welfare of posterity, will sequester and restrain the individuals who persist in parental action detrimental to society. It cannot be permitted that superior types of mankind should be lessened in number by the increase of the inferior.<sup>108</sup>

Clapperton thus asserted the right of the state to restrain the fertility of individuals whose reproduction would be ‘detrimental’ to society.<sup>109</sup>

In Jane Hume Clapperton’s non-fiction texts, the reader encounters a startlingly radical approach to sexual life and social reform. Drawing on new understandings of sex and women’s sexuality, she claimed that *all* women have the right to sexual experience

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<sup>104</sup> Ibid, 314

<sup>105</sup> Ibid, 331

<sup>106</sup> Ibid, 339; see also Clapperton, *Vision of the Future*, 157-60.

<sup>107</sup> Clapperton, *Vision of the Future*, 159, 121.

<sup>108</sup> Clapperton, *Scientific Meliorism*, 102.

<sup>109</sup> Ibid, 334.

and sexual pleasure. This conviction, in turn, caused her to become an outspoken supporter of women's right to birth control, sexual education, and 'free love.' However, for Clapperton, women's sexual emancipation depended on the regulation and restriction of reproduction to only the 'racially fit'. While disagreeing with the "overstrained morality" reflected in Galtonian 'moral' eugenics, Clapperton agreed that reproduction was not a universal right that should be extended to all women. Her analyses and reform proposals were thus undergirded by her belief that individual acts must subserve collective happiness, that the collective itself was an organism whose happiness depended upon health and strength of the race. Collective fate thus hinged on the rational manipulation of heredity. Clapperton's ideas and demands also proceeded from her view of sex as having multiple possible meanings and purposes beyond reproduction, which led her to advocate a sphere of private (hetero)sexual pleasure for men and for women.

Clapperton was a maverick figure within her generational cohort. Other, younger British feminists did not echo her views until the years immediately preceding the First World War. Indeed, her ideas more closely resemble the radical visions set forth by German-speaking feminists, such as Grete Meisel-Hess.

#### The "Modern Worldview" of Grete Meisel-Hess

Grete Meisel-Hess's background differs dramatically from that of Jane Hume Clapperton.<sup>110</sup> Born to a middle-class Jewish family in Prague in 1879, Meisel-Hess grew

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<sup>110</sup> On Grete Meisel-Hess, see Ellinor Melander, "Towards the Sexual and Economic Emancipation of Women: The Philosophy of Grete Meisel-Hess," *History of European Ideas* 14, No.5 (1992): 695-711; Irmgard Roebing, "Grete Meisel-Hess: Sexualreform zwischen Nietzschekult, Freudrezeption und Rassenhygiene," in *Freiburger literaturpsychologische Gespräche, Band 12: Literarische Entwürfe weiblicher Sexualität*, edited by Johannes Cremerius, Wolfram Maiser, Carl Pietzcker, and Frederick Wyeth (Würzburg: Königshausen and Neumann, 1993): 205-230; Kevin Repp, "Sexualkrise und Rasse: Feminist Eugenics at the Fin-de-Siècle," in *Germany at the Fin-de-Siècle: Culture, Politics, Ideas*, edited

up in Vienna, where she later attended university and studied philosophy, sociology, and biology. She moved to Berlin in 1908, and thereafter joined the League for the Protection of Mothers and Sexual Reform and the International League for the Protection of Mothers and Sexual Reform. According to Ilse Kokula, Meisel-Hess also delivered lectures on marital reform to the Scientific Humanitarian Committee in 1911.<sup>111</sup> Meisel-Hess died quite young, and severely depressed, in Berlin in 1922. Like Clapperton, Meisel-Hess analysed the relationship between race, women's rights, and sexual reform in her writings, which included novels such as *Fanny Roth* (1902) and *The Intellectuals* (*Die Intellektuellen*, 1911), and non-fiction treatises such as *In the Modern World View* (*In der modernen Weltanschauung*, 1901) and *The Sexual Crisis* (1909). The last text was hugely influential, eventually gaining an international readership. Among her vocal international fans were Havelock Ellis, Stella Browne, and the socialist publisher and translator, Eden Paul.<sup>112</sup>

Unlike Clapperton's generation, Meisel-Hess' cohort did not wholeheartedly embrace liberalism or positivism, and in fact expressed marked skepticism regarding the prospect of progress. Moreover, whereas Clapperton had numbered among the first of her generation to engage with eugenics and the question of racial degeneration, by the turn of the century such concerns were ubiquitous among social reformers. Like many of her contemporaries, Meisel-Hess's worldview was highly influenced by Monism, eugenics and racial hygiene. Moreover, like many of her radical feminist colleagues,

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by Suzanne Marchand and David Lindenfeld (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004), 102-126.

<sup>111</sup> Ilse Kokula, "Helene Stöcker, der Bund für Mutterschutz und die Sexualreformbewegung," *Mitteilungen der Magnus Hirschfeld Gesellschaft*, no. 6 (August 1985): 19.

<sup>112</sup> See, for example, Ellis, *The Task of Social Hygiene*, 130; letter from Stella Browne to Havelock Ellis, dated 25.12.22, 70539 Ellis Add MS, British Library Manuscripts and Archives. See also Lesley A. Hall, "Stella Browne and the German Radical Sex Reform Tradition," in *Sisters of Subversion: Histories of Women, Tales of Gender*, ed. Willem de Blécourt (Amsterdam: AMB, 2008), 152-161.

Meisel-Hess was inspired by Nietzschean philosophy and sexual science. All of these intellectual influences played a role in shaping Meisel-Hess's feminism and her views on sexual reform. Specifically, they contributed to her preoccupation with the relationship between racial regeneration, sexual reform, and women's rights.

For Meisel-Hess, as for Clapperton, the path to racial regeneration lay in fundamental reforms to sexual ethics and sexual governance that would empower women as autonomous sexual agents. For both Meisel-Hess and Clapperton, this conviction emerged from their understanding of sex and women's sexuality. Both feminists viewed women's sex drive not only as active, independent, and desirous, but also as morally and 'racially' superior to men's. Yet whereas Clapperton was unequivocal in her support of women's right to control their own fertility, Meisel-Hess was markedly ambivalent and in fact adamantly opposed the use of birth control among 'racially-fit' women. Indeed, Meisel-Hess insisted that, although women's sex drive may not be exclusively intended for reproductive purposes, women were naturally predestined to become mothers and she proclaimed motherhood to be women's highest destiny. Meisel-Hess therefore asserted that sexual ethics and modes of sexual governance must be reformed to enable all 'racially-fit' women to become mothers.

For Meisel-Hess, racial degeneration and what she termed the "sexual crisis" were interdependent and inextricable phenomena. Both were rooted in the unnatural social conditions produced by patriarchy, especially men's oppression of women's sexuality.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>113</sup> Meisel-Hess provided an impassioned explanation of the 'Sexual Crisis' in her contribution to the radical feminist collection *Ehe? Zur Reform der sexuellen Moral*: "...daß ihnen [Frauen] das normale Maß von Lebensfreude, von Geschlechtsglück sowohl Liebe als Fruchtbarkeit versagt ist, daß sie davon abgeschnitten sind durch unnatürliche soziale Konjunkturen—das ist es, was wir beklagen und worin wir einen krisenhaften Zustand im Geschlechtsleben der Kulturmenschheit erkennen, der mit dem mehr und

Meisel-Hess believed that patriarchal arrangements subverted sexual selection as practiced in nature. Like many feminists examined in this dissertation, she asserted that in nature, female animals sexually selected their mates based exclusively upon consideration of racial fitness.

Female animals could exercise sexual choice, Meisel-Hess intimated, because they did not depend upon males for their material maintenance. According to Meisel-Hess, the major difference between the natural world and human civilization lay in the role of the economy, specifically of capitalism, in regulating human life. Like Johanna Elberskirchen and numerous socialist feminists, Meisel-Hess believed that capitalism thwarted natural laws by facilitating the emergence and ensuring the power of patriarchy. Capitalist patriarchy, she claimed, prohibited women from supporting themselves through remunerated labour. It further restricted women's expression and exploration of sexuality to monogamic marriage, the "fenced precinct of love" in Meisel-Hess' words—and to prostitution.<sup>114</sup> Women who did not occupy the role of wife or prostitute were consequently excluded from sexual life altogether.

These arrangements, Meisel-Hess insisted, had disastrous consequences from a racial perspective, of which I will mention five. First, they placed sexual selection exclusively in male hands, as women were dependent upon men financially and sexually.<sup>115</sup> Like the feminist critics of male sexuality explored in Chapter Four, Meisel-Hess maintained that male-dominated sexual selection was based on selfish criteria,

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mehr erwachsenden Persönlichkeitsanspruch des Individuums und mit der immer besseren Besinnung der Gesellschaft auf ihre echtsten Gattungsinteressen immer unhaltbarer werden muß." Grete Meisel-Hess, "Die Sexualmoral der Frau—von heute und spaeter," in *Ehe? Zur Reform der sexuellen Moral*, edited by Hedwig Dohm (Berlin: Internationale Verlag, 1911), 98.

<sup>114</sup> Meisel-Hess, *Sexual Crisis*, 31, 35, 38, 39, 50, 51.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid.*, 98. According to Meisel-Hess, "the right of free choice of sexual partner" constituted one of woman's "most elementary rights."

whereas female-dominated selection was altruistic. Second, she argued that by restricting reproduction to monogamic marriage, many of the best women were excluded from motherhood, as they were often passed over as undesirable wives due to their independence of mind and will.<sup>116</sup> Moreover, when women did marry, they did so for money, not love. Meisel-Hess maintained that monetary motivations for marriage depressed racial quality because love provided the best guide to sexual selection, and produced the most ‘racially fit’ children.<sup>117</sup> Third, Meisel-Hess claimed that marriage’s stranglehold on sexual legitimacy prevented individuals from sexually experimenting to discover their ‘optimal’ sexual partner, and ensured that all children born of extramarital unions, regardless of their ‘racial fitness’, would be “doomed to failure.”<sup>118</sup> Fourth, she insisted that by placing the burden of economic maintenance exclusively on men, couples had to marry later, when they were less reproductively fit. Later marriages in turn forced women into prolonged celibacy and led men to seek out prostitutes, thereby running the risk of acquiring a venereal disease and ‘tainting’ his future wife and children. Finally, Meisel-Hess asserted that the economic constraints surrounding marriage encouraged the propagation of the most adaptable, who accommodated themselves—via a process of degradation—to the existing, undesirable status quo created by competitive capitalism. Meisel-Hess thus asserted that patriarchal marriage contributed to the propagation of “the mediocre, the ugly and the stupid.”<sup>119</sup>

Because of the dangerous collective consequences of patriarchal sexual governance, Meisel-Hess called for the re-ordering of sexual and social life.

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<sup>116</sup> Ibid, 210, 310-316.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid, 279.

<sup>118</sup> Meisel-Hess, “Die Sexualmoral der Frau,” 103.

<sup>119</sup> Meisel-Hess, *The Sexual Crisis*, 122-3.

Importantly, she asserted that, “If a new social order is to be created we must effect [sic] a harmonious compromise between the rights and duties of the individual and the rights of the community.” Achieving a balance between the individual and the collective was imperative for Meisel-Hess in light of her conceptualization of race. Like Clapperton, she conceived of the race as an “organic whole” composed of “all the individual organisms that arise out of and transmit this enduring vital unity.”<sup>120</sup> According to Meisel-Hess, “in every one of us, through the complicated tissue of individuality, there runs an ultimate secret thread of connection with the outer world, restricting the power of self-determination.”<sup>121</sup> Whereas the “individual life is transient,” she mused, the race “endures.”<sup>122</sup> Meisel-Hess further maintained that achieving a balance between individual rights and duties to the collective was necessary to ensure that “the economic misuse of valuable human energies [would] be brought to an end, and this is true above all as regards the energies of women.”<sup>123</sup>

Meisel-Hess argued that the reorganization of social life should be guided by natural sciences. According to her, new achievements in natural scientific and medical research made possible “a sensible social order of human society” because they made known “the natural causes of things” which had previously been obscured by “superstitions of all kinds” that were “collaps[ing] one after another.”<sup>124</sup> Science revealed the true nature of “species needs,” which she claimed ought to undergird moral

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<sup>120</sup> Ibid, 248.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid, 102.

<sup>122</sup> Ibid, 248.

<sup>123</sup> Ibid, 207.

<sup>124</sup> Grete Meisel-Hess, *In der modernen Weltanschauung* (Leipzig: Hermann Seemann Nachfolger, 1901), 108-9.

standards.<sup>125</sup> Meisel-Hess declared that, “Morality is based upon the interest of the species alone, and the only true sexual morality is that which leads to the procreation of healthy and beautiful human beings, that which condemns no individual and no class to misery and misuse, and that which neither suppresses nor artificially corrupts the energies of the heart and of the senses.”<sup>126</sup> In her view, scientifically guided social reform would allow for the simultaneous and reciprocal development of the individual and society.

However, for Meisel-Hess, “species needs” implied not only reproduction and racial renewal but also sexual experience. As demonstrated in Chapter Two, Meisel-Hess believed that sex itself constituted a natural, vital physiological and psychological need for women. She represented sex as the “focal point of every *healthy* being whose instincts have not undergone partial or complete atrophy,” and declared that, “upon the full satisfaction of the sexual needs depends the attainment of a true equilibrium of the mental no less than the physical personality.”<sup>127</sup> Meisel-Hess maintained that the experience of sexual passion heightened one’s creative capacities, and thus viewed sex itself as an aid to women’s development as “free personalit[ies].”<sup>128</sup> She insisted that

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<sup>125</sup> Meisel-Hess, *The Sexual Crisis*, 101-2; Meisel-Hess, *In der modernen Weltanschauung*, 52, 112, and especially 109: “Dem Einzelnen durch eine gesunde Gemeinsamkeit, die ihm Schutz und Stütze gewährt, zur Entfaltung individueller Lebensmöglichkeiten zu verhelfen und eben durch diesen reichen Individualismus den sozialen Boden zu befruchten, sind die Ziele einer Gesellschaftsordnung, die den in der nature wirksamen formenbildenden Gesetzen entspricht...Daher sind die Erkenntnisse, die uns die Naturwissenschaften vermitteln, in ihrer Nutzenanwendung auf sociale und ethische Neugestaltungen von unabsehbarer Tragweite.”

<sup>126</sup> Meisel-Hess, *The Sexual Crisis*, 101.

<sup>127</sup> Ibid, 117. Meisel-Hess claims that, at least in human love, spiritual love and physical sex are united: “Und so sehen wir wieder die grosse Einheitlichkeit: höchste körperliche Lust—vermittelt durch geistige Ströme; höchster seelischer Affekt—ausgelöst im Momente gesteigertsten Körperlebens, Materielles und Spirituelles—aneinander gebunden, durcheinander hervorgerufen.” See Meisel-Hess, *In der modernen Weltanschauung*, 35.

<sup>128</sup> Meisel-Hess, *The Sexual Crisis*, 120-1, 230-1, 112-3, 117, 111; emphasis added. In fact, Meisel-Hess drew direct parallels between intellectual power and sexual intensity in women: “It is the ardent women who can and must express themselves in the fields of art and of research. Their antitypes, frigid women, lacking alike the fire of love and the divine flame of inspiration, are inapt also for social and artistic work.



women had as strong a need for sex as men, asserting that the desire for a satisfying sexual life is universal.”<sup>129</sup> Moreover, she argued that, “the need for further *sexual rights* is therefore required not only for a small group [of women].”<sup>130</sup> Meisel-Hess therefore did not view greater sexual freedoms as incompatible with racial regeneration. Instead, she argued that it should be made “socially possible for everyone to satisfy [sexual] desire as may best commend itself to individual judgment,” as long as so doing did not harm others—or the race.<sup>131</sup>

To achieve her desired vision of social reform, Meisel-Hess believed that women and their sexual needs—independent of marriage—should be placed at the centre of social life. Yet because Meisel-Hess believed that women have an “organic” need for motherhood,” she particularly stressed women’s “child-bearing function,” calling it “the nodal point of social organization.”<sup>132</sup> Indeed, according to Meisel-Hess, “the female womb” was the expression of a “great will of nature,” and held that the mother and child constitute the “natural central unity of all social structures.”<sup>133</sup> Meisel-Hess further argued that centralizing women’s sexuality was particularly important from a biological perspective, as contemporary science had shown that women transmitted a greater share of their genetic properties to their offspring than men did. According to Meisel-Hess, this

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All that they do, all that they produce, is colorless, desexualized, and consequently valueless. In art and in research the ardent woman is the receiver and interpreter of intuitions.” See *Ibid*, 240.

<sup>129</sup> *Ibid*, 117.

<sup>130</sup> Grete Meisel-Hess, “Sexuelle Rechte,” *Die Neue Generation* 8 (April 1912): 183. Emphasis added

<sup>131</sup> Meisel-Hess, *The Sexual Crisis*, 117.

<sup>132</sup> Meisel-Hess, *The Sexual Crisis*, 322, 246; see also Meisel-Hess, *In der modernen Weltanschauung*, 90. As Meisel-Hess wrote in *Die neue Generation*, “Anerkennung des Mutterschaftsrechtes der Frau auch ausser der Ehe,—das ist es, was die besten und selbständigsten Geister heute fordern.” Meisel-Hess, “Sexuelle Rechte,” 190.

<sup>133</sup> Meisel-Hess, “Die Sexualmoral der Frau,” 105.

biological reality meant that women of genius were more likely to transmit their intelligence than men of genius.<sup>134</sup>

Thus, Meisel-Hess demanded the radical reform of society to “facilitate the reproductive activity of ‘fit’ women,” that is “intellectually and morally independent” women, in order to ensure racial regeneration.<sup>135</sup> This demand applied for all ‘fit’ women, regardless of whether they intended to marry.<sup>136</sup> Like Clapperton, Meisel-Hess maintained that eugenically inflected sexual education constituted a fundamental precondition for greater sexual freedoms.<sup>137</sup> She also advanced a number of practical measures that the state could implement to encourage the ‘reproduction of the fittest.’ Meisel-Hess advocated that the state provide financial support or ‘endowment’ to women when they could not work due to pregnancy, as well as early childcare. She also supported other welfare measures, such as protective labour legislation, because she believed that the competitive conditions of life fostered by capitalism degenerated the general standard of racial quality.<sup>138</sup> In her view, the evolutionary process of adaptation to capitalist emiseration left the race with the average person, not the exceptional, as its standard bearer.<sup>139</sup>

Meisel-Hess believed that racial regeneration required above all a reform of marriage and intimate relations. In Meisel-Hess’ view, “The welfare of the race and the

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<sup>134</sup> Ibid, 210.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid, 209.

<sup>136</sup> Ibid, 61; Meisel-Hess, “Die Sexualmoral der Frau,” 106.

<sup>137</sup> Meisel-Hess, *In der modernen Weltanschauung*, 106; Meisel-Hess, *The Sexual Crisis*, 116.

<sup>138</sup> “Sowohl Geist und Persönlichkeit, die sie ihm schon vorhandenen Individuum ausbilden, als auch natürliche biologische Werte, die sich durch Fortpflanzung vererben sollen, müssen von dieser kapitalistischen Konjunktur vollkommen frei werden, soll der Grund und Boden der Gesellschaft, der, aus dem die Generation sich erneut, heilsam umgerodet werden.” Meisel-Hess, “Die Sexualmoral der Frau,” 100.

<sup>139</sup> Meisel-Hess, *The Sexual Crisis*, 208, 216-7, 254-9, 268-71.

regulation of the sexual life of mankind are inseparable correlates. The quality of the race is the direct outcome of the existing sexual morality.”<sup>140</sup> Like Clapperton, she accused male eugenicists and racial hygienists of failing to consider the dysgenic effects of existing standards of sexual morality and arrangements of sexual life.<sup>141</sup> Meisel-Hess demanded the liberation of women’s sexuality and reproductive capacity from the exclusivity of monogamic marriage. In fact, Meisel-Hess declared that she sought “complete freedom for all those forms of the erotic life which promote racial progress; freedom, above all, for the work of reproduction in so far as this is the outcome of unrestricted natural selection.”<sup>142</sup> If marriage were to be retained, Meisel-Hess asserted that it required women’s economic independence to ensure that women could enter marriage as equals, motivated only by love.<sup>143</sup> She also supported cohabitation and sex before marriage, so that couples could ascertain whether they made a good match, from both a romantic and a eugenic perspective.<sup>144</sup> However, of greatest importance to Meisel-Hess was the social and legal recognition of new forms of intimacy, through which women could find their ‘optimal’ sexual and reproductive partners.<sup>145</sup> To this end, she proposed a range of options of varying duration and permanency, including “erotic

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<sup>140</sup> Ibid, 282-3.

<sup>141</sup> Meisel-Hess, *Sexual Crisis*, 262-7.

<sup>142</sup> Ibid, 32-3. Meisel-Hess claimed that this desire encapsulated the goals of the German movement for the Protection of Mothers and Sexual Reform: “dass auch Menschen, die zur Ehe nicht gelangen oder nicht rechtzeitig, ihr Leben nicht al seine zwecklose Wüstenwanderung verbringen und ihre natürliche und von ihnen selbst gewünschte Fruchtbarkeit zum Schaden der Rasse nicht unterdrücken müssen.” Meisel-Hess, “Sexuelle Rechte,” 187.

<sup>143</sup> Meisel-Hess, *The Sexual Crisis*, 116, 211-3.

<sup>144</sup> Ibid, 39-49, 68.

<sup>145</sup> Intriguingly, Meisel-Hess also celebrated “new opportunities for comradeship among women,” including the “bachelor woman” who cohabited with another woman and may even adopt a child.” According to her, this “positive development” indicated that women would have more possibilities for fulfillment and joy outside of marriage. Meisel-Hess, *The Sexual Crisis*, 229.

friendships,” which may or may not contribute to the “social *function* of childbearing.”<sup>146</sup> Meisel-Hess’ description of child-bearing as a social function is telling. Like Clapperton, she believed that, because reproduction affected collective wellbeing, it ought to be subjected to public controls, and specifically to eugenic regulation. Indeed, she insisted that, “the child belongs not to the individual, but to the community.”<sup>147</sup>

Throughout her analysis of existing sexual life and within her visions of sexual reform, Meisel-Hess stressed the need to prioritize racial fitness. The enhanced sexual “rights” and freedoms she extended to women were premised and legitimized by their racially regenerative effects. For Meisel-Hess as for Clapperton, greater sexual freedoms implied greater restrictions and self-restraint in the interests of future generations.<sup>148</sup> Indeed, Meisel-Hess explicitly stated that, “Limitations must be imposed upon the gratification of the appetites so long as the individual, male or female, remains incompetent to estimate or provide for all the consequences of sexual activity or passivity, and so long as there exists incapacity to control some of the pathological manifestations of the sexual life.”<sup>149</sup> Citing racial hygienist Alfred Ploetz, Meisel-Hess lamented that society was “overweighted with defectives” because the “community makes no effort to prevent the overloading of the race with the less fit.”<sup>150</sup> She thus proclaimed that, “the higher development of our race should be deliberately pursued by the restriction of parenthood to those human beings best fitted for this privilege.”<sup>151</sup>

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<sup>146</sup> Ibid, 59. See also Meisel-Hess, in *Mutterschutz und Sexualreform*, 85.

<sup>147</sup> Meisel-Hess, *The Sexual Crisis*, 206-7.

<sup>148</sup> “Mit den Forderungen nach Freiheit gehen Hand in Hand solche der Beschränkung, der strengsten Selbstzucht, im Hinblick auf das Wohl und Wehe der Nachkommenschaft.” Meisel-Hess, in *Mutterschutz und Sexualreform*, 86.

<sup>149</sup> Meisel-Hess, *The Sexual Crisis*, 101.

<sup>150</sup> Ibid, 251.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid, 281.

And yet, unlike Clapperton, Meisel-Hess was wary of negative eugenic measures, such as legal prohibitions or sterilization, that would prevent the birth of the ‘unfit’. Though she flirted with the idea of marriage prohibitions, she stressed more positive eugenic measures.<sup>152</sup> Meisel-Hess’s disinclination towards negative eugenic measures can be attributed to the fact that she believed that racial fitness cannot necessarily be determined at birth. Instead, she argued that society had a duty to protect its weaker members, and to create social and sexual conditions in which fitter children can be brought into the world.<sup>153</sup>

Meisel-Hess thus insisted that sexual life should be self-governing, guided by an internalized, eugenically informed sexual ethic. For her, this ethic rested on two fundamental maxims. First, she held that racially fit women have a *duty to* become mothers and to bear many children.<sup>154</sup> While Meisel-Hess believed that women ought to combine motherhood and other pursuits, she held motherhood, that is, the production of “the well-born,” to be primary.<sup>155</sup> Importantly, unlike Clapperton, Meisel-Hess did not support birth control, as she feared that it would inhibit the reproduction of the fittest women.<sup>156</sup> Second, she maintained that racially ‘unfit’ women have a duty not to become mothers, even if they wish to become mothers. Until social and sexual conditions conducive to the production of superior offspring were realized, Meisel-Hess believed that women “burdened” with congenital “defects” had an obligation to preemptively restrict their fertility. Given the implications of individual acts for the collective fate,

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<sup>152</sup> Ibid, 252-3.

<sup>153</sup> Ibid, 272.

<sup>154</sup> Ibid, 208.

<sup>155</sup> Meisel-Hess, *In der modernen Weltanschauung*, 1901, 83. See also Meisel-Hess, *The Sexual Crisis*, 210-1. As noted earlier, she did not necessarily believe that the women who bore children should necessarily be the one to care for them.

<sup>156</sup> Meisel-Hess, “Die Sexualmoral der Frau,” 106.

Meisel-Hess believed that restrictions upon the “freedom of the individual ego” were more than justified.<sup>157</sup>

Jane Hume Clapperton and Grete Meisel-Hess’ visions of sexual reform illustrate the ways in which the use of science proved simultaneously empowering and limiting for feminists. On the one hand, both Clapperton and Meisel-Hess maintained that women must be empowered to actively and independently participate in sexual life on equal terms with men, regardless of their legal relationship to men. As I have demonstrated, they both believed that women’s greater sexual participation would have a range of racially regenerative effects. These convictions emerged from their understanding of female sexuality as serving purposes other than reproduction and of sex itself as necessary for women’s physiological and psychological wellbeing.

On the other hand, both feminists believed that only certain women should have the freedom to reproduce and that the right to reproduce should itself be adjudicated based on ‘racial’ criteria. In making this argument, they implied that certain women were less valuable than others from a ‘racial’ perspective. In fact, they insisted that individuals ought to willingly choose to restrict their reproductive activity in consideration of its collective consequences. Clapperton and Meisel-Hess therefore premised and legitimized women’s freedom to participate in sexual life upon their claim that women would determine their reproductive behaviour not on their “selfish” desires, but rather on their consideration of ‘racial’ implications. Ultimately, while racial arguments facilitated Clapperton and Meisel-Hess’ call for the liberation of women’s non-reproductive

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<sup>157</sup> Meisel-Hess, *The Sexual Crisis*, 282.

sexuality, it also led them to impose a severe ethical burden upon women's reproductive freedoms.

### Conclusion

In both Chapters Four and Five, I explored how racial thinking enabled feminists to criticize existing arrangements of sexual life and to advance demands for sexual reform that centered on women's sexuality. However, these chapters also demonstrated that feminists' racialized sex reform demands varied according to their understandings of sex, and particularly women's sexuality. In Chapter Four, I examined the ideas of feminists who deployed an understanding of women's sexuality as exclusively reproductive, and who believed that sexual intercourse was inferior to 'spiritual' modes of intimacy. Such beliefs led them to argue for reforms such as an 'equal' standard of sexual morality based on sexual restraint, the establishment of a 'new-style' matriarchy, and even sexual separatism. These feminists therefore engaged racial arguments to demand women's freedom from sex, specifically heterosexuality.

Conversely, in this chapter I examined feminists who embraced new, scientific attitudes regarding women's sexuality, analyzed in Chapter Two, which held that women's sexuality was not exclusively reproductive and that sexual activity was critical to women's physiological and psychological wellbeing. Like the feminists in Chapter Four, they connected women's sexual oppression under patriarchy to racial degeneration. However, based on their new understanding of the female sex drive, these feminists maintained that empowering women to have sexual experiences outside of marriage—without necessarily having children—was essential to racial regeneration. They therefore synthesized their beliefs regarding sexuality and race to argue on behalf of women's

freedom to have sex. Moreover, the distinction between reproductive and non-reproductive sexuality, combined with their conviction that reproduction constituted a *social* function, led feminists such as Jane Hume Clapperton to insist that women have the right to a private realm of non-reproductive sexual activity into which neither the state nor society can intervene.

A key goal of this chapter was to explain why racial thinking, particularly eugenics, appealed to feminists. I argued that eugenics' appeal must be attributed not only to its stress on women's critical role in racial regeneration, but also to the fact that it conceived of sexual ethics in ways similar to feminists. Like feminists, eugenicists stressed the implications of individual behaviour for collective wellbeing, and thus highlighted the importance of individual rights and responsibilities when it came to sexual behaviour and decision-making. Indeed, they insisted that accepting this responsibility was a precondition of gaining rights. As Helene Stöcker argued in *Love and Women (Die Liebe und die Frauen, 1906)*, having and taking control over one's life, rather than being a passive tool of fate, endowed individuals with the ability—and the duty—to favourably shape the fate of future generations.<sup>158</sup> Feminists and eugenicists therefore shared a common conception of what it meant to be sexually 'free'. Both parties believed that absolute license did not provide the precondition of sexual freedom, but rather that sexual freedom emerged as a result of self-control and a well-ordered

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<sup>158</sup> "Nun wissen wir, daß unendlich vieles, wenn nicht alles, in unsere eigene Hand gegeben ist. Mit dieser Erkenntnis, daß wir das Schicksal zwingen können, ist aber auch eine neue Pflicht auf uns gelegt...Wir haben die heilige Pflicht, nun in jedem Augenblick darnach zu ringen, daß sich unser Schicksal, das Schicksal unserer Nächsten wie der Fernsten so gestaltet, daß es 'wert wäre, ewig gelebt zu werden.' Wenn die Masse der Menschen einmal erfaßt haben wird, welche ungeheure Erhöhung unseres ganzen Daseins durch diese Auffassung und Führung des Lebens eintreten muß, dann werden wir in der Tat von einer neuen Menschheit reden können." Helene Stöcker, *Die Liebe und die Frauen* (Minden.: J. C. C. Bruns' Verlag, 1906), 2.



system of sexual governance. Thinking about sex in racial terms thus enabled feminists to represent women as sexual agents entitled to certain rights and freedoms—but also tasked with certain duties and responsibilities.

It was precisely such attitudes towards sexual ethics and sexual freedom that would prove simultaneously empowering and limiting for feminists, particularly those advancing a radical feminist sex reform agenda. Feminists' demands for greater sexual freedom and autonomy were based on scientific arguments regarding women's physiological need for sex, and on the belief that women would internalize the "racial responsibility" to make wise and considered sexual decisions—that is, that their lasting duties to the race would always overwhelm their fleeting sexual desires. These feminists insisted that women's sexual instinct was 'naturally' more altruistic than men's "selfish" sex instinct, and argued that women's sexual instinct was, in fact, a race instinct. Such convictions further led them to require that "unfit" women willingly abstain from reproduction—and that those who failed to obey this ethical imperative be forced, via coercive, invasive measures such as sterilization, to do so. It is perhaps worth noting that, in this chapter, it was a British feminist, not a German-speaking one, who advocated coercive state intervention into reproductive life.

While I have analysed feminists' engagements with racial discourses in order to understand their political polyvalence, it is not possible to conclude this chapter—or this dissertation—without expressing reaction to them. The differential adjudication of human value according to biological standards, and the intractability of such judgments, is certainly disturbing. As I have demonstrated throughout this dissertation, part of the appeal of politicizing the 'laws of life' lies in the power and authority it offers to make

claims based on supposedly fundamental, unchanging essences. While recourse to scientifically revealed natural laws may be effective in staking claims, it offers one little space to maneuver once these claims have been accepted as fact. Moreover, its discursive logic ultimately undermines the political process as a sphere of contestation and debate on questions of individual and collective rights and freedoms.

And yet, it is worth questioning to what degree biology simply provided a new metric for the differential evaluation and treatment of human beings. Indeed, social criteria such as class, rank, and status—attributes that were ‘inherited’ from generation to generation and at times claimed to be preordained—had long divided humanity, and determined and rationalized different standards of value and treatment. However, the crucial distinction between purportedly biological and social dividing practices is that, claims to divine preordination notwithstanding, the latter are unquestionably human creations, subject to human control. That humans have the power to challenge and change human-made social institutions and arrangements is a fact that we forget at our own peril.

## Chapter Six: Conclusion

In this dissertation, I explored ‘first-wave’ German-speaking and British feminists’ complex engagements with the fledgling field of sexual science. Guiding my investigation of this topic were the following questions: Why did sexual science appeal to some feminists at this time? What roles did science play in feminist sexual politics? How did sexual science inform feminist thought concerning sex, as both a practice and a form of embodied subjectivity? And how does a transnational ‘way of seeing’ these questions offer up new insights that cannot be gleaned from a strictly national perspective? I explored these questions via four thematically-driven case studies that demonstrated and analyzed *how* German-speaking and British feminists engaged with sexual science between 1880 and 1914 to both criticize the sexual status quo and advance their visions of sexual reform. In Chapter Two, I examined debates regarding the ‘normal’ female sex drive; in Chapter Three, I studied feminists’ articulations of alternative, non-normative, non-heterosexual female sexual subjectivities; in Chapter Four, I explored feminists’ critiques of male (hetero)sexuality; and in Chapter Five, I analyzed the role, meanings, and implications of race and racial-thinking within feminists’ demands for women’s greater sexual freedoms, specifically to engage in (hetero)sexual acts and experience sexual pleasure. Based upon these case studies, I suggested that sexual science constituted a discourse of possibility and legitimacy for feminist sexual politics. Moreover, my transnational analysis of German-speaking and

British feminists discursive practices led me to argue that this phenomenon had no predetermined outcomes because it held the potential to affect both emancipation and oppression.

### Review of Arguments

In the preceding chapters, I examined how and why sexual science appealed to some feminists as an intellectual resource and as a potentially legitimizing discourse, even though sexual scientific ‘facts’ and theories were often used to disqualify feminists’ demands for sexual equality and social justice. I maintained that sexual science appealed to the feminists I studied because of its representation of sex as a natural, material ‘fact of life’ that required ‘objective’ study and understanding, not dogmatic moral judgments. Sexual science thus enabled feminists to think about sex, especially sexual subjectivities and sexual relations, in ways that transcended the limitations of ‘man-made’ world. Crucially, some feminists found in sexual science incontrovertible, ‘objective’ proof that women were ‘naturally’ autonomous and self-determining sexual agents entitled to greater participation—and power—in the governance of sexual life. Indeed, as I illustrated in Chapter Two, for feminists such as Johanna Elberskirchen, Grete Meisel-Hess, and Stella Browne, science revealed that sex constituted a biological “right” for women. Moreover, the feminists I studied all believed that scientific investigation revealed and represented the ‘true nature’ of sex, and that it could, and should, establish a ‘factual,’ legitimate, and rational basis for sexual reform.

By using qualifying adjectives such as “some,” I wanted to stress that not all ‘first wave’ feminists were attracted to sexual science. In fact, as I demonstrated in Chapter Two, sexual scientific argumentation often exacerbated existing tensions among feminists

regarding what constituted desirable ‘feminist’ sexual reforms. And yet, I also wanted to show that sexual science’s appeal cut across factional, ideological, ethnic, national, religious, and political divisions—though all adherents belonged to the middle classes. While many of these women were sympathetic to socialism, sexual scientific ideas and arguments were also attractive to liberals, nationalists, and imperialists. Sexual science appealed above all to feminists seeking a fundamental transformation of sexual life and women’s place within it. However, despite their common commitment to sexual science, in this dissertation I demonstrated that the feminists I studied did not constitute a homogenous group. They did not share a common vision of or set of demands for sexual reform, and in fact deployed sexual science for conflicting agendas. Whereas feminists like Johanna Elberskirchen used sexual science to demand a ‘break with man’ and the re-establishment of a ‘new-style’ matriarchy, others like Jane Hume Clapperton deployed sexual science to legitimize greater opportunities for women to enjoy (hetero)sexual encounters without reproductive consequences. Pointing out the differences between feminists who shared an epistemological and political commitment to sexual science ultimately illuminates the extent of its polyvalence.

Despite their internal differences, I nevertheless represented these feminists as belonging to a common epistemic community with recognized male sexual scientific ‘experts’. I argued that the feminists I study shared with sexual scientists common ways of knowing, patterns of reasoning, discursive practices, and commitments to the application and production of rationale for shared socio-political ends. My intention in characterizing feminists and sexual scientists as belonging to a common epistemic community was to break with representations of sexual scientists and feminists as

occupying fundamentally antagonistic and irreconcilable camps. I also wanted to demonstrate that feminists and sexual scientists shared biopolitical assumptions regarding science's potential to inform and legitimize new modes of sexual governance that would improve not only individual but also collective, 'racial' wellbeing.

Above all, by invoking the concept of 'epistemic community' I wanted to represent feminists as active contributors to the creation of sexual scientific knowledge and, in so doing, to challenge the gender biases that I maintain have shaped the writing of histories of sexual science, as well as the classification of certain individuals as 'sexual scientists'. Commonly, within histories of sexual science, feminists appear—if at all—as marginal figures, gadflies whose engagements with sexual scientific knowledge constituted superficial perversions or calculated appropriations of expert, male-produced knowledge. Yet many of the individuals recognized as 'sexual scientists', such as Edward Carpenter, had little more scientific training than feminists such as Johanna Elberskirchen—nor were their connections with other, scientifically-trained male 'experts' necessarily more significant. Certainly, as a 'weak' field at the turn of the century, the contributors to the emerging sexual science were many and varied. It was therefore one of my key goals in this dissertation to illuminate feminists' critical contributions to the creation of sexual scientific knowledge, and, in so doing, to argue for their inclusion within histories of sexual scientific knowledge production, alongside acknowledged male 'experts.'

Indeed, in the preceding chapters I sought to illustrate how feminists' engagements with sexual science were not strictly dependent upon, or merely derivative, of men's intellectual labour. Feminists did not simply and uncritically appropriate the

ideas of male sexual scientists. Although they drew upon sexual scientific knowledge produced by male sexual scientists, I argued that feminists drew out different interpretations, meanings, and implications. Feminists such as Rosa Mayreder also proved highly adept at pointing out contradictory pronouncements within this body of knowledge, and using these contradictions to advance their own ideas.<sup>1</sup> I thus attempted to show how, as a result of their analyses, interrogations, and interpretations of sexual scientific ideas and theories, feminists produced new sexual knowledge—knowledge which they claimed was ‘truer’ than that offered by ‘biased’ male sexual scientists, particularly regarding female sexualities.

Highlighting the truth-claims feminists made regarding the knowledge they produced raises another important point: namely, that they were highly concerned with the effects of male bias in the production of sexual scientific knowledge, specifically its potential socio-political impacts. To combat what they believed to be false and biased knowledge about sex and especially women’s sexuality, I argued that feminists engaged in a politics of sexual knowledge production that pitted their ‘objective’ knowledge against what they claimed were male scientists’ self-interested assertions. I consequently maintained that feminists’ investment in understanding sex scientifically—and in disseminating and circulating their ideas—was not exclusively intellectual, but also strategic. Sexual scientific knowledge production, I asserted, was directly tied to feminists’ claims to power. Furthermore, in stressing the political nature of feminists’ knowledge production, I followed Foucault in asserting that sexual science constituted a ‘tactically polyvalent’ discourse for feminists. Within my case studies, I demonstrated

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<sup>1</sup> See Rosa Mayreder, “Grundzüge,” in *Zur Kritik der Weiblichkeit*.

how feminists deployed sexual science to construct ‘reverse discourses’ that criticized and challenged existing arrangements of power.<sup>2</sup>

Thus, throughout my dissertation, I wanted to show how feminists engaged with sexual science epistemologically, that is, as a privileged way of knowing sex, and strategically, as part of a politics of sexual knowledge. Furthermore, I asserted that, through their intellectual labour, feminists aimed to reform what I have termed sexual governance. Sexual governance references the vast and interconnected complex of norms, ethics, and laws that transcended the divisions of public and private to regulate sexual behavior and delineate relations of power between men and women. The concept of sexual governance illuminates the fact that the law and social policy were not the only means of regulating sex. Rather, it gestures towards the disciplinary effects of hegemonic ways of thinking about sex, particularly when couched in the language of normality, morality, and nature. In order to reform modes of sexual governance, then, feminists not only made demands of the state, but also sought to transform dominant ways of thinking about sex and subjectivity. The concept of sexual governance therefore indicates the critical role of knowledge in contestations of power. Moreover, in decentering the state and social institutions as the loci of regulatory power over sex, sexual governance as I have conceived it encompasses a broader range of actors—including feminists—who played a role in shaping and contesting the regulation of sex.

In using the term sexual governance, I further wanted to highlight the stakes involved in feminists’ demands for sexual reform. Specifically, I wanted to stress that these feminists desired not only greater sexual autonomy and self-determination for

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<sup>2</sup> Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 101.



women, but also a new arrangement of powers that would give women greater regulatory control over sex, both in public and private. This stress on power and empowerment is crucial: while many feminists saw a deep connection between sex and love, they nonetheless recognized that sex expressed relations of power. Consequently, as Atina Grossman observed of a later generation of German feminists, they did not view sex sentimentally.<sup>3</sup> Moreover, as Edward Ross Dickinson has argued, many feminists viewed women's intimate relationships with men as alienating and even dehumanizing; under such conditions, they believed love was simply impossible.<sup>4</sup>

While I have been concerned with demonstrating the ways in which sexual science, as a 'tactically polyvalent' discourse, facilitated feminists' analyses and claims to power, I have also sought to illuminate its limitations, beyond entrenching and legitimizing the institutional power of science and scientists over sexual life. Through my case studies, I showed how feminists' embrace of the biopolitical concerns and assumptions that underpinned turn-of-the-century sexual science led them to assume ontological positions and advance political demands that circumscribed the reach of their proposed reforms. Feminists adjudicated sexual life in the binary terms provided by sexual science, such as healthy versus sick, regenerative versus degenerative, natural versus unnatural, and normal versus abnormal. As a result, they asserted differential standards of biological value—and hence, rights and freedoms—among women. Intriguingly, these different standards of value did not neatly map onto differences of race (in the sense of colour, ethnicity, or nationality) and class. Nevertheless, biopolitics'

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<sup>3</sup> Atina Grossman, "Continuities and Ruptures. Sexuality in Twentieth Century Germany: Historiography and its Discontents," in *Gendering Modern German History: Rewriting Historiography*, edited by Karen Hagemann and Jean H. Quatert (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2007): 208-227.

<sup>4</sup> See Dickinson, "A Dark Impenetrable Wall of Complete Incomprehension."

obsession with reproduction and its outcomes led feminists to express profoundly heteronormative attitudes regarding which women had the right to participate in sexual life—even, as I demonstrated in Chapter Three, when they argued on behalf of the rights of non-heterosexual subjects as social actors. Indeed, although thinking about collective life in the organic, ‘racial’ terms offered by biopolitics enabled feminists to assert ‘natural’ rights, this way of thinking also tasked women with certain responsibilities for the race that helped define—and restrict—what it meant for women to be sexually free, as I discussed in Chapters Four and Five.

By highlighting the ways in which sexual science both facilitated and limited feminist sexual politics, I framed sexual science as a discourse of possibility and legitimacy for fin-de-siècle feminists. I further claimed that the outcomes and implications of this discursive practice were by no means known or predictable during the prewar years, although they would have implications and lasting consequences for the course of ‘modern’ sexual politics. Such a representation of sexual science was made possible, to a large extent, by my transnational research and analysis. Over the course of the preceding chapters, I claimed that German-speaking and British feminists’ engagement with sexual science was a parallel and interconnected transnational phenomenon. I argued that it was parallel, as it occurred in more than one location at the same time, and interconnected, because feminists’ engagements with sexual science depended upon the transnational networks of knowledge-dissemination and activism.

In stressing the fact that feminists’ engagement with sexual science for political purposes was not a nation-specific phenomenon, I argued that scholars must acknowledge the ways in which sexual scientific knowledge provided new opportunities for feminist

sexual politics. In this dissertation, I claimed that sexual science helped reframe German-speaking and British feminists' discussions of sex and sexual governance. Science enabled the feminists I studied to represent sexual politics as a material politics of physical needs, one that connected sexual self-determination to economic and legal independence. In so doing, I maintained that feminists helped to establish a new conceptual paradigm for 'modern' sexual politics—one in which science plays a critical role in defining sexual 'truths' via its claims to reveal the natural state of human sexuality.<sup>5</sup>

### Lines of Future Research

By way of conclusion, I would like to propose three lines of scholarly inquiry suggested by my research and analysis. An exploration of these three areas, I maintain, would not only contribute to knowledge and understanding of the history of sexuality in twentieth century Europe but also help develop a genealogy for present-day sexual politics.

First, I maintain that modern European historians of women, gender and sexuality should focus greater attention on the transnationalism of sexual politics and especially feminist sexual politics, as they developed in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. One of my primary aims in this dissertation was to demonstrate that feminists' engagement with sexual science was not a nation-specific phenomenon, and was in fact facilitated by transnational flows of information. Through my archival research, I was able to more fully examine and analyse the transnationalism of German-speaking and

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<sup>5</sup> One of the few synthetic histories to integrate and highlight feminists' contributions to the emergence of modern sexuality is Jeffrey Weeks, *Sex, Politics and Society: The Regulation of Sexuality since 1800*, Second Edition (London: Longman, 1989); see especially pages 141-179.

British feminists' engagements with sexual science. However, in the process of conducting my research, I encountered all kinds of examples of feminists from beyond Germany, Austria, and Britain who engaged sexual science for the purpose of sexual reform. These feminists came from all over Europe, but especially from France, the Netherlands, Hungary, Belgium, Russia, Norway, and Sweden. They belonged to the same organizations as German-speaking and British feminists, particularly the League for the Protection of Mothers and Sexual Reform and the Malthusian League, and their work was translated and published in feminist journals. Key individuals, such as Swedish feminist Ellen Key, Dutch feminist Dr. Aletta Jacobs, and Hungarian feminist Rosika Schwimmer, recurred frequently: they were connected to German-speaking and British feminists via bonds of friendship and politics, and exercised an incredible intellectual influence on their contemporaries. Because they came from smaller nation-states (from the perspective of the American academy), spoke languages unfamiliar to many English-speaking scholars, and lived transnational lives, they feature only marginally within both feminist histories and histories of sexuality.

My repeated encounters with these figures led me to ask: how far did the phenomenon I study actually extend within Europe? What would broadening this study to include other national sites—particularly relatively neglected sites such as Hungary, Sweden, and the Netherlands—contribute to knowledge regarding scientifically informed, biopolitically inflected feminist sexual politics? Could such a study help build a case for the argument that 'modern' sexual politics can be defined not only by its content and legitimation strategies, but also by its cosmopolitanism? In constructing such a project, one would have to be careful to understand the dynamics of this highly

‘metropolitan’ project within the context of empire and a globalizing world. The work of scholars such as Ann Laura Stoler, for example, has demonstrated that sexual scientific knowledge produced in Europe was dependent upon colonial experiences and undertakings to a considerable extent.<sup>6</sup> Such a project is undoubtedly beyond the capacities of an individual researcher; thus, I maintain that such a project presents an exciting opportunity for international collaboration among historians working in different national traditions, much along the lines of the “Modern Girl Around the World” project.<sup>7</sup> It would also address increasing calls for transnational histories of sexuality.<sup>8</sup>

Second, I argue that my project suggests the need for a genealogy of ‘scientized’ sexual politics over the course of the twentieth (and twenty-first) century. While conducting this research, I was continually reminded of how identity-based claims for sexual rights and freedoms are still often premised on the idea that sexuality is a congenital trait. This is perhaps less true of twenty-first century feminists sexual politics; however, it is especially true of liberal LGBT politics. Many liberal activists and their supporters treat the assertion that sexuality is an unchosen, incontrovertible reality—that one is “born that way”—as unshakeable proof of the justice and legitimacy of their demands for sexual reform. Particularly in the United States, following the political rise of the Christian Right, this view has become axiomatic and difficult to discuss critically. To be clear: I am not interested in confirming or refuting the biological origins of sexual

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<sup>6</sup> See Ann Laura Stoler, *Carnal Knowledge and Imperial Power: Race and the Intimate in Colonial Rule* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); and Stoler, *Race and the Education of Desire. Foucault’s History of Sexuality and the Colonial Order of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995).

<sup>7</sup> The Modern Girl Around the World Research Group, *The Modern Girl Around the World: Consumption, Modernity, and Globalization* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).

<sup>8</sup> Canaday, “Thinking Sex”; Herzog, “Syncoated Sex”; Sirkus, “Sex, Sovereignty and Transnational Intimacies.”

orientation. Rather, I want to ask: what does or would it matter if sexuality is chosen? Why do we continue to crave biological verities regarding our sexuality? And, perhaps more broadly, why should sexual identities continue to adjudicate rights and freedoms in a purportedly liberal democratic society committed to individualism?

Biological thinking about sexuality has undoubtedly become ingrained within modern sexual politics; and, as I have attempted to demonstrate throughout this dissertation, feminists played a key role in this process. Yet what is intriguing about this history, as I suggested in the introduction, is its persistence: why is it that science, and especially biology, continues to exercise authority over sexual ‘truths,’ despite the (rightful) skepticism cast over scientific pronouncements on, for example, race, as a result of the genocidal twentieth century? Why, despite the critiques of feminists and queer theorists, and the proliferating contradictions produced by science itself, does science continue to occupy a vaunted role in public discussions and deliberations over sexual politics? What role have ‘progressive’ activists played over the course of the twentieth century in entrenching this scientific, biopolitical consciousness? Such questions require historical investigation and analysis.

Third, I maintain that historians of sexuality in twentieth century Europe should consider how the fin-de-siècle discourses I studied shaped the course of sexual politics at least until the end of the Second World War. Like many studies, mine ends with the outbreak of the First World War; however, as Dagmar Herzog has cogently argued with respect to German history, the First World War did not affect an absolute break with the pre-existing dynamics of sexual life and sexual politics. Rather, as Herzog asserted, the

war exacerbated “trends already underway as the century began.”<sup>9</sup> By way of example, she cited the growth of the German movement for homosexual rights following the war; she could have also cited heightened concerns with the ‘quality’ and ‘quantity’ of population, and with the governance of women’s sexuality—which, as Kathleen Canning has argued, became objects of increasing and widespread anxiety during and after the war.<sup>10</sup>

The actors that have animated my dissertation did not fade away in 1918. The youngest members of the prewar feminist cohort, such as Stella Browne, assumed the vanguard of radical feminist sexual politics during and after the war. Older feminists such as Adele Schreiber transitioned from movement activism to party politics, even becoming members of national parliaments; or, like Helene Stöcker and Rosa Mayreder, they combined their concerns for women’s rights and sexual reform with other political campaigns, such as pacifism. Sexual scientific ‘experts’ like Havelock Ellis acted as ‘elder statesmen’ to a new generation of feminists, scientists, and reformers active in sexual politics during and after the war; others, such as Magnus Hirschfeld, seized upon the opportunities offered by the liberalized atmosphere of the postwar era to expand their activities, as represented by Magnus Hirschfeld’s Institute for Sexual Science.

Likewise, the ideas of prewar feminists did not lose their relevance for the interwar period. For example, according to a letter from 1922, Stella Browne continued

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<sup>9</sup> Dagmar Herzog, *Sex after Fascism: Memory and Morality in Twentieth-Century Germany* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 259.

<sup>10</sup> See Kathleen Canning, “Introduction,” in *Citizenship and Sexual Crisis in the Aftermath of War and Revolution in Germany, 1916-1930*, book manuscript in progress.

to be inspired by Grete Meisel-Hess' *The Sexual Crisis*, written in 1909.<sup>11</sup> Meisel-Hess herself wrote a second volume to that provocative text during the war;<sup>12</sup> similarly, Rosa Mayreder wrote *Sex and Culture (Geschlecht und Kultur)* in 1923, arguably a companion piece to her *Zur Kritik der Weiblichkeit* of 1905.<sup>13</sup> These texts are themselves fascinating resources for tracing the continuities and ruptures in thought affected by the war. Particularly influential were prewar conceptualizations of female homosexuality. A series of articles entitled "Was ist Homosexualität?" ran in Weimar Germany's leading lesbian journal *The Girlfriend (Die Freundin)* in 1929; these articles were direct reprints from Johanna Elberskirchen's *The Love of the Third Sex* of 1904. Meanwhile, as Christiane Leidinger has pointed out, Anna Rüling was cited as an authority on female homosexuality in Simone de Beauvoir's highly influential *Second Sex*—a text written in 1949 that would inspire 'second wave' feminists.<sup>14</sup>

Despite the nationalist foreclosures affected by the war, the transnationalism of sexual politics and sexual science also reasserted itself in the 1920s and early 1930s. Transfers of sexual scientific knowledge, particularly via the institutional expansion of psychoanalysis and resurrection of friendships and alliances, helped to reinvigorate sexual politics as a transnational and cosmopolitan phenomenon, and one in which feminists were highly active. The transnationalism of sexual politics in the early twentieth century arguably reached its apogee in the World League for Sexual Reform,

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<sup>11</sup> See letter from Stella Browne to Havelock Ellis, dated 25 December 1922, Havelock Ellis Papers, Add MSS 70539, British Library Manuscripts and Archives.

<sup>12</sup> See Grete Meisel-Hess, *Das Wesen der Geschlechtlichkeit. Die sexuelle Krise in ihren Beziehungen zur sozialen Frage, zum Krieg, zu Moral, Rasse und Religion und insbesondere zur Monogamie* (Jena: Diederichs, 1916).

<sup>13</sup> See Rosa Mayreder, *Geschlecht und Kultur: Essays* (Jena: E. Diederichs, 1923).

<sup>14</sup> Leidinger, "'Anna Rüling': A Problematic Foremother of Lesbian Herstory," 479.



which met three times between its establishment in 1928, and its dissolution in 1935.<sup>15</sup> Tellingly, familiar prewar faces could be found at the head of the League and throughout its body: its honorary presidents were Havelock Ellis, August Forel, and Magnus Hirschfeld, and both Johanna Elberskirchen and Helene Stöcker were active within the organization. Arguably, it would take the rise of Nazism and another war to bury—and, in the case of Hirschfeld’s Institute, to physically eradicate—the legacy of prewar sexual politics, and to transplant the metropolitan centre of sexual science and sexual politics to the United States.

Finally, I suggest that paying greater attention to the continuities in sexual politics between 1890 and 1945 would enable scholars to identify the ways in which struggles over sexual governance shaped sexual politics throughout the twentieth century. Framing sexual politics as a struggle over sexual governance—and, importantly, as one that involved feminists as active and eager participants—would help scholars analytically move beyond blunt categories of repression, resistance, and emancipation.<sup>16</sup> It would also allow historians to see feminists’ investments in power, and to recognize the messiness and ambivalences that have long striated feminist sexual politics. Relatedly, it would enable scholars to consider the complexities and power dynamics at work among resistant and marginal groups. Attending more explicitly to relations and dynamics of power within sexual politics, and the ambivalences surrounding sexual freedom, would

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<sup>15</sup> On the World League for Sexual Reform, see Ivan Crozier, “‘All the World’s a Stage’: Dora Russell, Norman Haire, and the 1929 London World League for Sexual Reform Congress,” *Journal for the History of Sexuality* 12 (January 2003): 16-37; Ralf Dose, “The World League for Sexual Reform: Some Possible Approaches,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 12 (January 2003): 1-15; Nicholas Matte, “International Sexual Reform and Sexology in Europe, 1897-1933,” *Canadian Bulletin of Medical History/Bulletin canadien d’histoire de la médecine* 22 (2005): 253-70.

<sup>16</sup> For a provocative and persuasive critique of ‘emancipation’ as key rubric for studying and evaluating feminism, see Saba Mahmood, *Politics of Piety: The Islamic Revival and the Feminist Subject* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

provide a more complex view of our sexual past—one that reflects and illuminates the difficulties of treating sex rationally as a subject of political debate and contestation.

## Appendix: Birth and Death Dates of Major Figures

Iwan Bloch (1872-1922)  
Elisabeth Bouness a.k.a Ruth Bre ( ?-1912)  
Stella Browne (1880-1955)

Edward Carpenter (1844-1929)  
Jane Hume Clapperton (1832-1914)

Bessie Drysdale (1871-1950)  
Charles R Drysdale (1829-1907)  
Charles V. Drysdale (1874-1961)

Johanna Elberskirchen (1864-1943)  
Havelock Ellis (1859-1939)

August Forel (1848-1931)  
Henriette Fürth (1861-1938)

Magnus Hirschfeld (1868-1935)

Richard v. Krafft-Ebing (1840-1902)

Hope Bridges Adams Lehmann (1855-1916)

Rosa Mayreder (1858-1938)  
Grete Meisel-Hess (1879-1922)

Karl Pearson (1857-1936)

Anna Rüling (1880-1953)

Adele Schreiber (1872-1957)  
Olive Schreiner (1855-1920)  
Helene Stöcker (1869-1943)  
Frances Swiney (1847-1922)

Alice Vickery (1844-1929)

Otto Weininger (1880-1903)

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Alfred Russel Wallace Papers

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Charles V. Drysdale Papers  
Eileen Palmer Papers

#### Bundesarchiv Berlin

Teilnachlass August Bebel  
Teilnachlass Clara Zetkin

#### Bundesarchiv Koblenz

Nachlass Adele Schreiber

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I. HA Rep. 76 Kultusministerium VIII A. Nr. 4151  
I. HA Rep. 76 Kultusministerium VIII B Nr. 2006  
I. HA Rep. 76 Kultusministerium VIII B Nr. 2762  
I. HA Rep. 76 Kultusministerium VIII B Nr. 2763  
I. HA Rep. 76 Kultusministerium VIII B Nr. 2017  
I. HA Rep 77 Ministerium des Innern Tit. 662 Nr. 123 (Bund für Mutterschutz)  
Ministerium des Innern II. Abtheilung Rep. 77 Tit. 662 Nr. 44  
Beiakte 4 (Deutsche Gesellschaft zur Bekämpfung der Geschlechtskrankheiten)

#### Internationaal Instituut voor Sociale Geschiedenis

Kollektion August Bebel  
Kollektion Minna Cauer  
Kollektion Henriette Fürth  
Sozialistische Monatshefte Kollektion

#### Landesarchiv Berlin, Helene-Lange Archiv

Allgemeiner Deutscher Frauenvereine  
Bund Deutscher Frauenvereine

Nachlass Helene Lange  
Nachlass Anna Pappritz  
Verband Fortschrittlicher Frauenvereine  
Verein 'Frauenwohl'

Österreichische Nationalbibliothek  
Teilnachlass Rosa Mayreder

Sächsisches Staatsarchiv Hauptstaatsarchiv Dresden  
Internationale Hygieneausstellung in Dresden 1911

Sheffield Archives  
Edward Carpenter Collection

Staatsbibliothek zu Berlin-Preussischer Kulturbesitz Handschriftenabteilung  
Autogr. I/4009-1  
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*Dokumente der Frau*  
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*The Freewoman*  
*Jahrbuch für sexuelle Zwischenstufen*  
*The Malthusian*  
*Monatsschrift für Harnkrankheiten, Psychopathia sexualis, und sexuelle Hygiene*  
*Mutterschutz*  
*Neues Frauenleben*  
*The New Age*  
*Seed-Time*  
*Sexual-Probleme*  
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